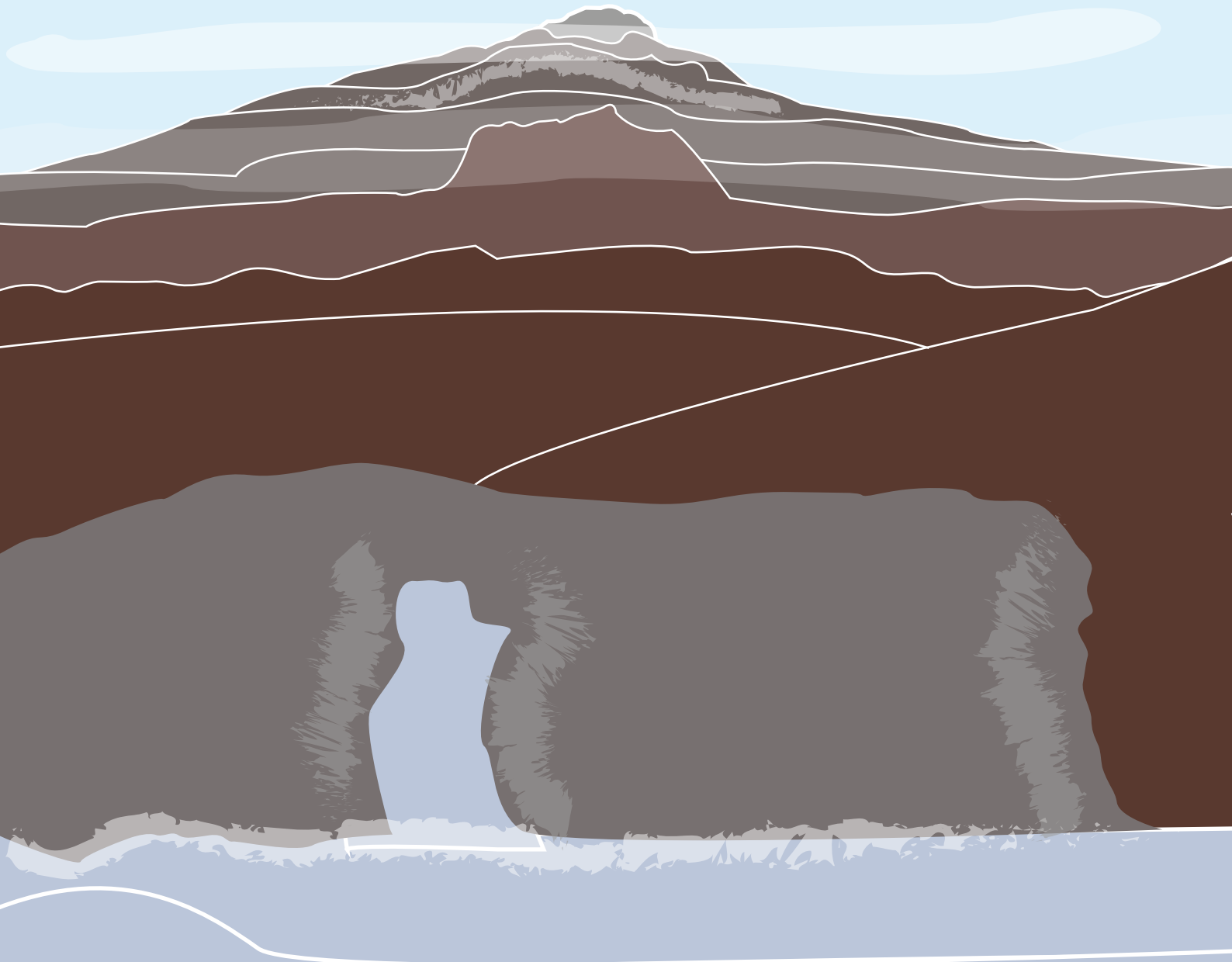


# Aberdeenshire Special Landscape Areas

Supplementary Guidance

## PROPOSED



2016

## **Executive Summary**

Aberdeenshire is renowned for its landscapes and scenic value. Therefore, it is important that we conserve, and where possible enhance landscapes, and to manage landscape change over time to protect against development which might impact on our landscape, sense of place and quality of life.

Landscapes are built upon the relationship between the natural environment, cultural associations and the way in which people live within them. The landscape is a significant asset in terms of environmental, social and economic activity across the region. This Supplementary Guidance has been produced to incorporate local landscape designations into the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (LDP) area. Ten **Special Landscape Areas** have been identified across Aberdeenshire's rich and diverse landscape. These Special Landscape Areas cover a total area of 1305.57km<sup>2</sup>, representing approximately 26.7% of the Aberdeenshire LDP area.

The purpose of the Supplementary Guidance is to support Policy E2 "Landscape" of the Aberdeenshire LDP2016. The Supplementary Guidance is to be used in the decision making process with regard to Development Management, but it may also provide guidance to communities and landowners in coming to decisions affecting the management and use of land within Special Landscape Areas.

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## Introduction

Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) are a local landscape designation placed on an area that exhibits particular qualities and characteristics within them that are valued locally. SLAs complement the National Scenic Area (NSA) designation, which identifies those landscapes that are seen as nationally important owing to their unsurpassed scenery. NSAs are designated by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). The primary purpose of this Supplementary Guidance is to identify, safeguard and enhance the character and quality of landscapes which are important and particularly valued by local communities. The policy background supporting this Supplementary Guidance is outlined under **Appendix 1**.

Aberdeenshire's landscape is characterised by a unique mix of coast, farmland, moorland, forest and woodlands and river valleys. Within this broad pattern of landscape character, there are very importance variations in local landscape character and quality. Individual glens, rivers, hills, lowland valleys, lochs and settlements have strong, distinctive and important relationships with neighbouring landscapes and areas.

In preparing the Local Development Plan (LDP) 2016 the need for a local landscape designation which is fit for purpose was discussed in the Main Issues Report and subsequently identified in the proposed Aberdeenshire LDP2016. A Local Landscape Designation Review (LLDR) provided an opportunity for Aberdeenshire Council to fully understand the key influences on landscape character and quality and how perception of these can change over time due to changes occurring in the surrounding area. In 2015 Aberdeenshire Council appointed Land Use Consultants (LUC), to undertake a LLDR for Aberdeenshire. A methodology for the LLDR was drawn from the "Guidance on Local Landscape Designations" published in 2006 by SNH and Historic Scotland (HS) (now known as Historic Environment Scotland) and was further developed and refined based on the consultants experience in designation reviews. The outputs of the study were a series of SLAs. The study approach is further explained in **Appendix 2**.

The outcomes of the LLDR have informed this Supplementary Guidance. It is intended to be used by prospective developers and by the Council's Planning and Building Standards Service in assessing the potential impact of development on these "special" areas. Not only does this Supplementary Guidance guide decision-making on development proposals but it will also help those involved in the management of land to ensure that proposals made by them do not adversely affect the integrity of locally valued landscapes.

This Supplementary Guidance applies to the Aberdeenshire LDP area (i.e. the whole of Aberdeenshire, excluding that part in the Cairngorms National Park).

## Special Landscape Areas

Policy E2 Landscape of the LDP2016 outlines the Council's approach to development which may affect the landscape of Aberdeenshire (see **Appendix 1**). The aim of this policy is to ensure that SLAs are afforded adequate protection against inappropriate development and this Supplementary Guidance seeks to take this forward.

The Supplementary Guidance provides:

- Guidance to developers, land managers and decision makers on appropriate actions to ensure the qualifying criteria for each SLA is recognised for appropriate protection, management or enhancement; and
- Guidance to the Council with regard to decision making on proposals that may affect the special characteristics of these areas, commenting on land management proposals, and monitoring landscape change.

The role of the SLAs is part of an "all-landscapes approach", as outlined in the SNH/HS Guidance. There are a number of principles underpinning the all landscapes approach:

- Both town and country – Landscapes do not stop at the edge of settlements, nor do they necessarily change at the boundary of local authority areas.
- Valuing landscapes – Views on what is important in a particular local landscape will vary and reflect personal responses as well as more objective assessments. Some landscapes are recognised to be of national importance but people will also value their local landscapes as the places where they live and work. All these views should be respected and should be used to inform the planning and management of local landscapes.
- Guiding landscape change – Landscapes are constantly changing and landscape planning and management at all levels should aim to facilitate positive change – be it the enhancement of existing qualities or the creation of new ones of equal or greater value. Higher standards in the planning and design of new development and management of land-use are essential components of such an approach.
- A shared responsibility – Responsibility for local landscapes does not rest with any one organisation or individual. Action for local landscapes should accordingly be broad-based, though local authorities have a particularly important role to play in developing consensus on the direction, nature and extent of landscape change and facilitating a more integrated and collective approach to their planning and management.

### Supplementary Planning Policies

In order for the Supplementary Guidance to be clear regarding the policy approach of Aberdeenshire Council with regard to decisions affecting local landscape designations it is necessary to set out supplementary policies. Three policies below allow for:

- Definition of the SLA and their boundaries;
- Ensure that the Statement of Importance can be used as a material consideration within SLAs to better evidence relevant development management decisions; and
- To help inform decisions on conservation and enhancement measures for management of the SLA.

**Policy A: Boundaries**

Aberdeenshire Council will apply the SLA boundaries as set out in this Supplementary Guidance in the implementation of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan Policy E2 Landscape.

Following the study approach used by the Council and LUC, the process of review and evaluation undertaken means that the boundaries can be justified as being robust. However, the Council will monitor and update the boundaries, where necessary, through future LDPs. Detailed digital boundaries have been published on the Aberdeenshire website and paper copies are available on request from Planning and Building Standards Service.

**Policy B: Development Management**

Aberdeenshire Council will use the Statements of Importance attached to each of the Special Landscape Areas as the qualifying interests protected by Policy E2. Development will only be permitted if these are not being adversely affected or the effects of the development are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of at least local public importance.

The policy aims to ensure that the Supplementary Guidance is used in the development management process. In most cases it will be possible to use a precautionary approach to layout, siting and design to mitigate and minimise potential impacts.

**Policy C: Landscape**

Aberdeenshire Council will promote and encourage conservation and enhancement measures within the Special Landscape Areas that enhance appreciation of the special landscape or are measures that enhance the features contained in the Statement of Importance.

The policy encourages the treatment of the SLAs as being particularly “special” by the Council and other partners. All parties should act in a way that recognises, maintains and enhances those features which make it so.

**The Statement of Importance for Special Landscape Areas**

A Statement of Importance (SOI) for each SLA has been developed in accordance with the SNH/HS Guidance. The SOI is broken in to four sections designed to clearly highlight the key landscape characteristics and qualities which underpin the SLA and outline possible threats to landscape and how decisions will be made to mitigate any impact arising as a result of development which should be referred to in any development proposal.

**Statement of Importance**

Location and Boundaries – This section provides a description of where the area and importantly includes justification of the boundaries of that SLA.

Designation Statement – This section outlines why the SLA has been designated. This details the particular features that make the landscape special. This information can better

evidence any potential decision on development which may adversely affect the landscape.

**Forces for Change** – This section identifies potential threats which could result in an adverse impact on the SLA. This can be used by developers and the development management process to identify development types that would not be encouraged in the designated area. However they can also be used as indicators of how improvements could be made to counter the forces, for example through land management initiatives. The guidance provided is not meant to be universal or exclusive.

**Management Recommendations** – This section notes what “type” of landscape the SLA is situated within. Aberdeenshire’s SLAs represent a range of landscape types and development has potential to affect different SLAs in different ways and this is reflected in the Statement of Importance. This section also provides guidance on landscape management which will help to indicate what types of development may or may not be appropriate in the designated areas.

There are 10 SLAs in the Aberdeenshire LDP area. A SOI has been prepared for each of these and can be found in on the following pages. Maps showing the detailed boundaries of the SLAs are included under **Appendix 3**:

<b>Special Landscape Area</b>	<b>Appendix 3 Map No.</b>	<b>SLA Map Reference</b>
North Aberdeenshire Coast	1-5	1
North East Aberdeenshire Coast	10-14	2
South East Aberdeenshire Coast	28-31	3
Deveron Valley	2, 3 & 6-9	4
Bennachie	16-18	5
Upper Don Valley	15, 16, 19 & 20	6
Howe of Cromar	19 & 20	7
Dee Valley	19-25	8
Clachnaben and Forest of Birse	20, 22-23 & 26-27	9
The Braes of the Mearns	26 & 27	10

# Statement of Importance: North Aberdeenshire Coast Special Landscape Area

## Location and Boundaries

This SLA extends along the north coast of Aberdeenshire, from Logie Head in the west to Fraserburgh in the east. The northern edge is defined by the coast; the western edge by the boundary with Moray. The southern edge of the SLA is defined by roads which run parallel to the coast and include (from west to east) the A98, B9139, A97, A947, B9031 and various minor roads. These boundaries contain the areas with a strong coastal influence. Although varying in distance from the coast, the road boundaries reflect the most suitable available boundary features. The SLA includes parts of the settlements of Banff and Macduff, being located on prominent headlands either side of the mouth of the River Deveron, but does not include the much larger fishing port of Fraserburgh.

Designation of this area distinguishes the high scenic value created by the juxtaposition of rugged coastal cliffs and headlands with traditional fishing villages nestling at the base of the cliffs. It also recognises the strong elemental qualities of this coast and the importance of expansive views across the North Sea from higher headlands and coastal roads. The many features of natural heritage present along this coastline. Designation protects the recreational value of the area and its function as a corridor for the movement of people, as highlighted in the evaluation.



*Crovie, from the Braes (Source: LUC)*

## Designation Statement

The North Aberdeenshire Coast is a narrow, self-contained strip of coastal farmland which is unified by its exposed, north facing orientation onto the North Sea and its rugged coastline of high cliffs, headlands and sandy bays. This is an area of geological importance with



exposures of old red sandstone, conglomerate cliffs and features which demonstrate glacial process.

The coast is windswept, with few trees, although the Tore of Troup is a distinctive wooded glen which extends inland from the coast to the south of Pennan. The rich ecological value of the coast is recognised by much of it being designated as an SSSI. Troup Head is an RSPB reserve and is the only mainland gannet colony in Scotland. The wave cut platforms formed by the rocks along the shore towards Fraserburgh are a distinctive feature.

There are frequent settlements along the coast, including traditional fishing villages nestled at the base of cliffs, many of which are Conservation Areas. There are numerous features of built heritage interest, including castle ruins situated on prominent headlands, such as Findlater Castle, Dundarg Castle and Pitsligo Castle at Rosehearty.

Sandy beaches at Sandend and Banff Links are popular for recreation and tourism, including surfing, and boat tours are available at Troup Head.

Despite being accessible and well settled, the influence of the sea and exposure to the elements means that qualities of wildness can be experienced.

The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:

- Rugged coastal cliffs and headlands, forming an intricate coast of inlets and rocky bays with important outcrops of rocks and fossils, e.g. the sandstone caves at New Aberdour beach.
- Settlement is defined by its relationship to the sea, with buildings sited and oriented accordingly.
- Traditional fishing villages are nestled at the base of cliffs, including Pennan and Crovie, distinguished by diminutive form and difficulty of access.
- Larger settlements such as Banff and Macduff retain characteristic links to maritime industry.
- The Tore of Troup is the largest example of the many coastal dens, a deep wooded ravine with its own distinct, tranquil character, linked to the north coast.
- Panoramic views from higher headlands, some of which can be appreciated from the A98 and B9031 coastal roads.
- Nature conservation interest contributes to appreciation of this coastal landscape, with a focus for bird life around Troup Head, and extensive undeveloped coastlines.
- Historic monuments provide landmarks and incidents along the coast, including castles such as Pitsligo, ancient churches as at Inverboyndie, and other landmarks including the Macduff war memorial.
- A recreational coast, with beaches coastal paths enabling good access to the outdoors, as well as more formal recreation such as the historic Tarlair swimming pool.
- Elemental qualities of the rugged north coast: a strong relationship with the sea and sky, offering an accessible experience of wildness.

### **Forces for Change**

- Decline in fishing industry leads to erosion of coastal character associated with fishing towns and villages.
- Development on or near coastal cliffs and headlands.
- Scattered and incremental development along the coastline e.g. single houses cause negative impact on sense of place.

- Development of renewable energy technologies (e.g. on and off-shore wind turbines and associated infrastructure) affect views to and from the SLA.
- Impact of proposals which effect the integrity of natural and historic features within the SLA.

### **Management Recommendations**

- The North Aberdeenshire Coast SLA is classed as a coastal landscape type. As such emphasis should be to maintain the focus of development within existing coastal settlements in order to retain the character of the coastal area. Development within settlements should be of scale and style that respects and complements their coastal character. The effects of development along the coastal edge and within the hinterland adjacent to the SLA should be carefully considered.
- Development which impacts upon the rugged coastal cliffs and headlands should be carefully considered in order to ensure that the strong relationship with the sea and sky, offering an accessible experience of wildness are not negatively impacted upon.
- Panoramic views from higher headlands should be preserved. Views can be appreciated from the A98 and B9031 coastal roads. Development along these routes should be sensitive to the surroundings and no interrupt the panoramic views experienced.
- Settlements in this SLA are generally defined by its relationship to the sea, with buildings sited and oriented accordingly. Development proposals should reflect the character of traditional fishing villages which are nestled at the base of cliffs, including Pennan and Crovie.
- Larger settlements such as Banff and Macduff retain characteristic links to maritime industry. It is expected that much of the larger scale development will occur in and around these settlements. Developers should seek early engagement with Council to determine what action can be taken to protect the characteristics associated with towns in this area.
- Proposals should seek to protect and where possible enhance historic monuments, such as castles at Pitsligo, ancient churches as at Inverboyndie, and other landmarks including the Macduff war memorial.
- To reflect the importance of the coast as an area for recreation with its beaches and coastal paths enabling good access to the outdoors, as well as more formal recreation such as the historic Tarlair swimming pool, proposals seeking to sensitively enhance such opportunities may be supported.

# Statement of Importance: North East Aberdeenshire Coast Special Landscape Area

## Location and Boundaries

This SLA extends across two sections of the Aberdeenshire Coast: from Fraserburgh to Peterhead; and from Buchan Ness to Blackdog. Between Fraserburgh and Peterhead the boundary runs inland along the B9033 and A90. South of Buchan Ness at Boddam the boundary follows the A90, and then cuts in towards Cruden Bay along the A975. It crosses the River Ythan at Newburgh, and then re-joins the A90 at Rashiereive, following this road until the boundary with Aberdeenshire at Blackdog. These long narrow areas cover a variety of coastal landscapes, and the boundary has been drawn to reflect the approximate extent of maritime influence, largely following roads which parallel the coast. The variation in breadth reflects topography, since in lower lying areas the influence of the sea is felt further inland, while high cliffs tend to screen the hinterland from the coastal edge. The large industrial town of Peterhead, and the developed coast immediately south, are excluded from the SLA.

Designation of this area distinguishes its strong sense of place, scenic qualities and uninterrupted views out to the North Sea. Designation also recognises the ecological importance of the area's dune systems and protect features. The importance of the coast to the setting of settlements and numerous built heritage assets such as castles, towers and churches. There are opportunities for recreation, such as long distance walking routes, coastal paths and nature reserve at the Loch of Strathbeg.



*The Bullers of Buchan (Source: LUC)*

## Designation Statement

The North East Aberdeenshire Coast is a strip of coastal farmland with a strong sense of place. The SLA is unified by its east facing orientation onto the North Sea and wide sandy

beaches backed by extensive dynamic dune systems with some outcrops of rugged cliffs. A collapsed sea cave, the Bullers of Buchan, is a notable geomorphological feature.

There are occasional pockets of scrubby woodland, but otherwise trees are limited in this windswept landscape. The Loch of Strathbeg, north east of Crimond, is a large inland loch and is an RSPB reserve. Forvie National Nature Reserve (NNR) east of Newburgh is a landscape of shifting sand dunes with patches of dune heath and marram grass. The Ythan Estuary runs along the edge of the NNR.

Settlements and industry have had a major impact on this landscape, most notably the St Fergus Gas Terminal. Elsewhere, traditional fishing villages have a strong relationship with the coast are nestled into the sheltered landform. There are numerous features of built heritage interest along the coast.

The area is visible from the A90 and uninterrupted views out to sea are available from coastal paths including the clifftop walk at the Bullers of Buchan and the long distance Formartine and Buchan Way. Notable beaches include the expansive sands at Balmedie Country Park, and Cruden Bay. There are also numerous golf courses along the coast.

The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:

- Expansive beaches backed by rolling dunes, with long views out to sea.
- Rugged and dramatic cliffs to the south of Boddam, with intricate landforms such as the Bullers of Buchan.
- Important nature conservation sites: Forvie National Nature Reserve covering an extensive area around the mouth of the Ythan; and the Loch of Strathbeg.
- Lighthouses form landmark features along the coast.
- A popular coast for visitors, with coastal paths, accessible dunes, golf courses and popular beaches.
- Ancient coastal forts occupy headlands, with later castles and houses like Slains also prominently sited.
- Coastal settlement generally associated with small harbours, such as at Collieston and Cruden Bay. The siting and orientation of buildings can be highly distinctive, as seen at Inverallochy.
- Panoramic views out to sea from cliff tops and open beaches.

### **Forces for Change**

- Development on or near coastal cliffs and headlands impact on the sense of wildness felt or effect views out and from the sea.
- Expansion of recycling/ landfill developments around Blackdog negatively impact on the special features associated with this SLA.
- Development pressure for major residential and employment expansion as well as development within the Energetica area result in an unbalance between economic development and landscape conservation and enhancement.
- Increased growth associated with tourism such as golf, chalets and visitor centres.
- Development of renewable energy technologies (e.g. on and off-shore wind turbines and associated infrastructure) affect views to and from the SLA.
- Potential for future development associated with carbon capture and storage result in damage or loss of features associated with the SLA.
- Impact of Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route in increasing the attractiveness of the area for development.

- Development proposals which effect the integrity of natural and historic features within the SLA, particularly development seeking to take advantage of sand dunes and beaches.

### **Management Recommendations**

- The North East Aberdeenshire Coast SLA is classed as a coastal landscape type. As such emphasis should be to maintain the focus of development within existing coastal settlements in order to retain the character of the coastal area. Development within settlements should be of scale and style that respects and complements their coastal character. The effects of development along the coastal edge and within the hinterland adjacent to the SLA should be carefully considered.
- Development which seeks to exploit the expansive beaches and rolling dunes, should be carefully considered in order to ensure that the dune network and panoramic views within are not negatively impacted upon.
- Development which may impact upon the dramatic cliffs to the south of Boddam, should only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the sense of place and wildness associated with the cliffs in this area will be unaffected.
- The setting of lighthouses and other landmark features along the coast should be protected.
- Care should be exercised to ensure that visitor facilities do not act to the detriment of the environmental geological, and historical qualities.
- Landscape and visual impacts of proposed developments in and around the edge of coastal settlements, should be clearly set out, as to ensure that any impacts (both positive and negative) can be determined.
- The siting and orientation of buildings can be highly distinctive. Siting and design should be carefully considered to ensure development respects the vernacular heritage and sense of place felt in coastal settlements.

# Statement of Importance: South East Aberdeenshire Coast Special Landscape Area

## Location and Boundaries

This SLA covers the coast from the council boundary north of Portlethen, to the mouth of the North Esk in the south. Between Aberdeen and Newtonhill the boundary follows the railway line (except between Portlethen and Newtonhill where it cuts inland up to the A90), before joining the A90 south of Newtonhill until Stonehaven. It includes the eastern edge of the settlement before joining the A92 near Dunnottar Mains. It then follows the A92 until the boundary with Angus. This narrow but continuous strip has been defined to include areas with strong coastal influence, the landward extent of which is generally restricted due to the high cliffs that separate the hinterland from the sea.

Designation of this area recognises the importance of its rugged scenery of weathered coastal cliffs and atypical raised beach features, which form an important setting to the numerous coastal villages and towns as well as an important natural habitat. Designation also acknowledges the importance of the area for enjoyment, with its numerous coastal paths, beaches and long distance touring routes, providing connectivity for people as well as opportunities for expansive views out to sea.



*Newtonhill Bay (Source: LUC)*

## Designation Statement

The South East Aberdeenshire is unified by its general south east facing orientation onto the North Sea. North of Bervie Bay the coast is more rugged, with interesting features such as stacks and arches. South of Bervie Bay is a raised beach landscape and is backed by cliffs.

The windswept nature of this coastal landscape means that there are few trees. There is a broad sandy beach at St Cyrus, backed by cliffs and dunes which form part of a National Nature Reserve. There is a clifftop seabird colony at Fowlsheugh which is an RSPB reserve and home to thousands of breeding birds.

The SLA contains many settlements, the largest of which is Stonehaven, framed by cliffs and featuring a working harbour, and strong cultural elements such as the Art Deco swimming pool and annual Fireball Festival. Settlement also includes intact fishing villages located in sheltered coves or nestled on cliff tops, and larger coastal towns with extensive new development e.g. Inverbervie. Built heritage interests include the striking Dunnottar Castle, which can be approached via the coastal path from Stonehaven.

This area is visible from the A90 and A92 coastal routes, NCN Route 1, east coast railway and coastal footpaths, and sea views are fundamental to its character. Coastal landmarks include lighthouses e.g. at Todhead. Opportunities for recreation include beaches, sea kayaking and boat trips from Stonehaven harbour.

This landscape is farmed up to the coastal edge, and settlement and major transport corridors are ever present in views, however the open seas and exposure to the elements.

The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:

- Rugged and intricate scenery of weathered coastal cliffs and raised beach landforms, including sites of geological interest.
- The broad sweep of sand at St Cyrus, backed by dunes that form a National Nature Reserve.
- Iconic Dunnottar Castle, on a rocky headland south of Stonehaven, is the most striking of many coastal archaeological sites.
- The coast provides the immediate and wider setting for a number of larger settlements, including Porthlethen, Newtonhill, and Stonehaven, framed by rising cliffs on either side.
- Intact traditional fishing villages with diminutive harbours including Gourdon and Catterline.
- Coastal routes include the A92, A90, east coast railway, footpaths and National Cycle Network (Route 1), all offering expansive views out to sea.
- Panoramic views out to sea from headlands and beaches and important views along the coast, including the view over the sands at St Cyrus, and views from Dunnottar.

### **Forces for Change**

- Impact of proposals which effect the integrity of natural and historic features within the SLA, particularly development seeking to take advantage of sand dunes and beaches.
- Development on or near coastal cliffs and headlands.
- Development pressure for residential and employment expansion in and around towns and villages including Porthlethen, Stonehaven and Newtonhill.
- Impact of Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route in increasing the attractiveness of the area for development.
- Increased recreation along coastal paths may lead to erosion.
- Development of wind turbines and associated infrastructure affect views to and from the SLA.

## Management Recommendations

- The South East Aberdeenshire Coast SLA is classed as a coastal landscape type. As such emphasis should be to maintain the focus of development within existing coastal settlements in order to retain the character of the coastal area. Development within settlements should be of scale and style that respects and complements their coastal character. The effects of development along the coastal edge and within the hinterland adjacent to the SLA should be carefully considered.
- Development should only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the sense of place associated with the cliffs in this area will be unaffected.
- Development which may impact on the headlands, beaches and landmarks in the area should be carefully considered in order to ensure that the panoramic views within are not negatively impacted upon including the view over the sands at St Cyrus, and views from Dunnottar.
- Development should conserve the coastal characteristics associated with towns in this area.
- In smaller coastal villages that the design of development proposals respects the vernacular heritage and sense of place that they provide.
- Assess the potential impact on the sea views from significant roads, paths and visitor sites, particularly seeking to ensure that the ragged and wild nature of the coastal cliff tops and open vista of St Cyrus Bay are maintained.



# Statement of Importance: Deveron Valley Special Landscape Area

## Location and Boundaries

This SLA covers the valley of the River Deveron as it flows through Aberdeenshire, from Haugh of Glass in the west to the north coast at Banff and Macduff. From west to east the northern boundary of the SLA follows the ridge of high ground to the north of the River Deveron, crossing the Daugh of Cairnborrow and The Bin. North east of Ruthven the boundary follows the Moray council boundary until the Moss of Crombie. Here it travels east along minor roads (and briefly the A97 south of Aberchirder) before heading north at South Briggs. From here it continues to follow minor roads before following the A97 from the Mill of Brydock to Banff, where it shares a boundary with the North Aberdeenshire Coast SLA. From west to east the southern boundary of the SLA follows minor roads from Haugh of Glass, then crosses Clashmach Hill to Huntly. The A96 and A97 then form the boundary until Cobairdy. It then follows watercourses and minor roads east past Glen Dronach Distillery south of Forgue, and on to Milnbank and Turriff. The boundary passes through Turriff on the A947, then heads north along a minor road returning to the A947 as far as Macduff.

The boundaries of the SLA follow, as far as possible, the ridge lines that define the valley. Roads and other physical boundaries have been selected as close as possible to these ridge lines, though in places the boundary follows topography where no alternative was located.

Designation of the Deveron Valley acknowledges the high scenic quality resulting from its meandering river bounded by rolling wooded hills, which forms an important setting to settlements along the valley floor and sides, and backdrop to castles and estates. The importance of the area for connectivity, in terms of transport corridors, water catchments and woodland networks is also recognised.



*The Deveron Valley north of Turriff (Source: LUC)*

## Designation Statement

The Deveron Valley is a farmed landscape, framed by wooded hills and ridges. The valley is unified by the meandering River Deveron, which flows from the hills of Moray into the Moray Firth at Banff Bay. The landscape is a pleasing composition of river, farmland, wooded estates and heather-clad / forested hills, forming the setting to numerous villages and historic buildings.

The Deveron Valley has a strong woodland structure comprising deciduous woodland associated with traditional estates, as well as forested hills, riverside trees and beech hedging. Woodland on the steep sided valleys are important for nature conservation and contribute to the landscape character of this area.

There are numerous small settlements and estates with distinctive local architecture.

The River Deveron is popular for fishing of salmon, sea trout and brown trout. Other opportunities for recreation include canoeing, walking, cycling and golf. Some of the hills enclosing the valley provide opportunities for panoramic views across the Deveron and beyond, including Fourman Hill, a Marilyn on the boundary with Moray, south east of Milltown of Rothiemay. Views across the valley from the A97 are also available, e.g. south of Aberchirder.

The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:

- Meandering river framed by rolling wooded hills and ridges, providing views into the valley.
- Strong network of woodland throughout the valley provides landscape structure and wildlife habitat. A variety of woodland types include coniferous plantations, deciduous hilltop copses, shelter belts and a wealth of roadside trees including beech and ash.
- The presence of historic estates has a strong influence along the river, including parkland around Duff House, Forglen and others, but more generally in the wooded landscape.
- The valley landscape forms an important part of the setting of various settlements, including the planned town of Huntly and the market town of Turriff.
- Distinctive local granite architecture displayed in villages and towns, farms and most notably in castles such as Huntly.
- The attractive landscape makes the Deveron a popular setting for a range of outdoor recreation including fishing, canoeing, walking and cycling, with the NCN Route 1 between Banff and Turriff.
- A continuous valley landscape, from the hills to the sea.

## Forces for Change

- Development of renewable energy technologies (e.g. on-shore wind turbines and associated infrastructure) affect views to and from the SLA.
- Changes to landscape as a result of forest management and changes to agricultural practices in this area.
- Pressure for major residential developments in and around towns and villages including Huntly and Turriff.
- Impact of proposals which effect the integrity of natural and historic features within the SLA.

- Scattered and incremental development e.g. single houses cause negative impact on sense of place.

### **Management Recommendations**

- The Deveron Valley SLA is classed as a valley landscape type. As such emphasis should be on maintaining the current patterns of land use and settlement, with development focused within existing towns and villages. Elsewhere, development should be located on lower slopes or floor of the valley and carefully sited, designed and landscaped to integrate within the wider valley landscape. Development proposed in surrounding upland areas should be assessed to minimise the visual impact on the SLA, including views and vistas along the valley.
- Proposals within the river valley or on the rolling wooded hills and ridges should be carefully assessed to ensure development will not negatively impact on the landscape or sense of place felt within this area.
- There is strong network of woodland throughout the valley which provides landscape structure. Woodland management and further creation of coniferous plantations, deciduous hilltop copses and shelter belts is encouraged in this area.
- The sense of place associated with historic estates including parkland around Duff House, Forglen and others, but more generally in the wooded landscape should be maintained and where possible enhanced through well considered layout, siting and design.
- The valley landscape forms an important part of the setting of various settlements, including the planned town of Huntly and the market town of Turriff. Developers should seek early engagement with Council to determine what characteristics associated with towns in this area development must protect.
- Design of new development should be sensitive to the distinctive local granite architecture displayed in villages and towns, wider countryside.
- Proposals which seek to take advantage of the Deveron landscape as a popular setting for a range of outdoor recreation including fishing, canoeing, walking and cycling, with the National Cycle Network Route 1 between Banff and Turriff should be carefully assessed to balance the economic, social and environmental benefits.
- This SLA should remain as a continuous valley landscape, from the hills to the sea. Development which is likely to break up or negatively impact on the continuity associated with this landscape should not be supported.

# Statement of Importance: Bennachie Special Landscape Area

## Location and Boundaries

This SLA is centred on the landmark hill of Bennachie at the centre of Aberdeenshire, and extends west along the distinctive ridge as far as Suie Hill. It includes Pitfichie to the south and the wooded farmland which forms the foreground to Bennachie to the east.

The western boundary follows minor roads along the Suie Burn between Bridge of Alford in the south and Ford in the north. The northern boundary follows minor roads and the B9002 between Ford and the A96 at Mill of Carden. The eastern boundary heads south east through Garioch, following minor roads, and briefly the route of an overhead line, between Mill of Carden and west of Inverurie. The boundary crosses the River Don west of Port Elphinstone, then joins the B993 south west until Kemnay. The southern boundary skirts the edge of Kemnay before re-joining the B993 until Tillyfourie where it follows the A944 as far as Bridge of Alford.

These boundaries have been chosen as defensible physical features that enclose the key upland areas, and their lowland settings, which have been identified as meriting designation within this SLA.

Designation of Bennachie and its setting recognises its importance to Aberdeenshire's landscape identity, its popularity with visitors and its intervisibility with the surrounding landscape. Designation also recognises the contribution of the moorland spurs to scenic qualities of the area, by forming dark ridges across the skyline which contrasts with the green lowlands.



*Bennachie from the north-east (Source: LUC)*

## **Designation Statement**

The Bennachie ridge is part of the Grampian Outliers, and comprises a series of rounded hills – Suie Hill in the west and Mither Tap in the east. Oxen Craig is the highest point on the ridge, although Mither Tap has the most distinctive profile. Bennachie is an iconic landform, visible from much of the wider Aberdeenshire area.

The hills are blanketed with moorland and forestry, with rocky outcrops at the higher summits. This moorland and forestry forms a dark ridge seen across the skyline from the farmed and wooded lowlands.

Bennachie has numerous historic features, including an Iron Age hill fort at the summit of Mither Tap, and cairns on other summits. The Maiden Stone is a Pictish symbol-bearing slab of pink granite, located near Garioch. The Place of Origin is a modern sculpture, located overlooking the quarry at Kemnay.

There are spectacular views over the surrounding lowlands from the hill summits, and conversely the series of hills is widely visible from the surrounding lowlands, forming a distinctive focal point in views. Bennachie is visible from the A944 to the south and A96 to the north and east.

The upland areas have an intact landcover of heather moorland and forestry, supporting wildlife such as cuckoos, red squirrels and roe deer. The hills provide opportunities to experience tranquillity and solitude, whilst being in proximity to farmed and settled lowland areas.

The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:

- Bennachie is the iconic hill of central Aberdeenshire, instantly recognisable from across the wider landscape, in both long and short range views.
- Intact landcover of heather moorland on the main Bennachie ridge.
- Extensive woodland across lowland and upland, including native woods, estate policies and forestry plantations, with a substantial amount recognised as ancient woodland.
- Hill forts are found on summits such as Mither Tap and Tillymuick, with cairns and other features emphasising the long history of settlement.
- The River Don is a key feature of Aberdeenshire, meandering through the upland glen south of Bennachie, and across the farmland around Kemnay.
- The farmland to the east provides the setting to Bennachie, but also typifies lowland Aberdeenshire with its mosaic of wooded estates and open farmland.
- A hugely popular area, with walkers enjoying the spectacular views from the Bennachie summits, and Pitfichie being a centre for mountain biking.
- Panoramic views from the upland areas, particularly from the Bennachie summits, over the Don Valley and beyond to the patchwork of Aberdeenshire farmland.

## **Forces for Change**

- Changes to landscape as a result of forest management and changes to agricultural practices in this area.
- Creation and maintenance of hill tracks associated with land management.
- Increased levels and types of recreation along access tracks may lead to erosion.
- Impact of proposals which effect the integrity of natural and historic features within the SLA.

- Development pressure for major residential and employment expansion in and around towns and villages including Kemnay and Inverurie.

### **Management Recommendations**

- The Bennachie SLA is classed as an upland landscape type. As such emphasis should be on retaining their largely undeveloped and remote character. This means ensuring that any developments are located and designed to limit their wider visibility and, so far as possible, protecting open skylines and rugged summits.
- Impact of development at both long and short ranges to Bennachie should avoid negative impacts to the view and ensure that they are not disproportionate. Mitigation measures can be put in place, including landscaping in and around new developments.
- The intact landcover of heather moorland on the main Bennachie ridge should be maintained.
- Woodland management and further woodland creation in the form of native woods, estate policies and forestry plantations is encouraged in this area to maintain the mosaic of wooded estates and open farmland.
- Cognisance must be had to the River Don as a key feature of this landscape.
- Hill forts and cairns and other features that emphasise the long history of settlement in the area should not be negatively affected.
- Development which seeks to take advantage of popularity and accessibility of Bennachie should only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the sense of place associated with Bennachie will be unaffected and conflicts with other land uses can be managed.

# Statement of Importance: Upper Don Valley Special Landscape Area

## Location and Boundaries

This SLA lies in the west of Aberdeenshire, and covers the upper part of the River Don valley from Glenkindie in the west to the Howe of Alford in the east. The western boundary is contiguous with the Cairngorms National Park. To the north the boundary follows ridgelines, minor roads and tracks across to the A97. It continues east along minor roads and paths to cross the ridge of Lord Arthur's Hill. The boundary follows the Blacklatch Burn down to the Old Military Road at Tullynessle. From here the boundary marches with that of Bennachie SLA as far as Alford, where it turns westward to follow the A980. From Muir of Alford it returns to forest tracks and field boundaries up to The Socach, from where it follows the ridgeline westward across Broom Hill and Balderonoch Hill to the National Park boundary.

Boundaries have been drawn as closely as possible along the ridge lines that frame the upper Don valley, with the intention of including the immediate visual envelope of the river itself, and of the experience of the valley from the A97 and A944 roads that pass through.

Designation of the upper Don Valley and enclosing ridges recognises the high scenic qualities of its rolling wooded hills enclosing steep sided gorges and wider straths. The naturalness and connectivity created by the river corridor, woodland network and relationship with the adjacent Cairngorms National Park are also seen in this area.



*Heather-clad moors contrast with farmland in Strathdon (Source: LUC)*

## Designation Statement

The Upper Don Valley comprises rolling arable and pastoral farmland, bisected by the meandering River Don and contained by hills blanketed in open moorland and woodland. The A97 (Highland Tourist Route) passes through this area and is seen as a gateway into

the Cairngorms National Park to the west. The A944 runs along the valley floor parallel to the River Don, and passes through an attractive wooded gorge west of Alford.

The Don is one of Aberdeenshire's major rivers, with a strong identity. The Upper Don Valley is well wooded, with both broadleaved woodland and coniferous forestry.

There are numerous features of built heritage interest, including a cairn on Lord Arthur's Hill and the medieval Kildrummy Castle. There are small settlements and scattered farmsteads along roads, built with traditional materials.

The Don Valley is a gateway into the National Park, and attractive drives are available along both the A944 and A97. Higher hills within the Cairngorms National Park are visible beyond those enclosing the valley.

The Upper Don valley is farmed and settled, with accessible hills, and does not display true wildness characteristics although the network of meandering rivers, burns and woodland contributes to naturalness within the landscape.

The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:

- Distinctive valley landforms, including the steep sided gorge west of Alford and the wider strath around Kildrummy.
- The Don is contained by rolling wooded hills with attractive broadleaved woodland and a patchwork of arable farmland and pasture.
- Broad open moorland forms the backdrop to views along and across the strath, including views to the higher hills within the Cairngorms National Park.
- Moorland ridges extend almost to the river in places, creating an interlocking visual pattern of upland and lowland.
- Substantial and well visited built heritage features include the medieval Kildrummy Castle and its more recent namesake and associated gardens. The designed landscape of Glenkindie House has an influence on the approach to the National Park.
- An agricultural but sparsely settled landscape, the settlement pattern is one of dispersed farms, often featuring traditional granite buildings set in small woodlands, rather than nucleated villages.
- The meandering, occasionally braided River Don is a key river that contributes to the identity of Aberdeenshire, forming a link between the mountains and the sea.
- The Don valley is the route of the A97 Highland Tourist Route, a major gateway into the National Park, with glimpses into the higher hills west of Glenkindie.
- The southern ridge of Balderonoch Hill, Broom Hill and The Socach offers panoramic views for walkers over Strathdon and south into the Howe of Cromar.

### **Forces for Change**

- Changes to landscape as a result of forest management and changes to agricultural practices in this area.
- Scattered and incremental development e.g. single houses cause negative impact on sense of place.
- Creation and maintenance of hill tracks associated with land management.
- Changes in estate and moorland management practices.



## Management Recommendations

- The Upper Don Valley SLA is classed as an upland landscape type. As such emphasis should be on retaining their largely undeveloped and remote character. This means ensuring that any developments are located and designed to limit their wider visibility and, so far as possible, protecting open skylines and rugged summits.
- Development should be sensitive to the distinctive valley landforms.
- Any development occurring within the broad open moorland which forms the backdrop to views along and across the strath, including views to the higher hills within the Cairngorms National Park, should be justified with layout, siting and design being a vital consideration. Development should not encroach on the panoramic views associated with the southern ridge of Balderonoch Hill, Broom Hill and The Socach.
- The interlocking visual pattern of upland and lowland created by moorland ridges which extend almost to the river in places should be maintained.
- The setting of landmarks and built heritage features should be preserved and where possible enhanced due to their influence on the approach to the National Park.
- Development should reflect the existing the settlement pattern of dispersed farms, featuring traditional granite buildings set in small woodlands, rather than nucleated villages. Large-scale development is inappropriate.
- Cognisance must be had to the River Don and the patchwork of broadleaved woodland and the pattern of arable farming land pasture as a key feature of this landscape.
- Proposals which seek to utilise and promote the key attributes associated with the Don valley as part of the A97 Highland Tourist Route, a major gateway into the National Park, particularly associated with diversification, may be supported where clear merits are seen and no detrimental impact is experienced.

# Statement of Importance: Howe of Cromar Special Landscape Area

## Location and Boundaries

This SLA is centred on Tarland in the west of Aberdeenshire. The area includes the Howe of Cromar and the surrounding hills that define it on all sides. To the west this area is bounded by the Cairngorms National Park, which wraps around to Balderonoch Hill in the north and Black Moss in the south. From Balderonoch Hill the northern boundary of the SLA continues east across the ridge of Broom Hill and Pressendye, then follows the Corse Burn south-east to the B9119. From this road the boundary runs south largely following the eastern edge of forest plantations that cap the Craiglich-Mortlich ridge. At Mortlich it joins the boundary of the Dee Valley SLA, and turn west to follow the higher ground that separates the Howe of Cromar from the river valley. This boundary mainly follows minor roads, paths and field boundaries as far as the National Park boundary at Black Moss.

The boundaries have been established along the ridge lines that enclose the Howe. The most appropriate boundary feature has been chosen along each ridge, which in some cases is a track or path following the high ground. In other cases, as at Craiglich, the boundary is on the hillside beyond the ridge, rather than in front of it, in order to ensure that the visual envelope of the Howe is included.

Designation recognises the intact nature of the Howe, and its strong relationship with the Grampian Outliers and Cairngorm fringes. The inter-visibility of the area with the Cairngorms National Park, including views to and from Morven and other peaks is also seen. Designation acknowledges the visibility of the area from the A97 and panoramic view from Queen's View. Other features such as archaeological remains, the woodland network and River Dee catchment would also be recognised.



*The Howe of Cromar from Queen's View (Source: LUC)*

## **Designation Statement**

The Howe of Cromar is a wide, sweeping pre-glacial basin of farmland, contained by low lying hills blanketed by moorland and forestry, and also by the more distant summits within the Cairngorms National Park, including Morven.

Numerous burns cross the Howe, and are tributaries of the River Dee and therefore part of the River Dee SAC. The Howe is well wooded, much of it ancient woodland, and both the woodland and waterways contribute to the ecological connectivity of the area.

The area has numerous features of built heritage interest including stone circles, Pictish stones and hill forts. The small granite village of Tarland is at the centre of the Howe, and there are scattered traditional farmsteads throughout.

There are many opportunities for recreation in the Howe including walking, mountain biking and hang-gliding. Queen's View offers panoramic views across the Howe towards the Cairngorms National Park.

The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:

- Wide, sweeping basin of farmland, framed by ridges of dark moorland and forestry.
- Dramatic mountain peaks rising from the farmland in the west of the Howe to the summit of Morven within the National Park.
- Panoramic vistas from Queen's View in the east, overlooking the Howe and beyond, to the cliffs of Lochnagar.
- A patchwork of arable farmland and woodland across the Howe, with an intact network of coniferous and deciduous plantations, policy woodlands and shelterbelts.
- A long heritage of settlement, with stone circles, Pictish stones and hill forts forming a well-known network of historic landscape, including many accessible sites.
- More recent built heritage includes castles and laird's houses, and distinctive granite village architecture as seen in Tarland.
- The area is overlooked from walking routes in the National Park, and also from the adjacent hills including the open ridge of Pressendye and the more intricate, wooded Scar Hill.

## **Forces for Change**

- Changes to landscape as a result of forest management and changes to agricultural practices in this area.
- Creation and maintenance of hill tracks associated with land management.
- Changes in estate and moorland management practices.
- Scattered and incremental development e.g. single houses cause negative impact on sense of place.
- Impact of proposals which effect the integrity of natural and historic features within the SLA.

## **Management Recommendations**

- The Howe of Cromar SLA is classed as an upland landscape type. As such emphasis should be on retaining their largely undeveloped and remote character. This means ensuring that any developments are located and designed to limit their wider visibility and, so far as possible, protecting open skylines and rugged summits.
- Development should be sensitive to the distinctive valley landforms.

- The wide, sweeping basin of farmland, framed by ridges of dark moorland and forestry should be maintained.
- Development and management proposals should not negatively impact on the sense of place or panoramic vistas associated with the Queen's View and views of the dramatic mountain peaks rising from the farmland in the west of the Howe to the summit of Morven within the National Park.
- The patchwork of arable farmland and woodland across the Howe, with coniferous and deciduous plantations, policy woodlands and shelterbelts. This should be maintained and enhanced.
- Layout, siting and design of development proposed in and around settlements should reflect the distinctive granite village architecture.
- The area is overlooked from walking routes in the National Park, and also from the adjacent hills including the open ridge of Pressendye and the more intricate, wooded Scar Hill. It is important that development in this area respects the sense of place and experience of wildness felt.

# Statement of Importance: Dee Valley Special Landscape Area

## Location and Boundaries

This SLA includes the valley of the River Dee from Dinnet in the west to Peterculter in the east. It includes the river and associated landscapes, taking in the adjoining hills, and covers the settings of riverside towns such as Aboyne and Banchory. The boundary has been drawn to include landscapes which help to frame the setting of the river.

Designation identifies the strong identity of the Dee Valley, and its scenic qualities which are a combination of the river, with wooded valley sides rising to moorland hills, and occasional limestone outcrops. The importance of the Dee Valley for tourism, with its numerous visitor attractions and facilities including castles and estates that contribute to built heritage. The naturalness of the Dee Valley, with its river and broadleaf woodland is also recognised.



*The River Dee from the B974 at Banchory (Source: LUC)*

## Designation Statement

The Dee is one of Aberdeenshire's major rivers, and the Dee Valley has a strong sense of place. It comprises an intact farmed valley, with wooded sides rising to moorland hills. The Mouth rises to the south and the Grampian Outliers to the north.

The valley has a strong sense of naturalness, created by the combination of river and broadleaf woodland. The River Dee with its tributaries is an SAC.

There are many opportunities for recreation in the Dee Valley, including canoeing, walking and cycling. The area is a hub for tourists, with visitor attractions and tourist facilities, particularly in Banchory. These attractions include the Falls of Feugh near Banchory,

comprising waterfalls with a stone footbridge and opportunities to view leaping salmon. Scolty Hill near Banchory is a popular location for its woodland walks and has panoramic views from the summit.

Despite being farmed and settled the Dee provides opportunities to experience tranquillity and enjoy the area's wildlife.

The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:

- Broad, meandering river, with wooded banks rising to moorland hills and occasional limestone outcrops.
- Broadleaf woodland contributes to visual diversity and habitat value all along the valley, and reflect long history of estate development.
- The woodland along the Dee forms part of an intact habitat network, including policy woodland, plantations and riparian woodland, providing connectivity between the lowlands and uplands of Aberdeenshire.
- Key routes through the valley include the Royal Deeside Railway, the Deeside Tourist Route and long distance walking, cycling and horse riding trails. The valley is seen by large numbers of people using these routes.
- A wealth of distinctive built heritage, including the well-known Crathes Castle, and the Victorian vernacular of farms, cottages and estate buildings along the valley.
- The granite architecture of Deeside settlements is an essential part of the character of Aboyne and Banchory, as well as smaller villages.
- Deeside is representative of Aberdeenshire's identity, and is a popular tourist destination, both in itself and as a link between Aberdeen and the National Park.
- At its western end, increasing glimpses to the higher hills mark the approach to the National Park.

### **Forces for Change**

- Pressure of residential development in towns and villages along course of the River Dee.
- Effect of light pollution in and around settlements.
- Changes to landscape as a result of forest management and changes to agricultural practices in this area.
- Increased recreation along access tracks may lead to erosion.
- Impact of proposals which effect the integrity of natural and historic features within the SLA.

### **Management Recommendations**

- The Dee Valley SLA is classed as a valley landscape type. As such emphasis should be on maintaining the current patterns of land use and settlement, with development focused within existing towns and villages. Elsewhere, development should be located on lower slopes or floor of the valley and carefully sited, designed and landscaped to integrate within the wider valley landscape. Development proposed in surrounding upland areas should be assessed to minimise the visual impact on the SLA, including views and vistas along the valley.
- Proposals should not impact on the sense of place provided by the broad, meandering river, with wooded banks, rising to moorland hills.
- Development should contribute to the distinctive form of policy woodland plantations and riparian woodland in the area.

- Proposals are likely which seek to take advantage of the Dee valley landscape as a popular setting for a range of outdoor recreation including key routes through the valley. The valley is seen by large numbers of people using the Royal Deeside Railway, the Deeside Tourist Route and long distance walking, cycling and horse riding trails and proposals should be carefully assessed to maintain the landscape setting.
- The wealth of distinctive built heritage, should be maintained. Opportunities which attempt to sensitively develop/ convert traditional vernacular buildings are likely to be looked upon favourably.
- The granite architecture of Deeside settlements is an essential part of the character of Aboyne and Banchory, as well as smaller villages and this characteristic needs to be protected. Development within smaller villages should ensure that design respects the vernacular heritage and sense of place that they provide.
- Deeside is representative of Aberdeenshire's identity, and is a popular tourist destination, both in itself and as a link between Aberdeen and the National Park. It important that development and management proposals reflect the identity and sense of place associated with the River Dee, particularly at its western end, increasing glimpses to the higher hills mark the approach to the National Park.

# Statement of Importance: Clachnaben and Forest of Birse Special Landscape Area

## Location and Boundaries

This SLA is in the south west of Aberdeenshire, taking in part of the upland Mounth. The Forest of Birse is one of the wildest parts of Aberdeenshire outside the National Park, while Clachnaben is a prominent landmark for miles around.

The northern boundary follows the edge of the Dee valley to the north, and the more populated Water of Feugh valley to the north east. It travels via the B976 between Bridge of Ess and Birsemore, then follows a minor road and forestry edge before re-joining the B976 at Allancreich. East of Arntilly Craig the eastern boundary follows forestry tracks, open moorland and minor roads until joining the B974 south of Greendams, which it follows south until Cairn o' Mount. The southern boundary follows the Cairn o' Mount – Sturdy Hill ridge. The western boundary follows the administrative boundary with Angus and the Cairngorms National Park.

These boundaries have been selected to enclose the most undeveloped parts of The Mounth, which are among the least accessible and wildest parts of Aberdeenshire. The boundaries have been drawn to exclude all but minor roads, as well as the larger forest plantations east of the B974.

Designation of the western part of the Mounth recognises the scenic qualities created by the strong rolling relief and distinctive hill profiles. The relative lack of habitation and high wildness qualities, as well as the naturalness resulting from extensive areas of heather moorland are also seen in this area. The relationship with the adjacent Cairngorms National Park supports designation of this SLA.



*The distinctive profile of Clachnaben from the B974 (Source: LUC)*



## Designation Statement

The Forest of Birse is an open expanse of rolling upland hills which extends west into the Cairngorms National Park. Clachnaben is a distinctive craggy peak on the north side of Glen Dye, a valley running east-west through the SLA.

The land cover is predominantly heather moorland, with some extensive areas of forestry on the fringes, particularly in the north above the Dee Valley. The pine forest on the northern slopes of the Birse valley have the largest remnants of nature pine woodland found in Aberdeenshire. Burns running along the sheltered glens are tributaries of the River Dee and form part of the River Dee SAC.

The Mounth provides opportunities for hill walking, and Clachnaben is a popular summit, with panoramic views including towards Bennachie to the north. The area is visible from the elevated B974 which runs along the eastern boundary. The area forms the backdrop to the Dee Valley to the north.

There is little habitation in the SLA, and many areas are inaccessible except on foot. The area has a strong sense of wildness, and tranquillity can be experienced in both the upland moorland hills and sheltered glens.

The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:

- Strong, rolling relief of the upland landscape, including highly distinctive hill profiles the most recognisable of which is the crag of Clachnaben.
- High wildness qualities including a virtual absence of habitation, limited access and rugged terrain.
- Uninterrupted natural landcover of heather moorland across most of the area, with forestry on fringes.
- Forest of Birse includes a range of habitat types, including the community-owned Commonly Pinewoods, which are being positively managed. is an important habitat for bird life.
- A widely visible landscape, forming the backdrop to Deeside to the north, and with the landmark of Clachnaben seen from miles around.
- The long minor road into Ballochlan ends at the remote Forest of Birse Kirk, with historic links over The Fungle, an ancient way linking Deeside with Glen Tarf.
- Expansive area which continues seamlessly westwards into the Glen Tanar Forest area in the Cairngorms National Park.
- Clachnaben is a popular hill summit, with views across the whole of this landscape and beyond. Remote Mount Battock is the most easterly of the Corbetts (hills over 2500 feet), and there are several hill ascents accessible from Ballochlan.

## Forces for Change

- Changes to landscape as a result of forest management and changes to agricultural practices in this area.
- Creation and maintenance of hill tracks associated with land management.
- Scattered and incremental development e.g. single houses cause negative impact on sense of place.
- Development of renewable energy technologies (e.g. on-shore wind turbines and associated infrastructure) affect views to and from the SLA.
- Changes in estate and moorland management practices.

## **Management Recommendations**

- The Clachnaben and Forest of Birse SLA is classed as an upland landscape type. As such emphasis should be on retaining their largely undeveloped and remote character. This means ensuring that any developments are located and designed to limit their wider visibility and, so far as possible, protecting open skylines and rugged summits.
- Development should be sensitive to the distinctive valley landforms.
- Development must respect the strong, rolling relief and sense of wildness of the upland landscape.
- Woodland management and further woodland creation in locations found to be suitable for such, is encouraged in this area.

# Statement of Importance: The Braes of the Mearns Special Landscape Area

## Location and Boundaries

This SLA includes the south-facing slopes of the Mounth and the northern part of the Howe of the Mearns, where these two distinct landscapes come together.

The northern boundary follows the ridgeline from Sturdy Hill (544 m AOD) in the south west to Coyle Hill (464 m AOD) in the north east, and includes Cairn o' Mount, the summit above the scenic viewpoint on the B974. The eastern boundary crosses the Drumtochty Forest via a forest track, and then follows minor roads and tracks between Bogburn and the B966 south of Auchenblae. The southern boundary follows the B966 along the Howe of the Mearns until the boundary with Angus at Gannochy. The western boundary follows the Aberdeenshire - Angus border.

These boundaries include the wooded farmlands at the foot of the Highland Boundary Fault, and the steep hills which form the backdrop of the Howe of the Mearns. The boundary therefore contains this important combination of landscapes, but does not cover the broader and less visually diverse farmland of the Howe of the Mearns.

The Howe of the Mearns is a uniformly flat landscape, which slopes steeply up into the Mounth, marking the line of the Highland Boundary Fault. Designation of part of the Howe of the Mearns and the enclosing ridge of the Mounth recognises the contrast between the distinctive flat farmed valley of the Howe, with its beech woodland and avenues, and the rugged upland ridge which forms its backdrop. Designation also recognises the highly visible nature of the landscape, and commanding views from its summits including the Cairn o' Mount Scenic Viewpoint, a popular resting place for passers-by.



*View south from Cairn o' Mount, looking towards Strathfinella Hill and the Howe of the Mearns (Source: LUC)*

## **Designation Statement**

The Braes of the Mearns comprises a pleasing juxtaposition of uniformly flat farmland and woodland, with a dramatic and rugged ridge to the north marking the line of the Highland Boundary Fault.

The northern part of the Howe of the Mearns is well wooded, with notable beech hedges and woodland associated with traditional estates, some of which is ancient woodland.

Notable built heritage features include Fasque House, a mansion house near Fettercairn, set in a wooded estate. The village of Fettercairn is a Conservation Area with some notable buildings such as the Royal Arch.

There are opportunities for walking and cycling in this SLA. The Sturdy Hill to Coyle Hill ridge is widely visible from the Howe of the Mearns including the A90, as well as the Hill of Garvock on the opposing side of the Howe. The Cairn o' Mount viewpoint is an easily accessible location for panoramic views south across the Howe.

The Howe is farmed and settled, and accessible via a network of roads. The rugged moorland and forested hills rising to the north display some qualities of wildness, such as natural landcover and pockets where remoteness from human influence can be experienced.

The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:

- Strong contrast between the distinctive flat Howe and the dramatic ridge of the Mounth to the north.
- Clear expression of the Highland Boundary Fault, where Highland and Lowland Scotland meet.
- Intact farmed landscape of the Howe of the Mearns, with a strong structure of beech woodland and avenues along the foot of the slopes.
- Highly visible ridge viewed from across the landscape to the south east, including from the A90, which defines the Howe of the Mearns.
- Cairn o' Mount scenic viewpoint, a popular stopping place on the hill road with views across the Howe.
- Strath Finella, an intimate wooded glen leading into the hills.
- Wooded estate landscapes including Fasque, Fettercairn and Drumtochty.
- Well known literary associations of the Howe of the Mearns including the work of Lewis Grassic Gibbon.

## **Forces for Change**

- Changes to landscape as a result of forest management and changes to agricultural practices in this area.
- Creation and maintenance of hill tracks associated with land management.
- Changes in estate and moorland management practices.
- Development pressure in and around towns and villages including Auchenblae, Fettercairn and unallocated development around Fasque.
- Scattered and incremental development e.g. single houses cause negative impact on sense of place.
- Development of renewable energy technologies (e.g. on-shore wind turbines and associated infrastructure).
- Development associated with mineral extraction.

## Management Recommendations

- The Braes of the Mearns is classed a lowland landscape type. As such emphasis should be to retain the distinctive rural character of the landscape. Isolated developments in the open countryside should be avoided wherever possible. Agricultural development and proposals for farm diversification or conversion of traditional vernacular buildings (i.e. agricultural buildings, bothies and redundant houses) should retain their character and avoid the creation of incongruous elements.
- The strong contrast between the distinctive flat Howe and the ridge of the Mounth to the north should be maintained.
- Development proposals should maintain the intact farmed landscape of the Howe of the Mearns, with its strong structure of beech woodland and avenues.
- Due to the highly visibility impacts of proposed developments on the ridge, development proposals require to be carefully considered.
- Impact of development at both long and short ranges to the Cairn o' Mount scenic viewpoint should be carefully considered to ensure that any negative impacts to the view are not disproportionate and mitigation measures can be put in place, including landscaping in and around new developments
- The sense of place associated with wooded estate landscapes should be maintained and where possible enhanced.
- Development proposals which seek to take advantage of and promote literary associations of the Howe of the Mearns including the work of Lewis Grassie Gibbon are likely to be supported.

## **Consideration of Other Relevant Policies**

In applying this Supplementary Guidance, it is important to note that it does not act in isolation and there could be other relevant policies which should be cross-referenced, most notably policies within Shaping Development in the Countryside, Protecting Resources and Shaping Places sections of the LDP. Pre-application discussions are encouraged where impacts to the landscape could occur from development proposals in order to determine the extent to which policies of the LDP apply to a proposal.

## **Monitoring**

In common with other Supplementary Guidance, the SLAs will be subject to review every five years as part of the local development plan-making process. Although landscape change generally occurs over a longer time period, it is important that the boundaries and qualifying criteria are monitored on a regular basis to ensure that the special qualities and characteristics for which a SLA is designate are maintained.

### **Policy Background**

#### **The European Landscape Convention**

The European Landscape Convention was signed in the year 2000 and came into force in the UK March 2007. The Convention defines landscape as:

*“An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.”*

The Convention aims to encourage public authorities, including planning authorities, to adopt policies and measures at a local, regional and international level to promote the protection, management and planning of European landscapes and organises European co-operation on landscape issues. It marked a key milestone in recognising that all landscapes are important, not just those that are “special” and it underpins the landscape character approach advocated in SPP (paragraph 194) and found in Policy E2 of the LDP2016.

#### **National Planning Framework 3**

Scotland's third National Planning Framework (NPF3) is a long-term spatial expression of the Scottish Government's Economic Strategy, and outlines plans for national infrastructure investment across Scotland. The contribution Scotland's landscapes makes towards our quality of life, our national identity and the visitor economy is celebrated in paragraph 4.4 of NPF3:

*“Landscape quality is found across Scotland and all landscapes support place-making. National Scenic Areas and National Parks attract many visitors and reinforce our international image. We also want to continue our strong protection for our wildest landscapes – wild land is a nationally important asset. Closer to settlements landscapes have an important role to play in sustaining local distinctiveness and cultural identity, and in supporting health and well-being”.*

#### **Scottish Planning Policy**

Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) is the Scottish Government's policy on nationally important land use planning matters. SPP outlines the need for planning authorities to protect, enhance and promote *“access to natural heritage, including green infrastructure, landscape and the wider environment”*.

SPP paragraph 196 states that:

*“International, national and locally designated areas and sites should be identified and afforded the appropriate level of protection in development plans. Reasons for local designation should be clearly explained and their function and continuing relevance considered when preparing plans”.*

Paragraph 197 identifies that non-statutory local designations should be limited to areas designated for their local landscape or nature conservation value. SPP notes that the purpose for designating a local landscape area should be to:

- *“safeguard and enhance the character and quality of a landscape which is important or particularly valued locally or regionally; or*
- *promote understanding and awareness of the distinctive character and special qualities of local landscapes; or*
- *safeguard and promote important local settings for outdoor recreation and tourism”.*

### **Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Strategic Development Plan 2014**

The Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan sets out the vision for the future of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. The Quality of the Environment Objective sets targets for *“Local Development Plans and Supplementary Guidance [to] make sure the North East’s natural environment, historic sites and buildings continue to be protected”* and commits the Council to taking account of landscape in assessing development proposals LDP level.

### **Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2016**

The Aberdeenshire LDP sets out statements of the policies which will be used in assessing planning applications and through the proposals confirms the principle of development on sites across Aberdeenshire.

Policies contained within the “Natural Heritage and Landscape” section of the LDP seek to protect Aberdeenshire’s landscape, and contribute to sustainable management and improvement to landscapes across the region. Policy E2 Landscape outlines the Council’s approach to development which may affect the landscape of Aberdeenshire. The aim of this policy is to ensure that SLAs are afforded adequate protection against inappropriate development.

This Supplementary Guidance has been prepared to support the implementation of this policy.

#### **Policy E2 Landscape**

*“We will refuse development that causes unacceptable effects through its scale, location or design on key natural landscape elements, historic features or the composition or quality of the landscape character. These impacts can be either alone or cumulatively with other recent developments. Development should not otherwise significantly erode the characteristics of landscapes as defined in the Landscape Character Assessments produced by Scottish Natural Heritage or have been identified as Special Landscape Areas of local importance.”*

*“Boundaries and qualifying criteria for Special Landscape Areas are identified in the Supplementary Guidance Special Landscape Areas. Developments located within Special Landscape Areas will only be permitted if the qualifying interests are not being adversely affected or effects of the development are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of at least local importance.”*

### **Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland Guidance on Local Landscape Designations (2006)**

This Guidance document was developed by SNH and HS to help local authorities refresh their approach to local landscape designations. Part 1 reviews the changing context for local landscape designations; Part 2 sets out the key elements in refreshing the approach to local



landscape designations and reviewing them in practice; and Part 3 addresses aspects of policy and management and other practical designation issues. This Guidance has been used by Aberdeenshire Council and LUC to prepare this Supplementary Guidance.

### Study Approach

In 2015 Aberdeenshire Council undertook a LLDR, to identify landscapes that merit additional protection at a local level. The LLDR followed the process recommended by the “Guidance on Local Landscape Designations”.

LUC were appointed and tasked to assess the relative importance of the landscape evaluation criteria and to identify a selection of SLAs. Their approach to the LLDR included desk based over view of existing Landscape Character Areas, quantitative evaluation, field work and qualitative evaluations, formation of areas of search and application of practical criteria to identify SLAs. Extensive stakeholder engagement was carried out during the course of the study. Full description of the method used is contained in the document “Aberdeenshire Local Landscape Designation Review” (2016) available online at [www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/ldp](http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/ldp).

Stakeholder engagement confirmed that the purpose of SLAs in Aberdeenshire should be to *“Safeguard and enhance the character and quality of landscapes which is importance or particularly valued locally or regionally”*.

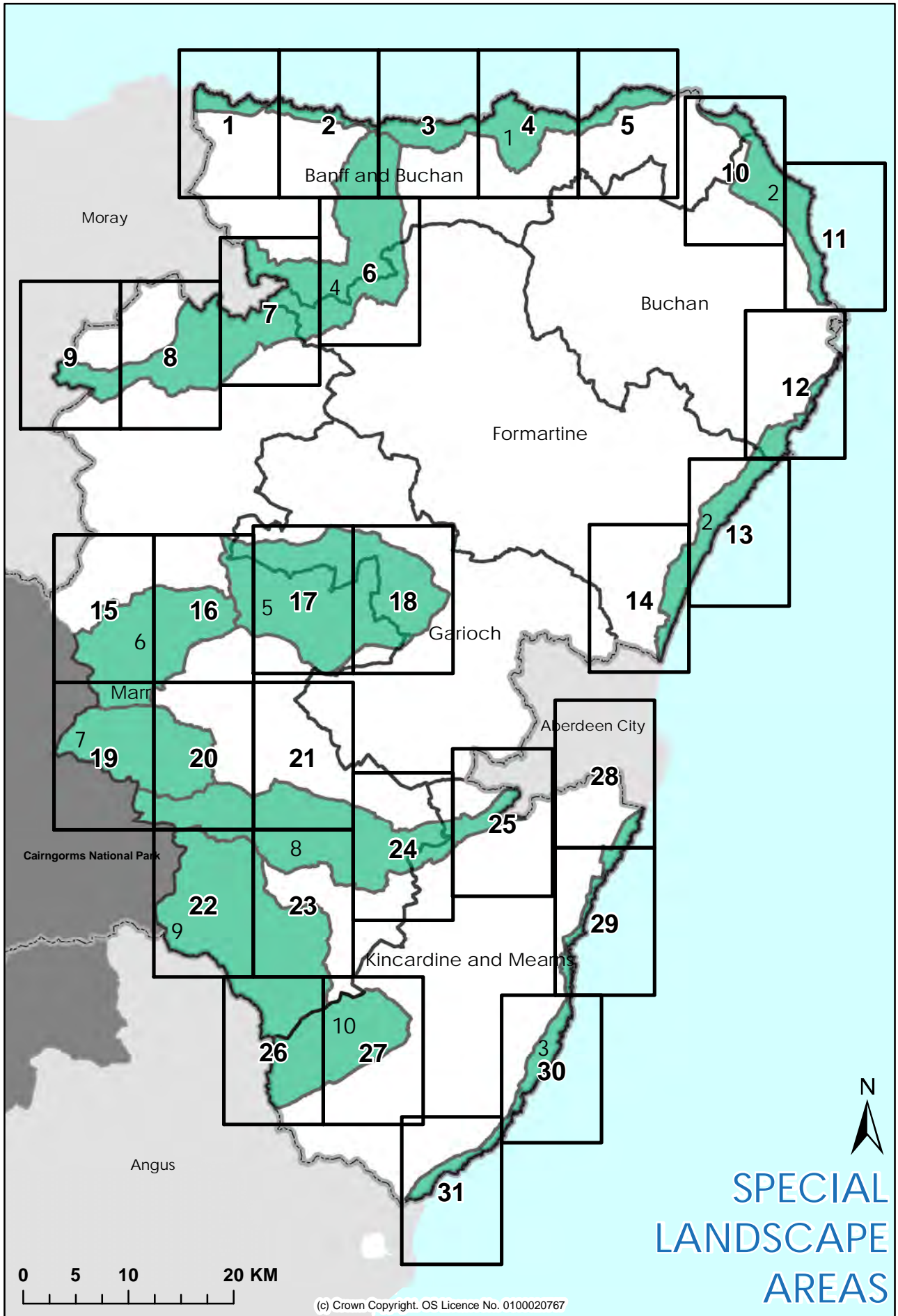
Recognising that the consideration of a landscape as “special” is subjective and a matter of public opinion, Aberdeenshire Council’s LLDR sought consensus of the characteristics of landscape that should be considered in the identification of SLA’s. Consequently, a set of 12 criteria were identified to score Landscaper Character Areas to define “search areas” from which SLAs were then identified.

#### **Landscape character criteria**

- Typicality / Representativeness – The extent to which a landscape represents the study area as a whole, and contributes to its wider identity and sense of place.
- Rarity / Uniqueness – Landscapes which are unique to Aberdeenshire, or uncommon elsewhere.
- Intactness / Condition – Landscapes that are intact and distinctive, having been unaffected by development over a considerable period of time and where these may be threatened by development.
- Wildness – The relative remoteness of the landscape, including lack of human features, distance from settlement, and ruggedness of terrain
- Scenic qualities – The extent to which the landscape contains pleasing combinations of features, or to which it prompts strong sensory appeal.
- Enjoyment – Landscapes which provide access and recreation opportunities for local people and visitors.
- Built heritage assets – Landscapes which provide key views, in to and away from, important built heritage assets.
- Cultural qualities – Landscapes which provide cultural associations such as with literature, music, art or local history or which have spiritual associations.
- Naturalness and natural heritage assets – The perceived importance to the landscape of features of natural heritage interest, including important habitats, protected sites, and features of geodiversity value.
- Settlement setting – Landscapes of particular importance to the setting of settlements, as a whole, or particular aspects of the settlement.

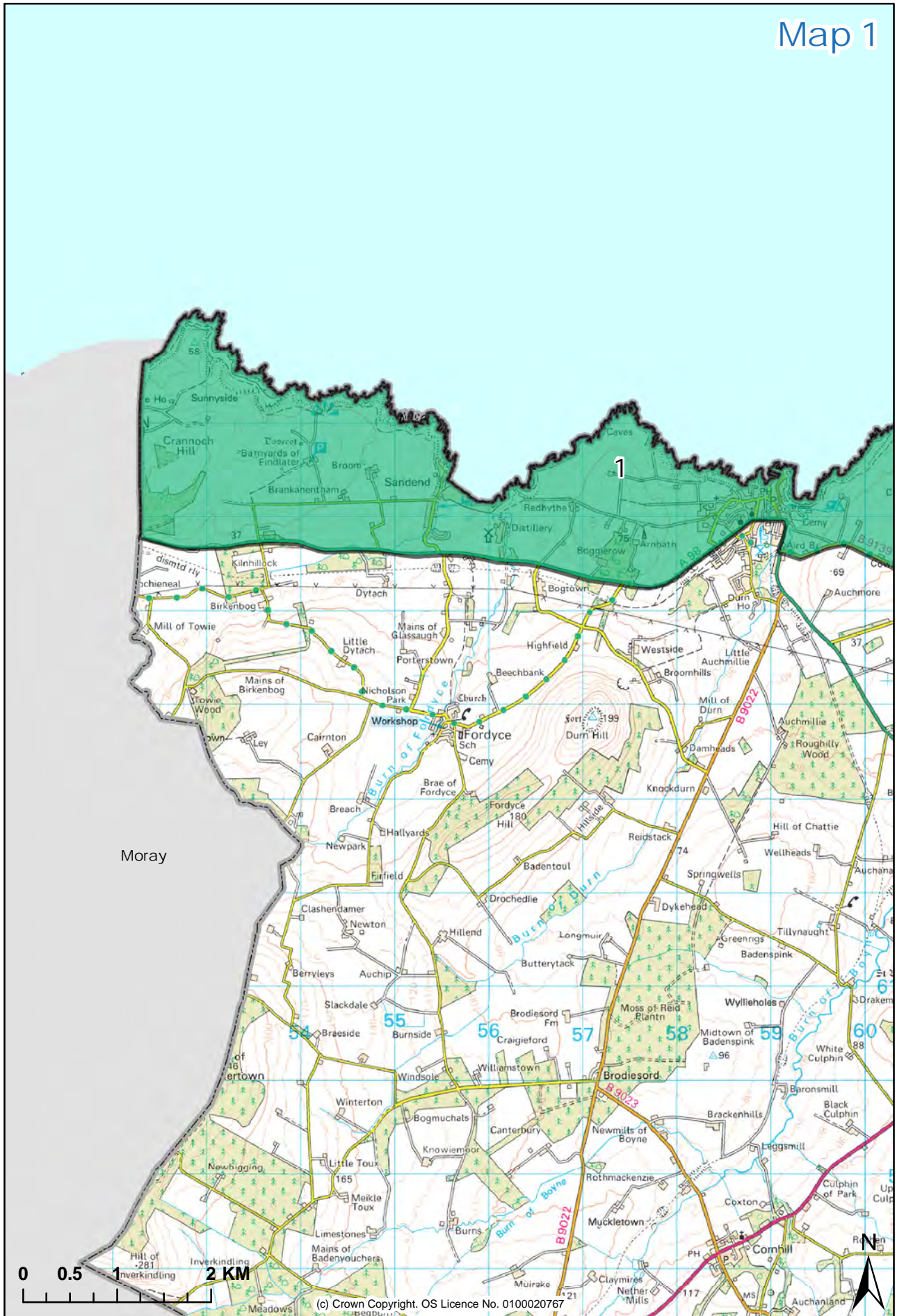
- Views – The extent and importance of views in and out of the landscape, including the relative visibility of the landscape from key routes and locations, and key views from outwith Aberdeenshire boundaries.
- Connectivity – Landscapes which contribute to green networks, such as those which provide green corridors between settlements and the countryside.

Special Landscape Area Boundary Maps



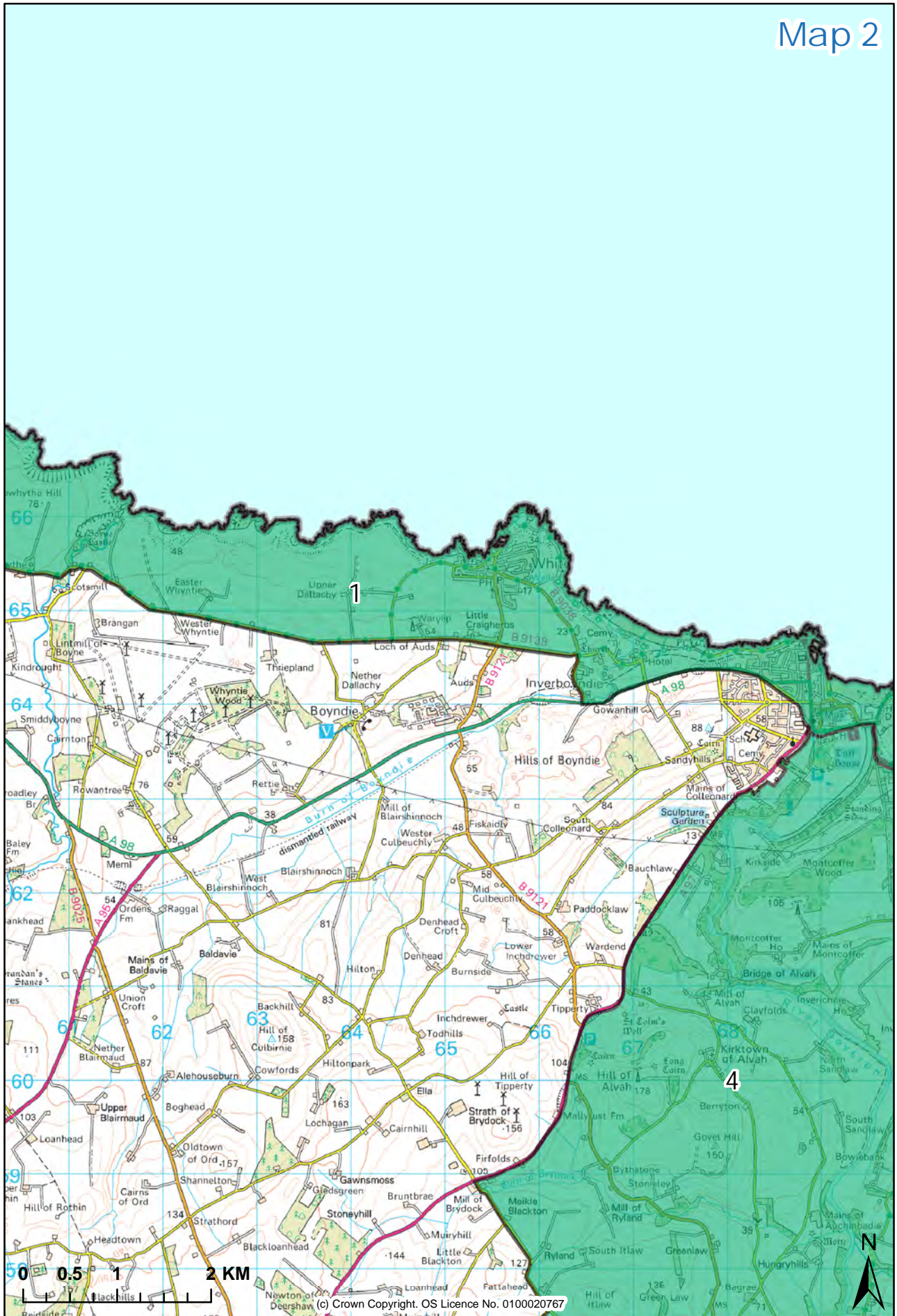
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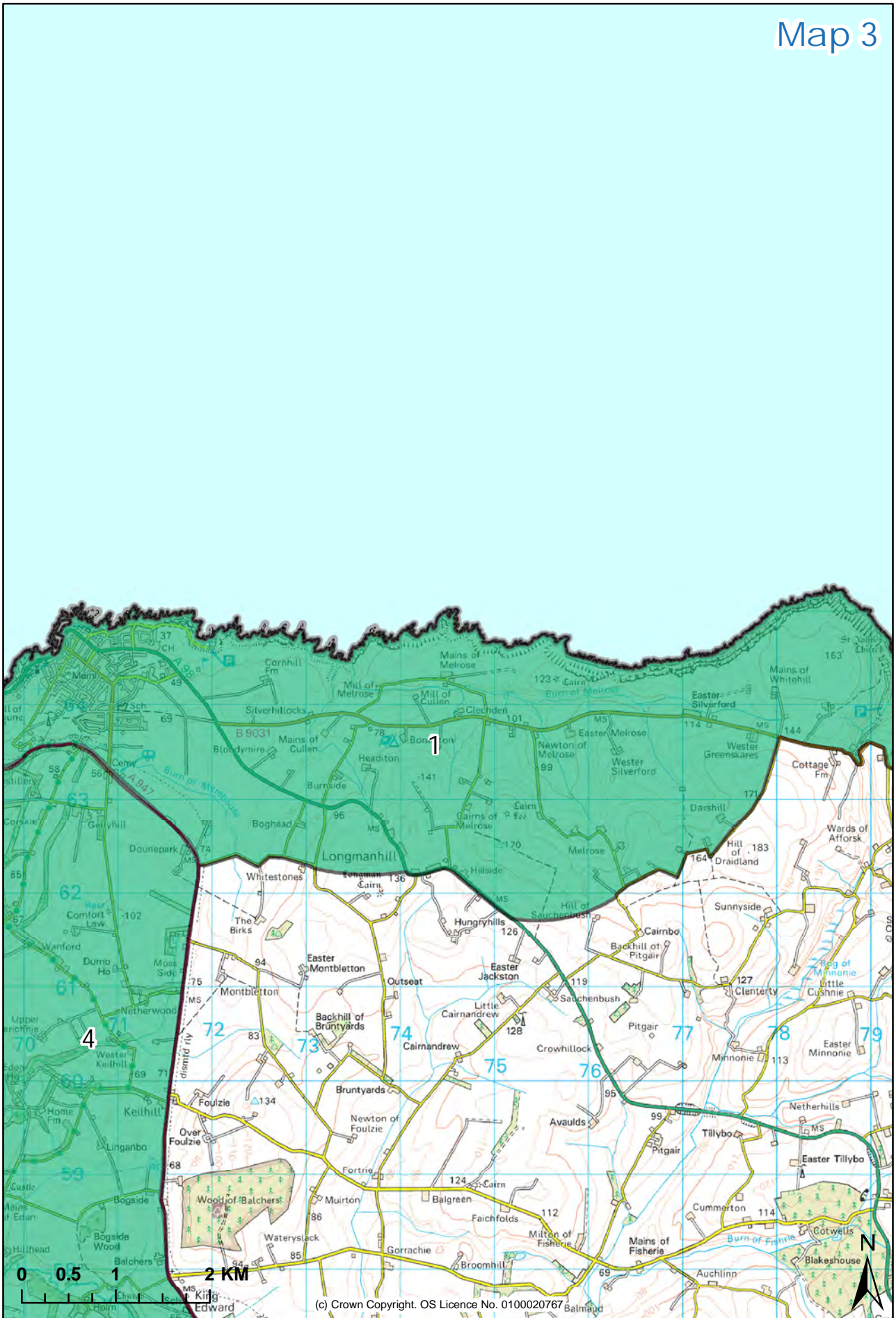


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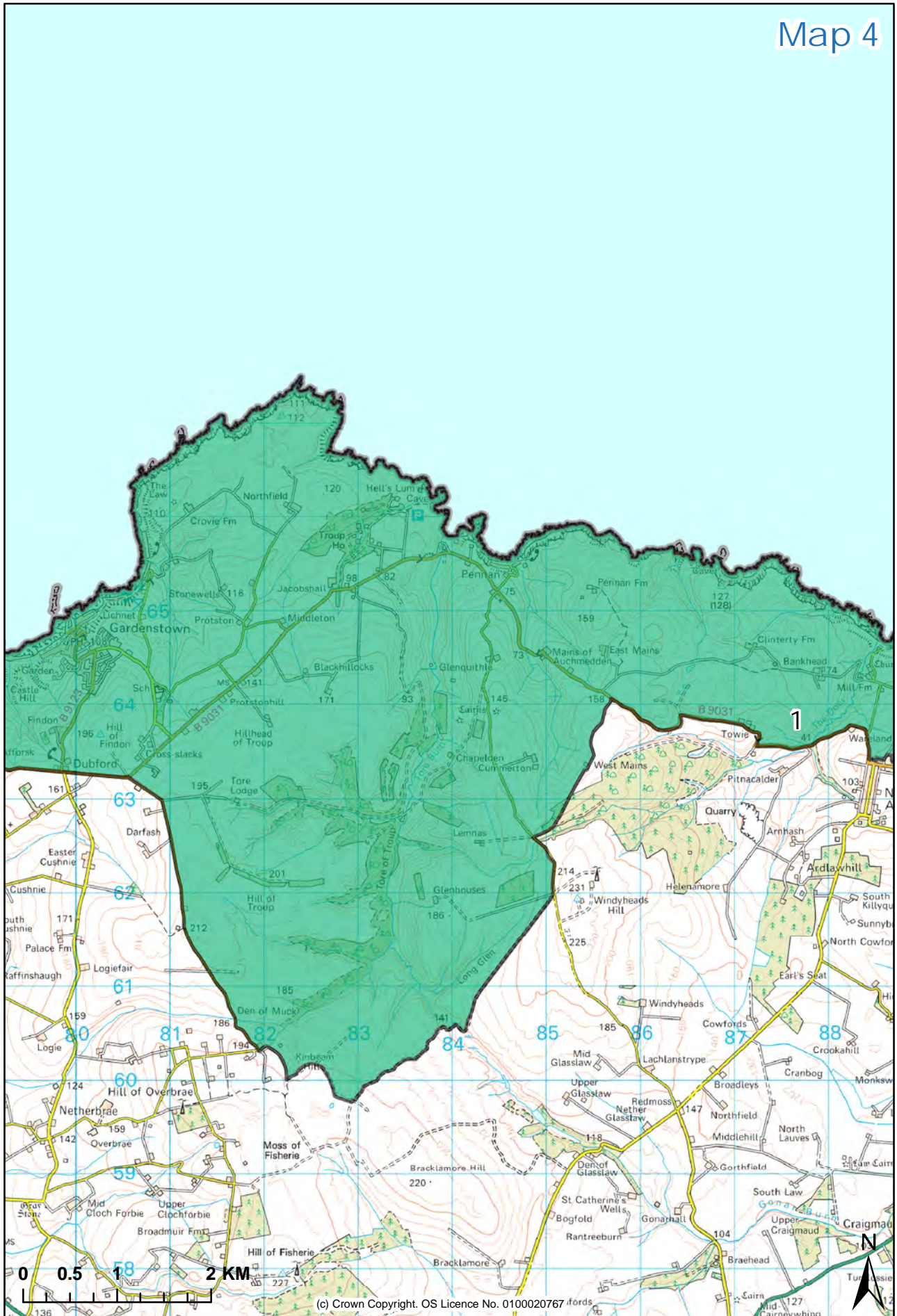
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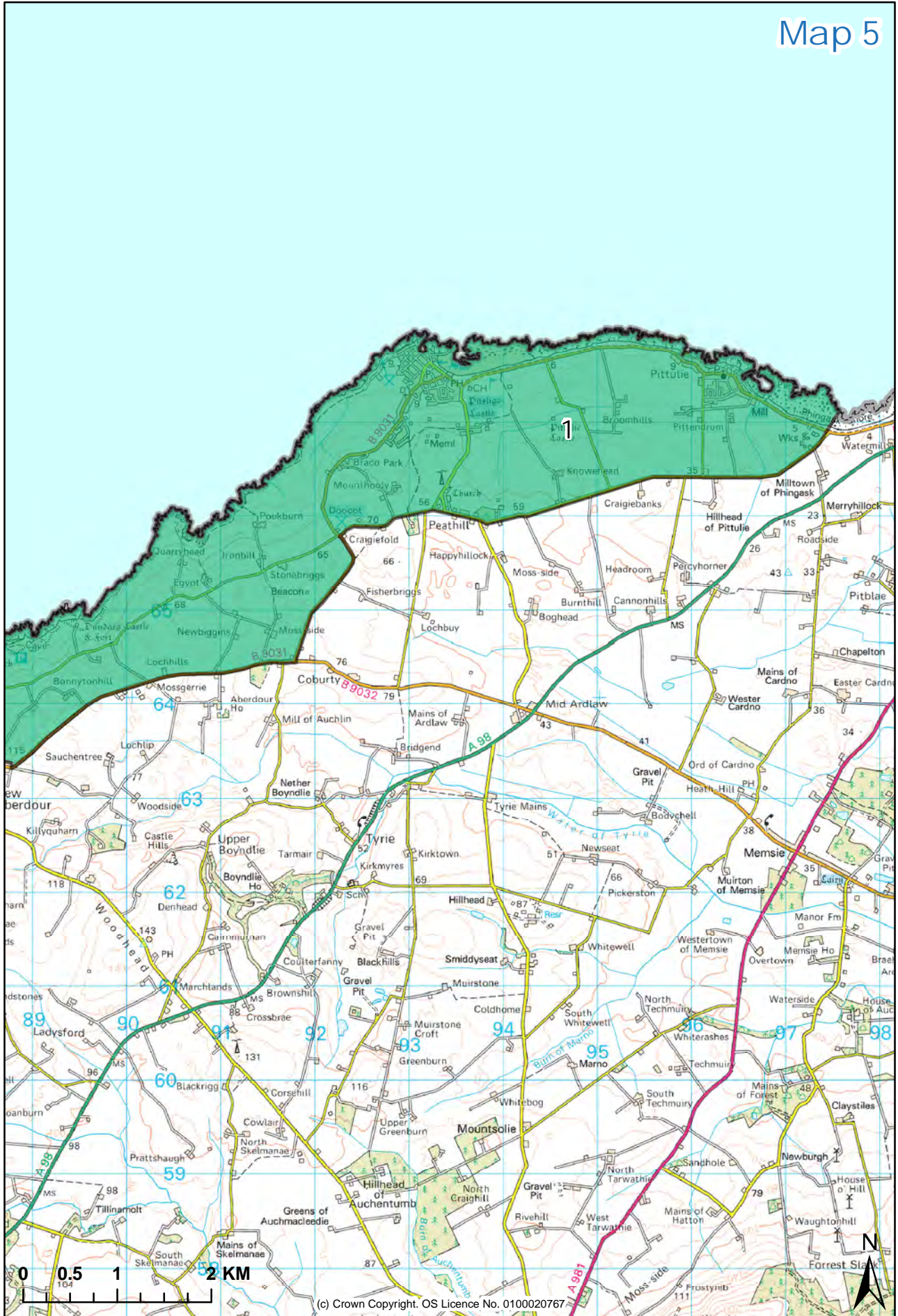
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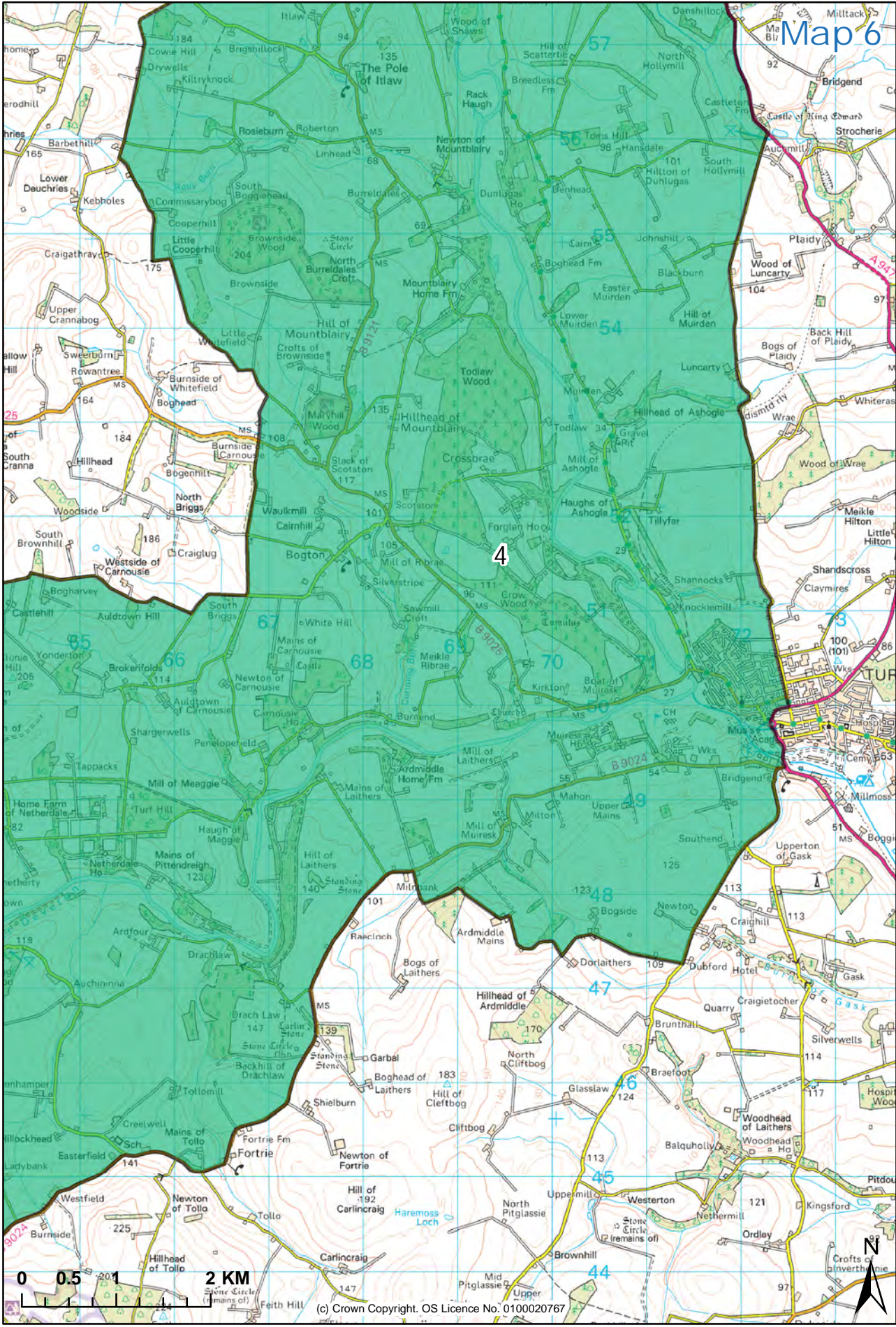
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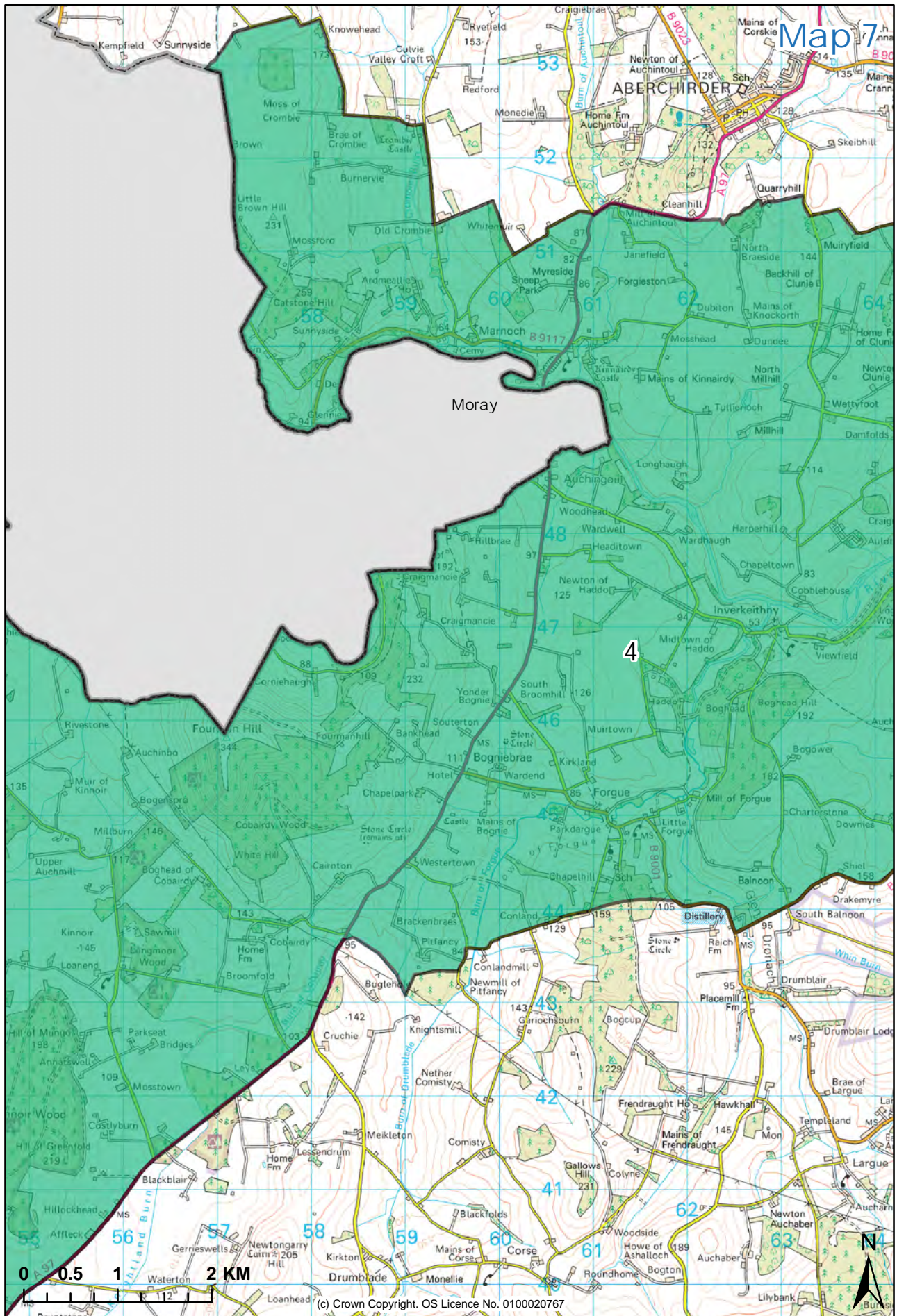
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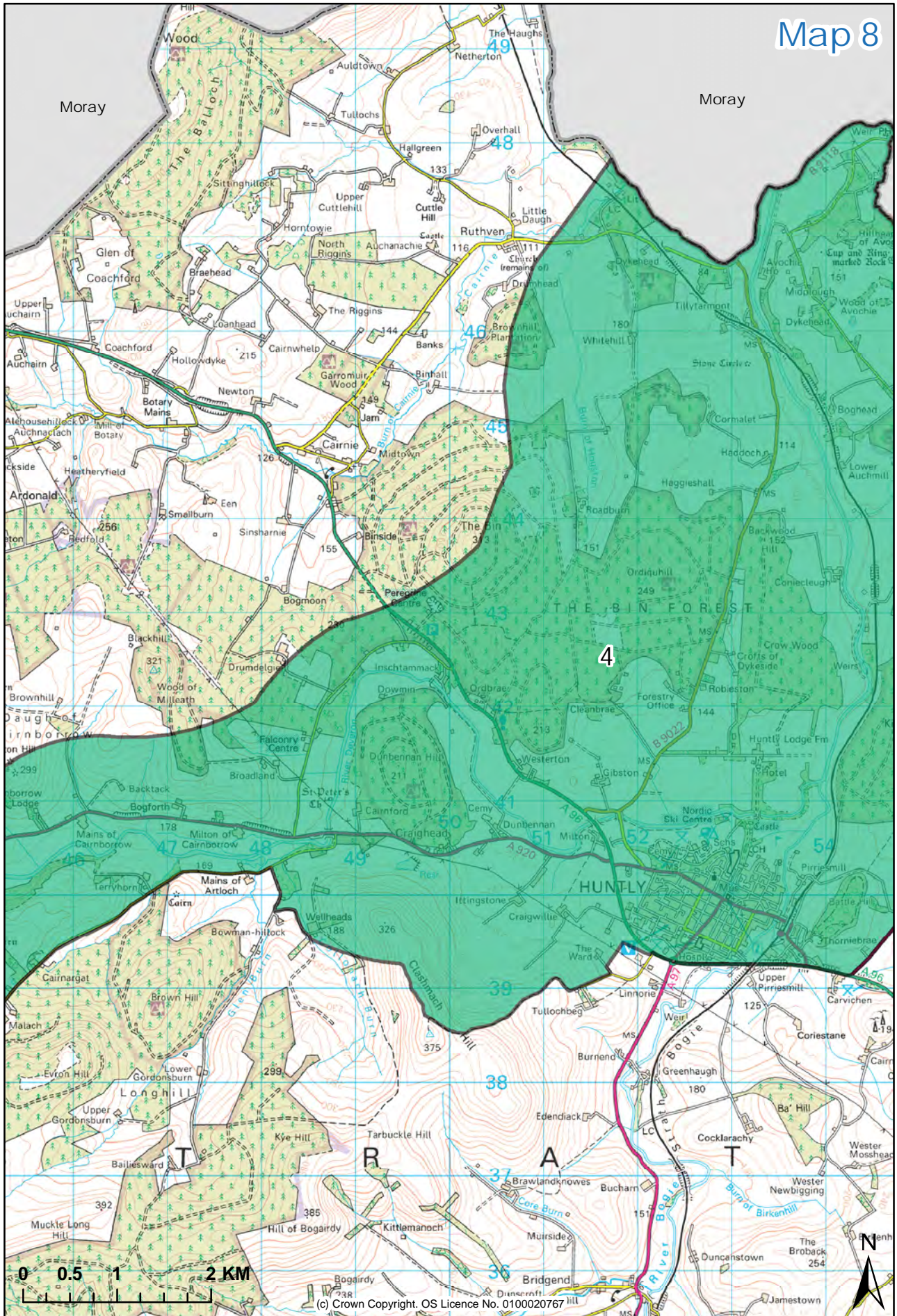
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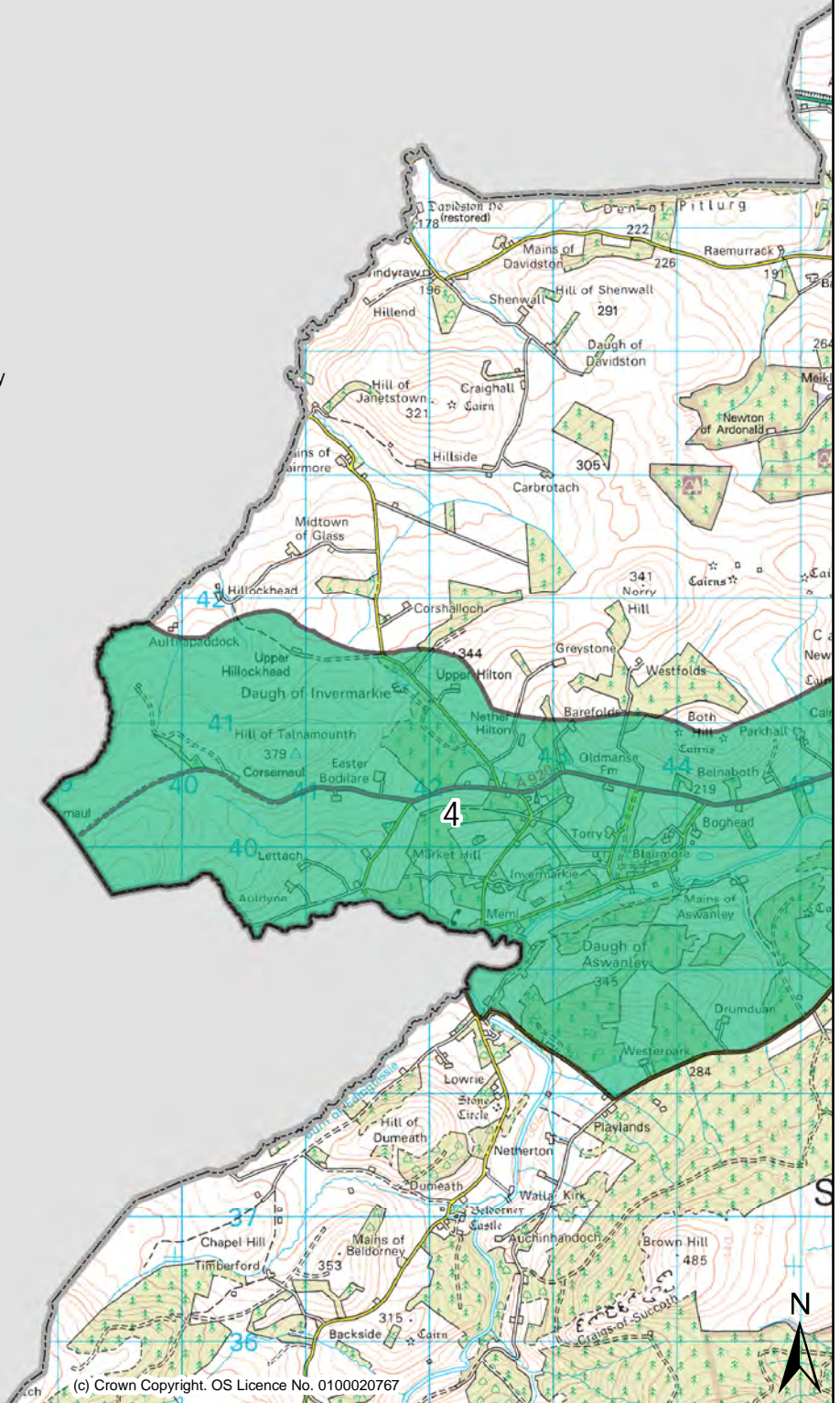
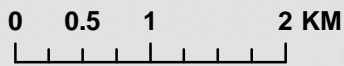
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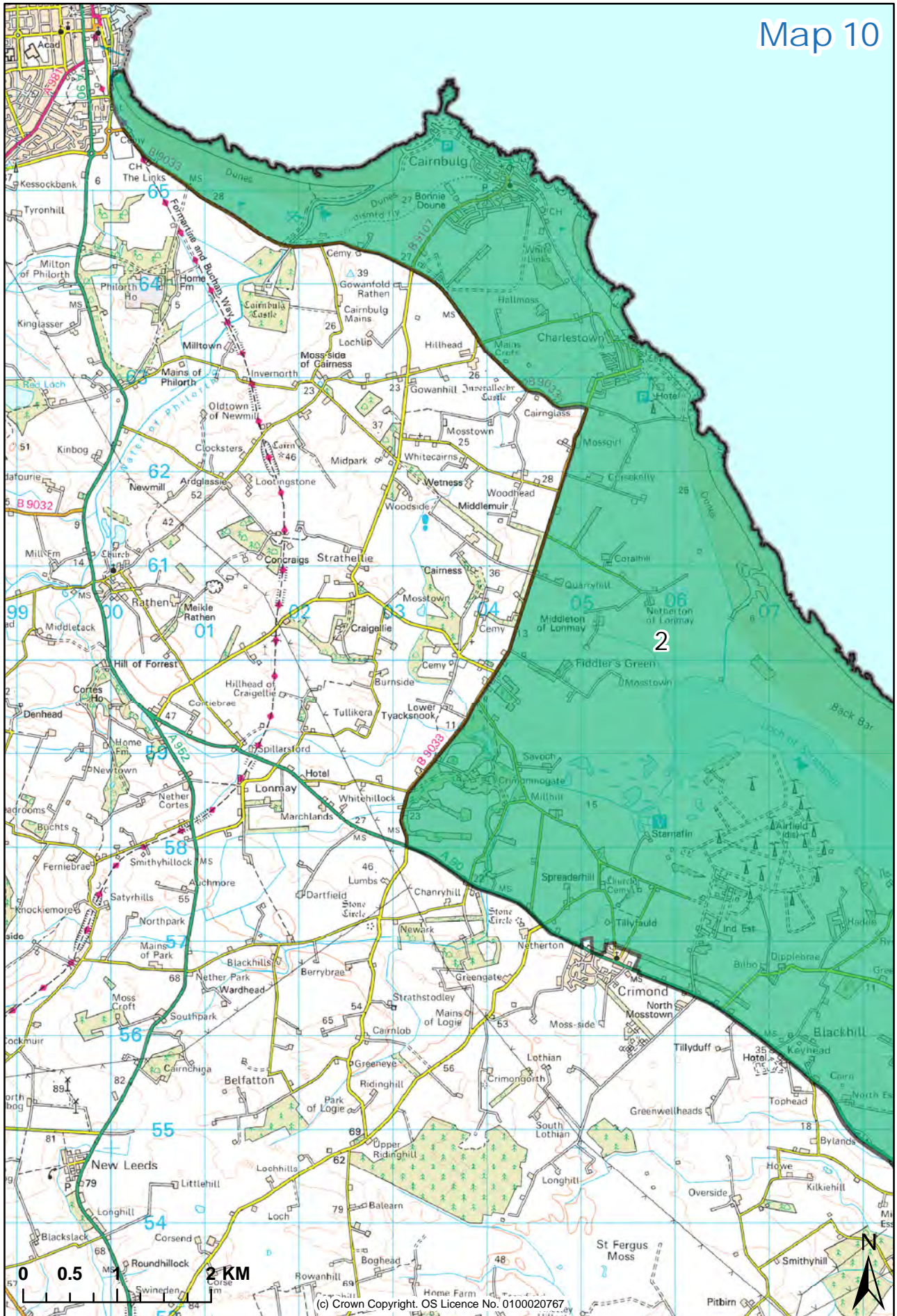
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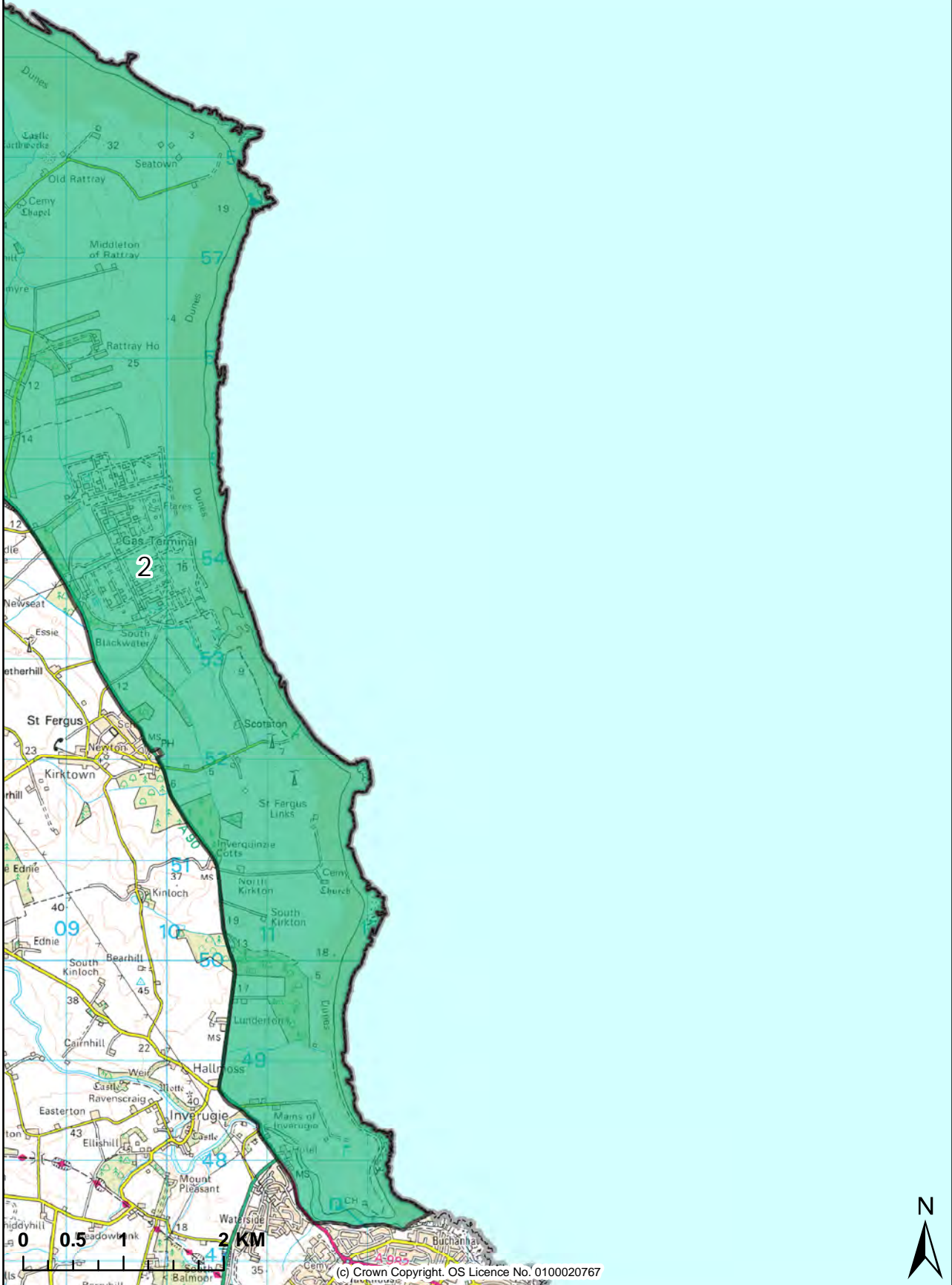
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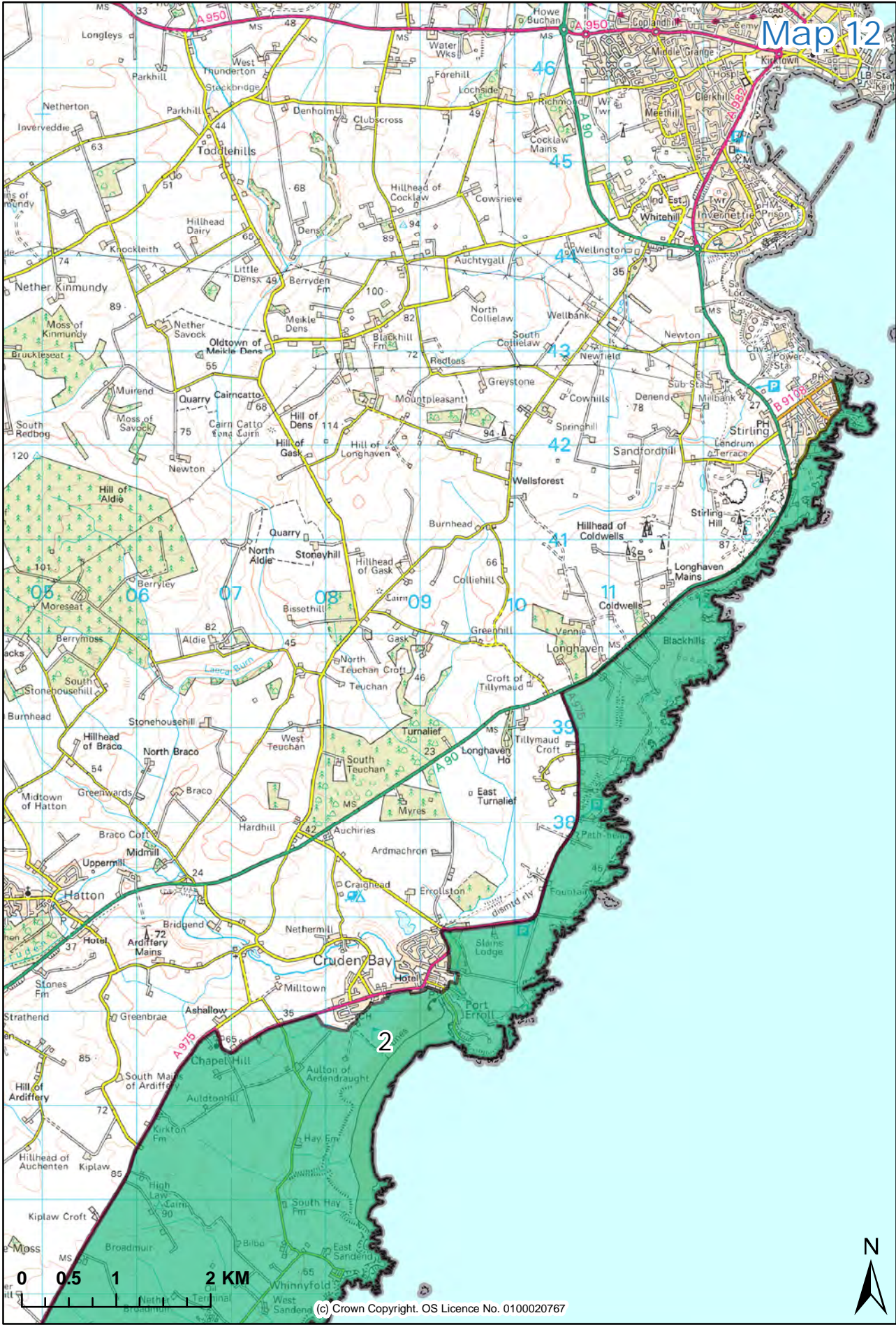
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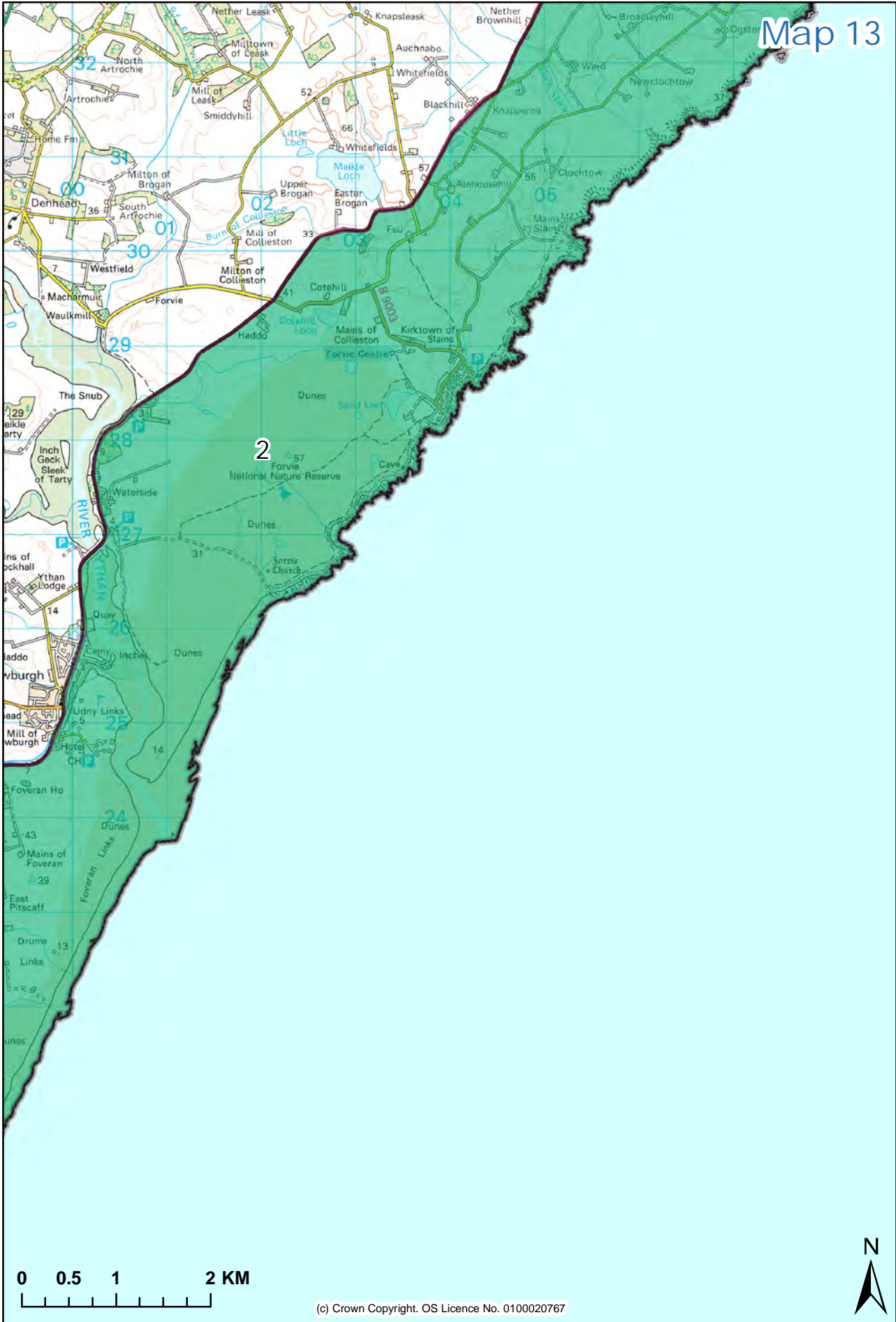


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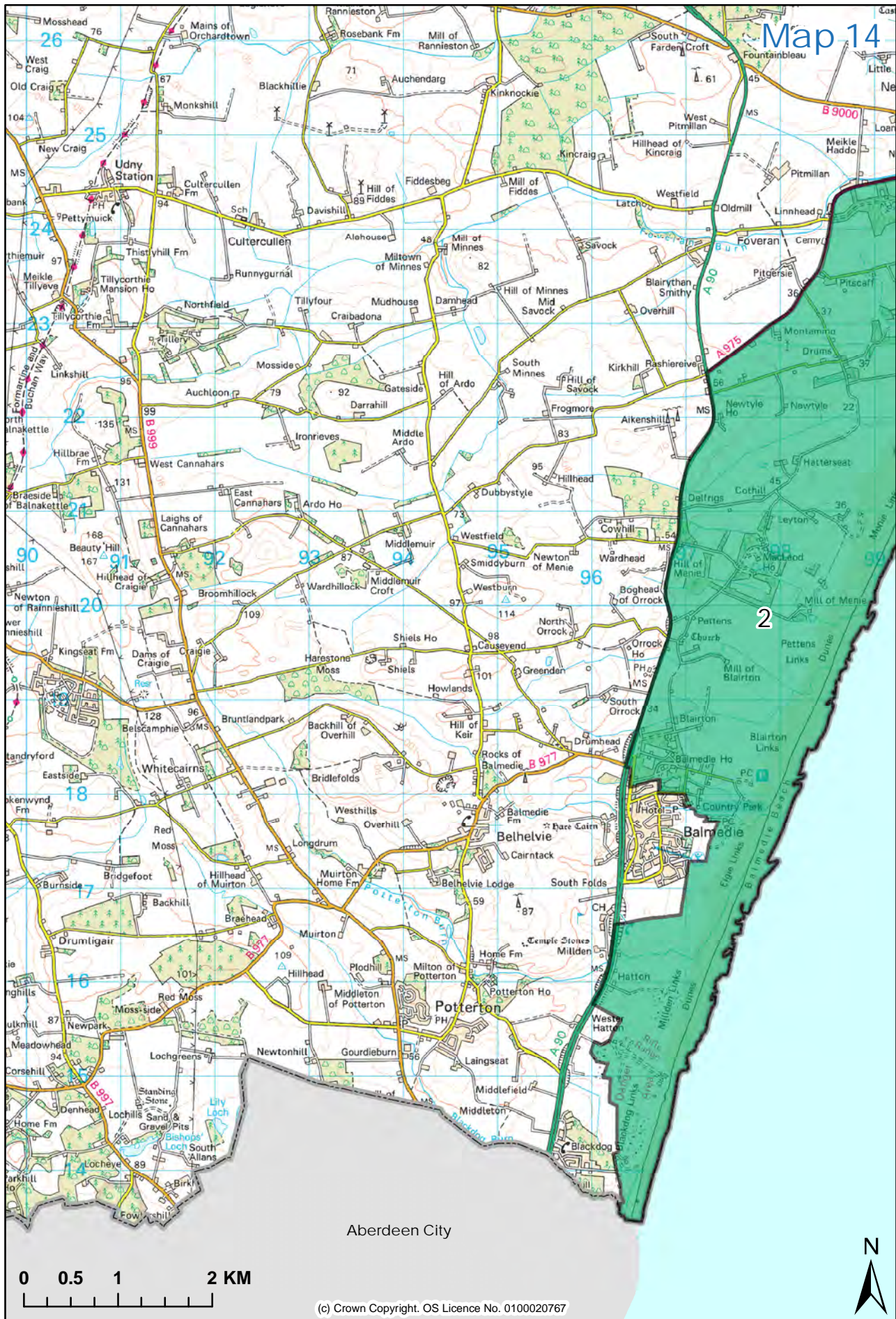


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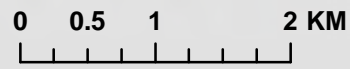




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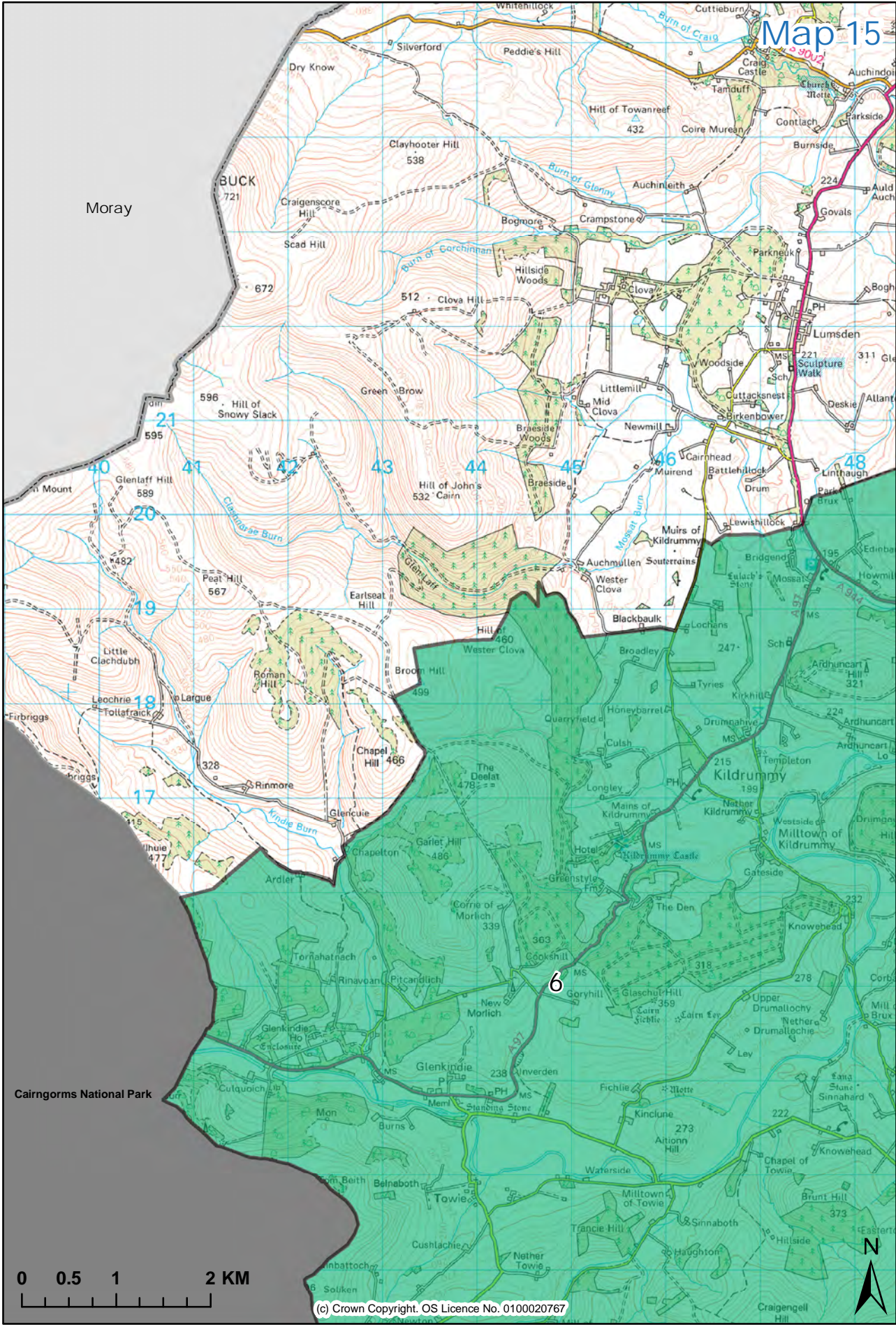
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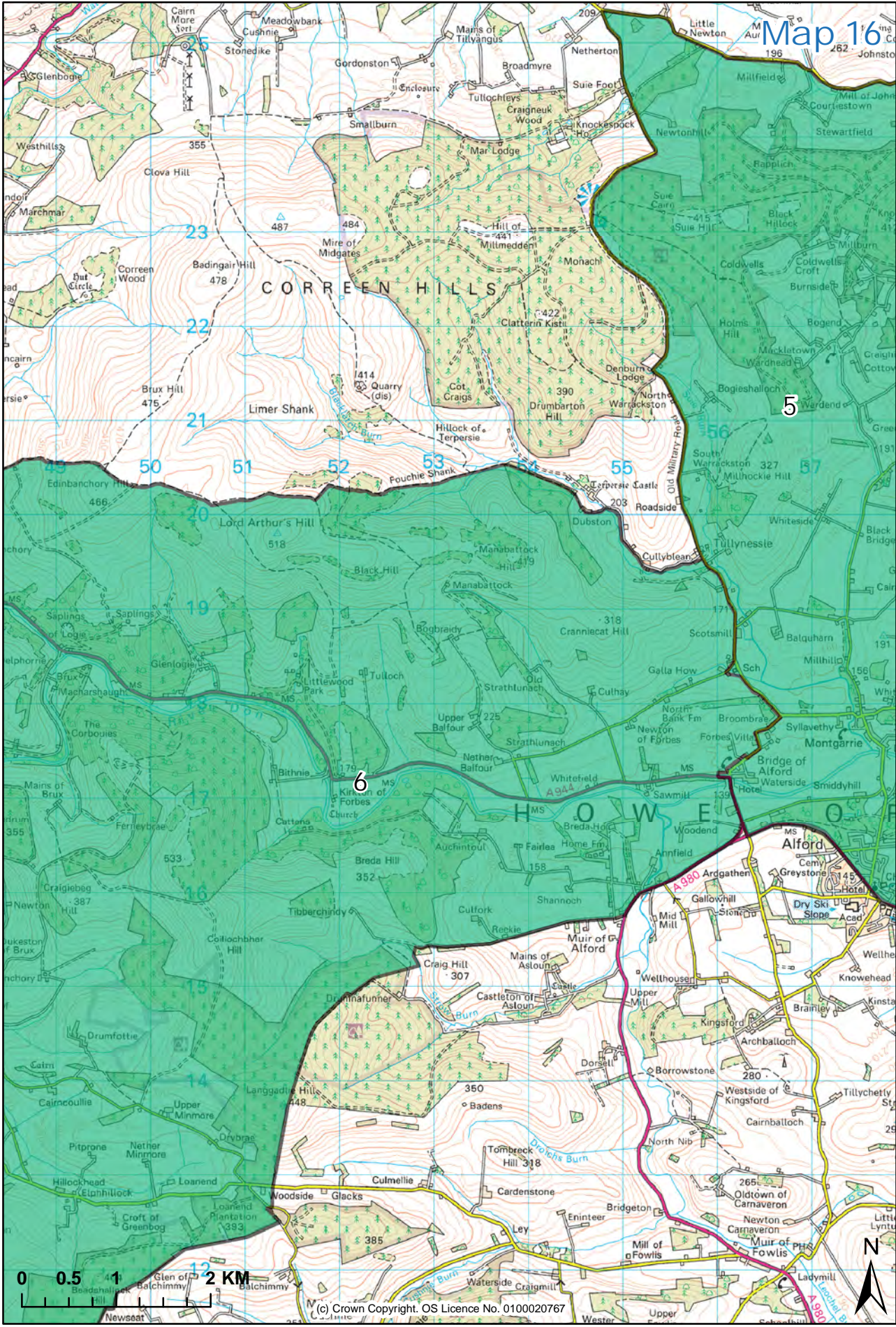
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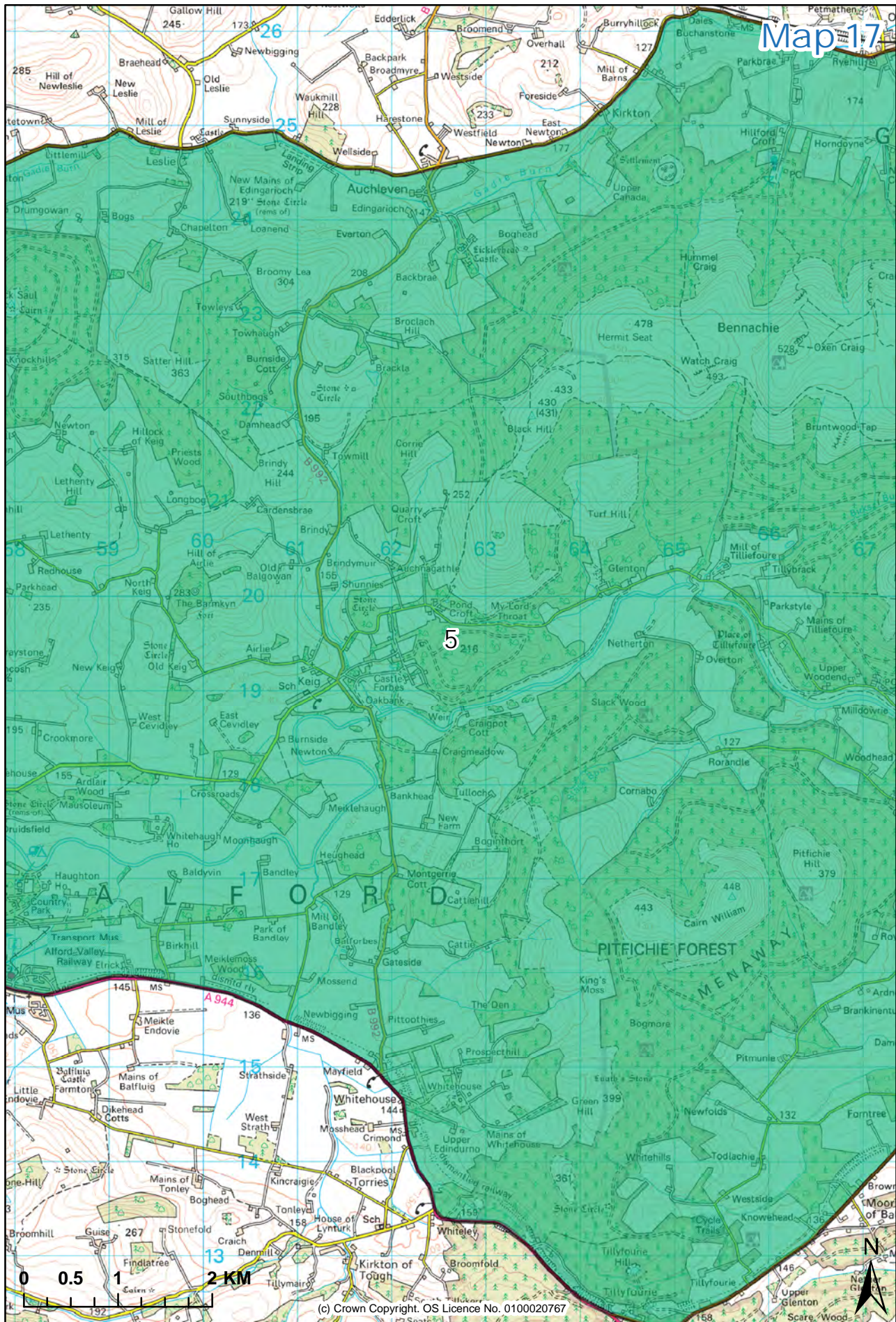


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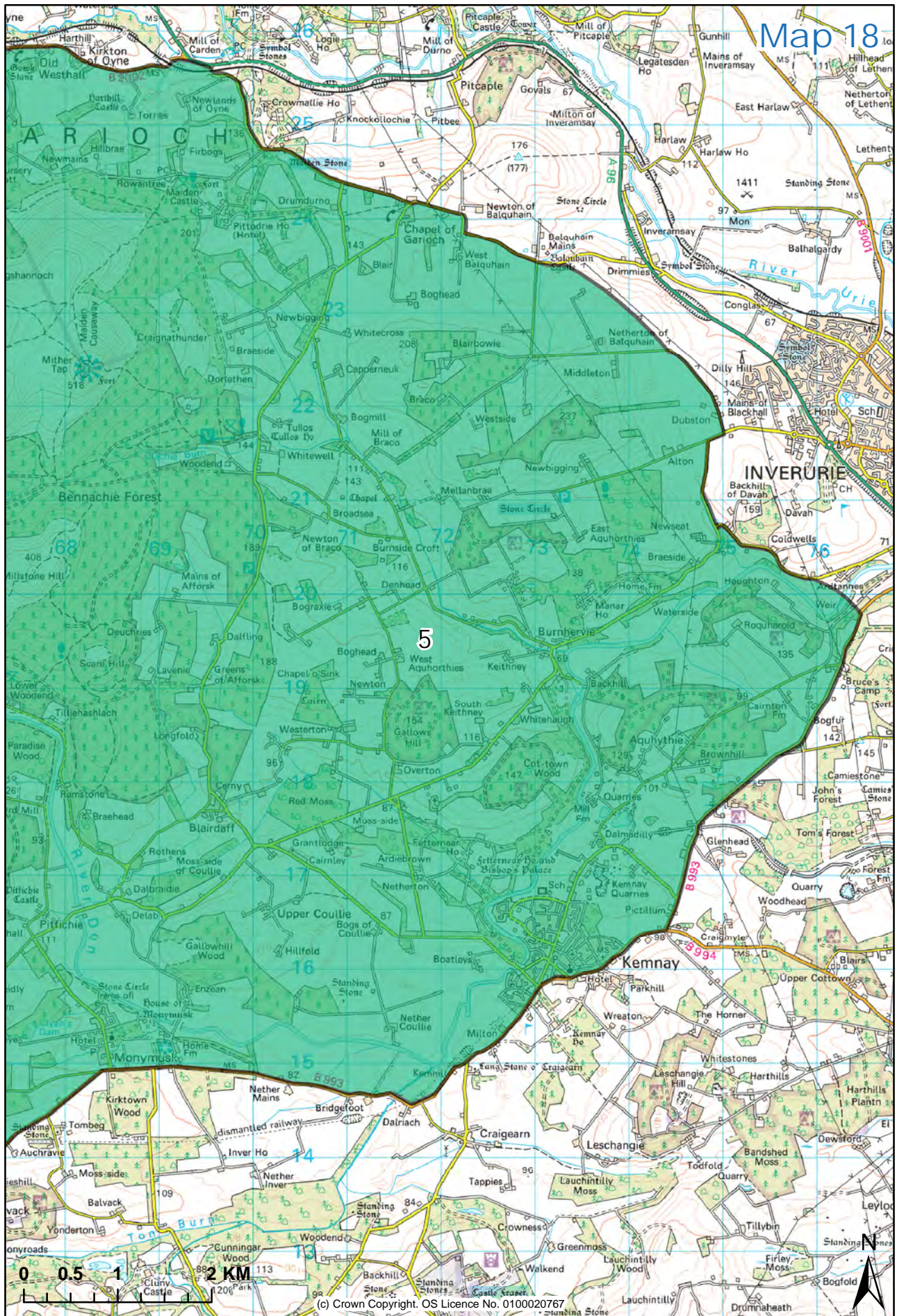


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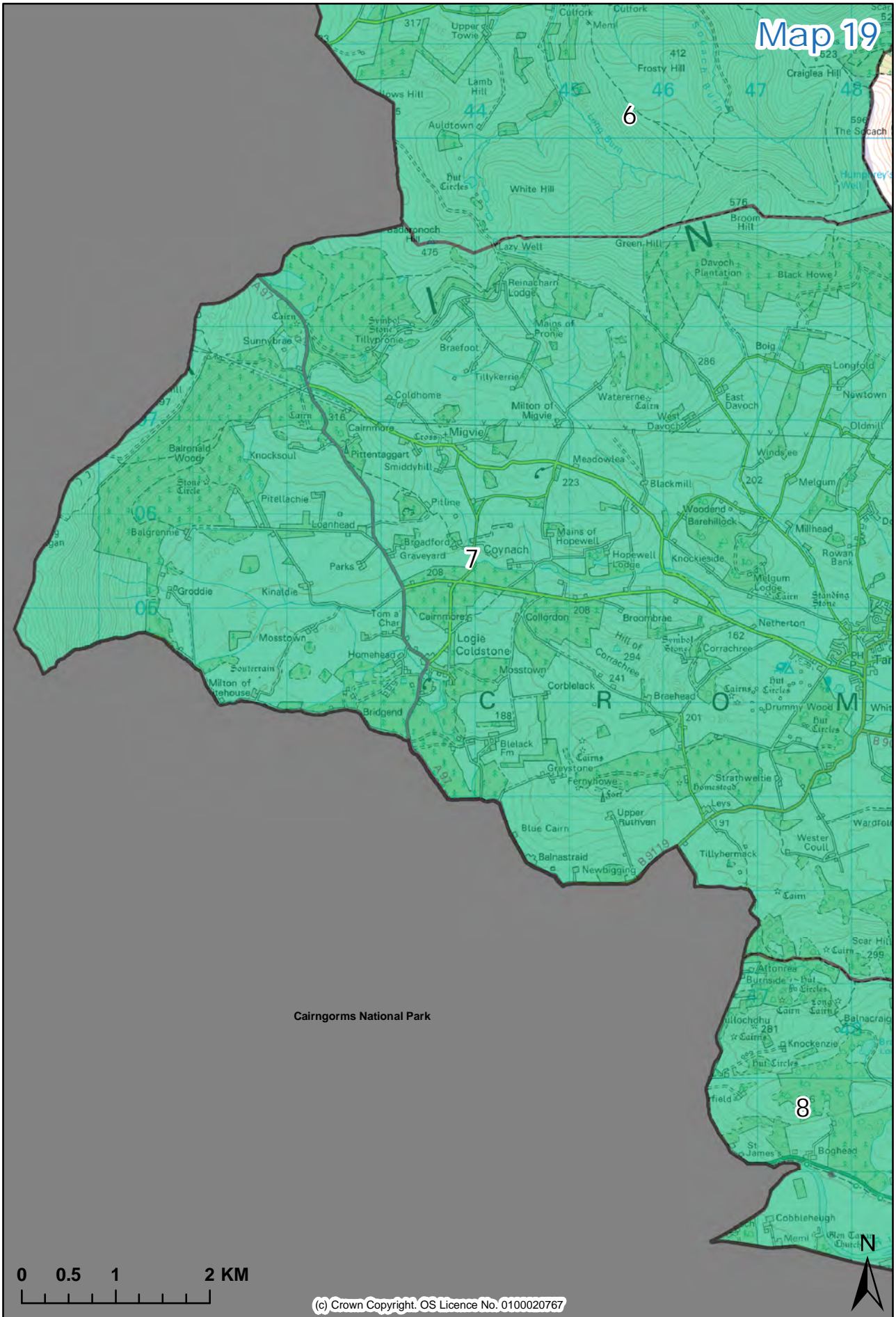




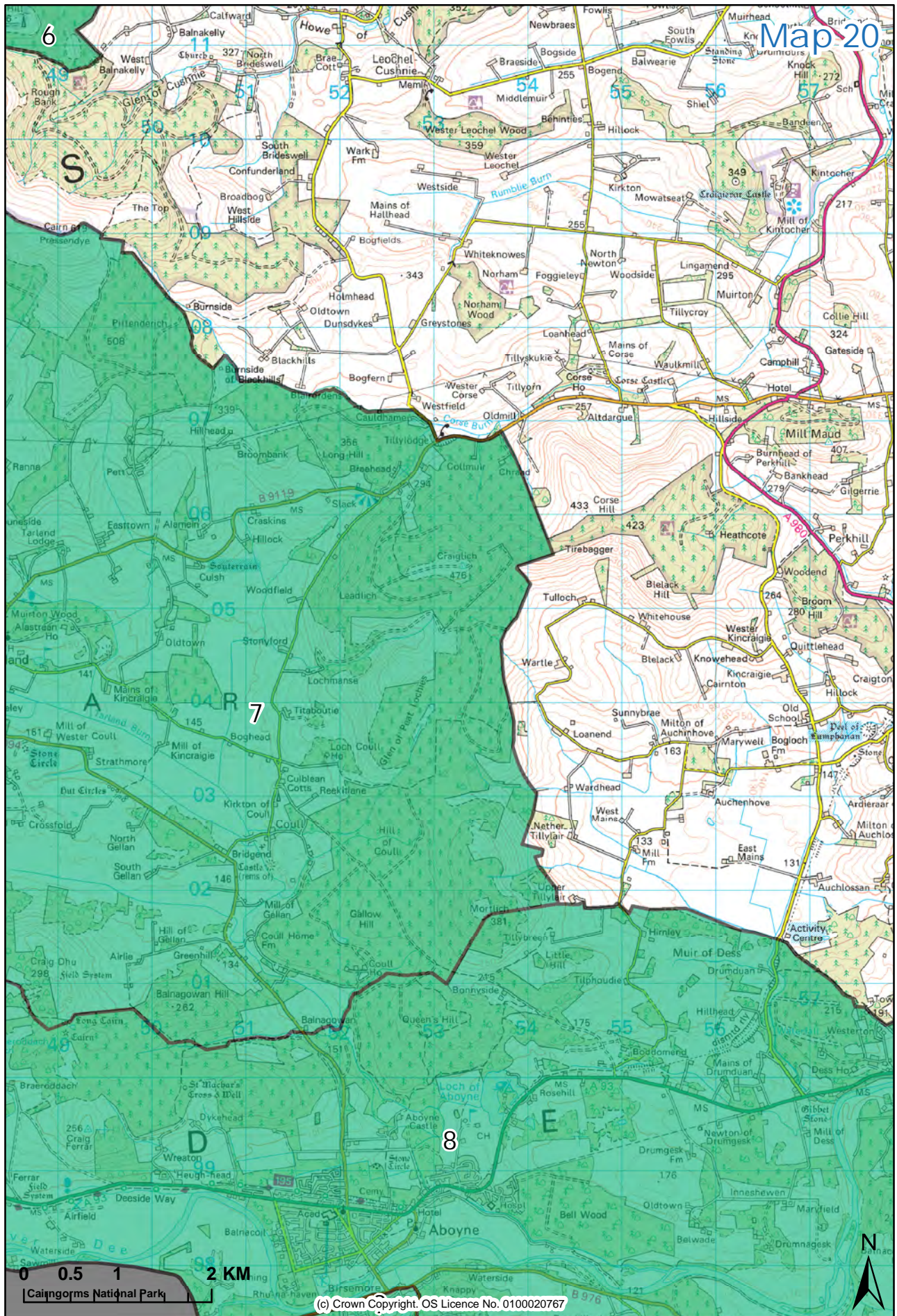
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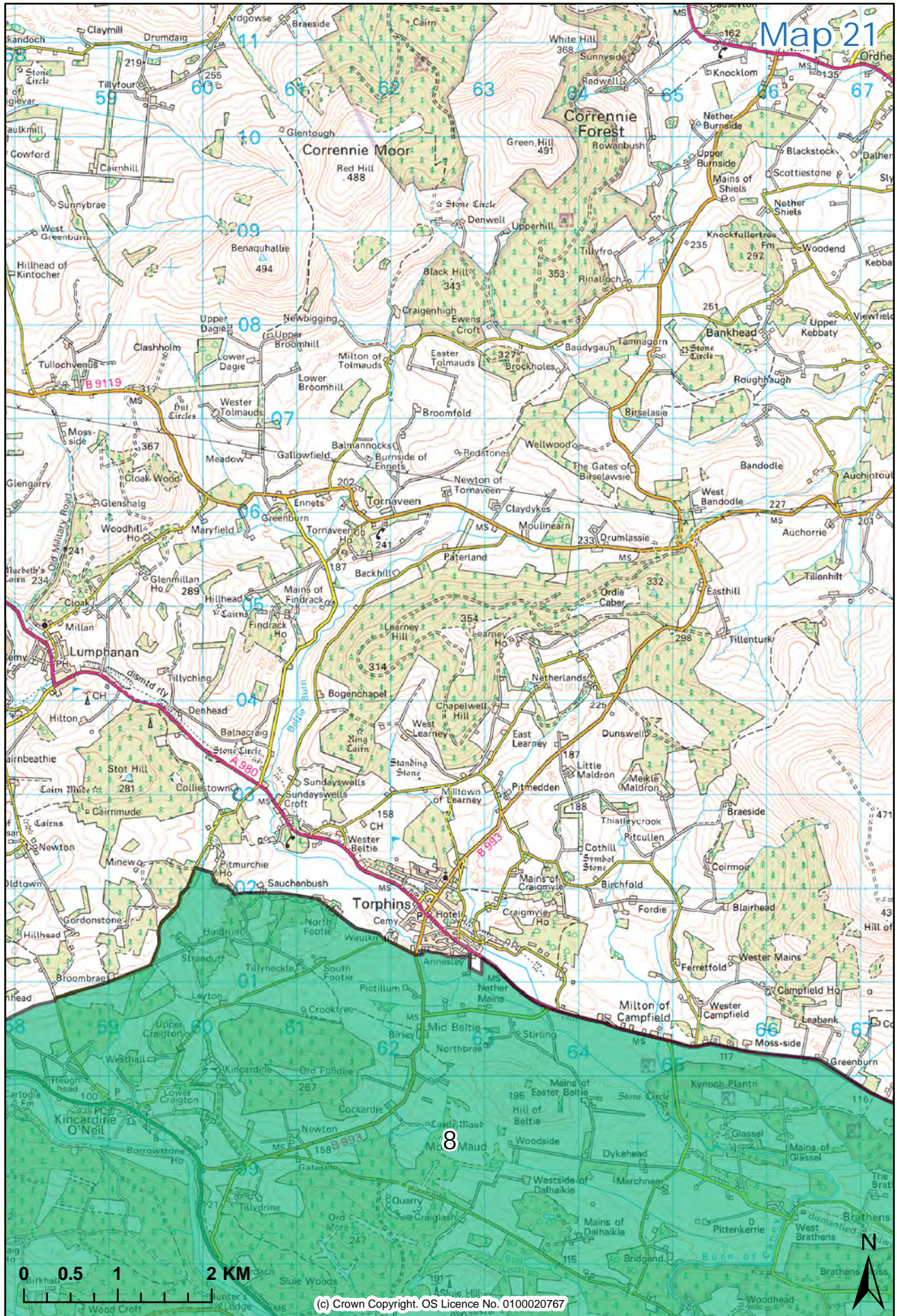
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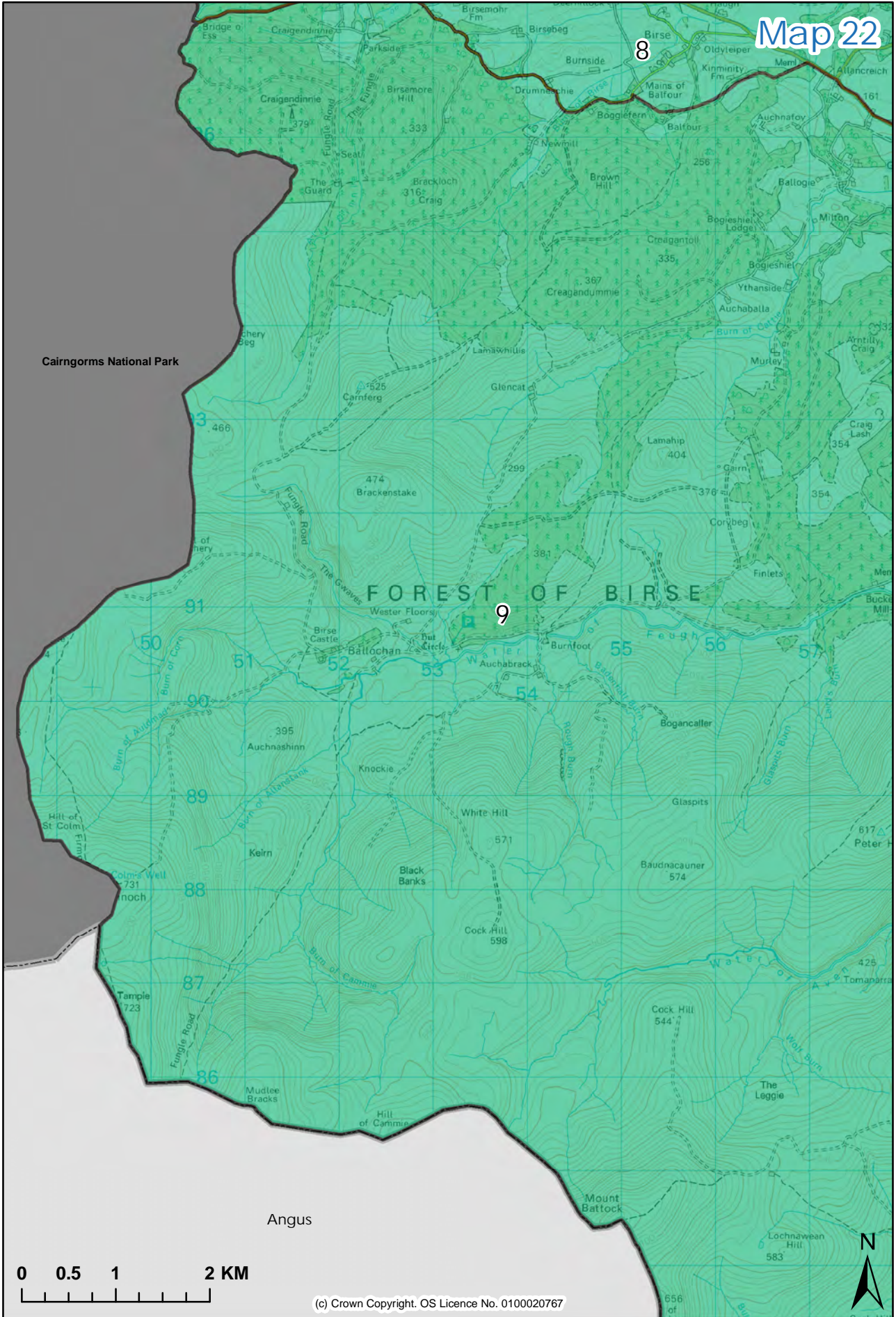
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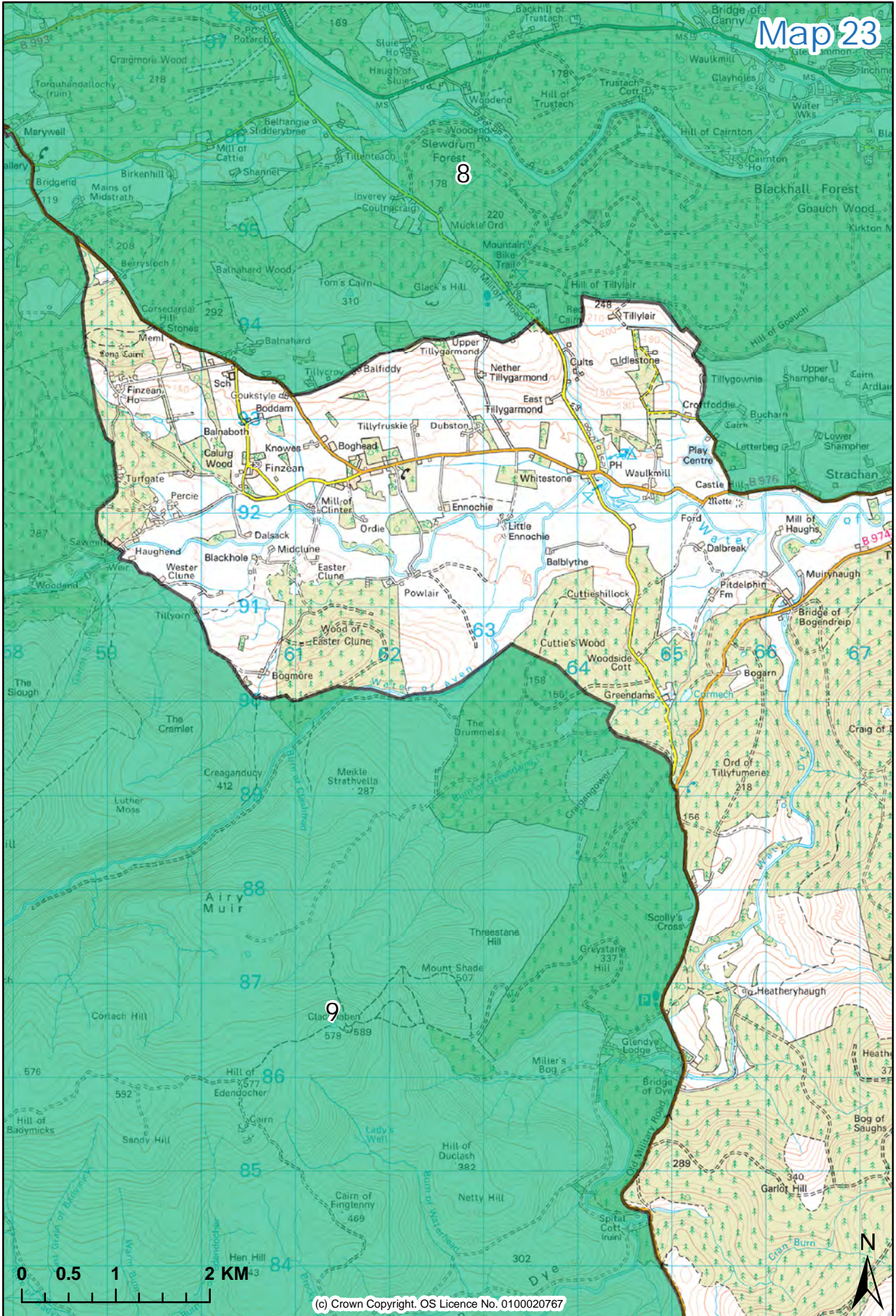




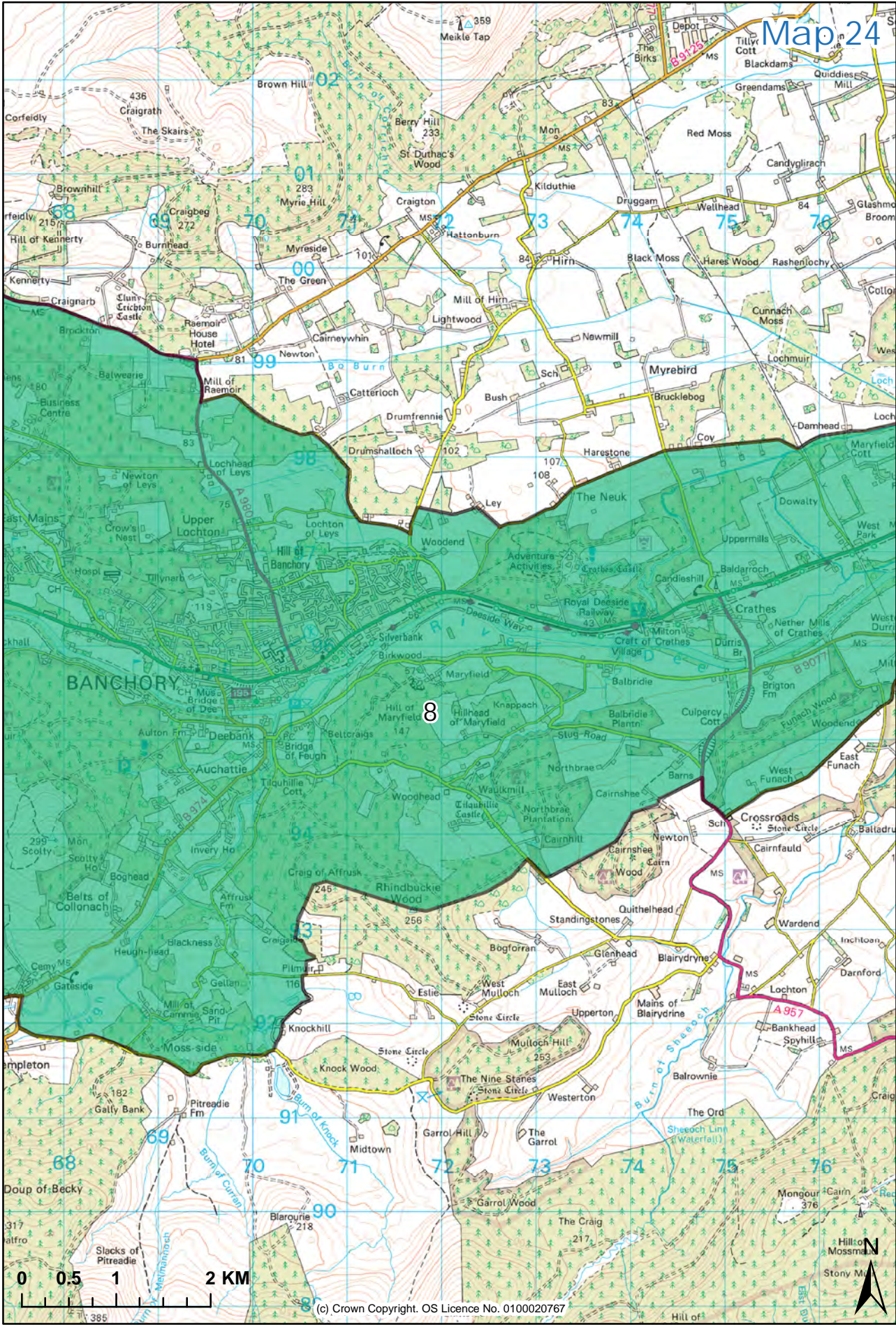
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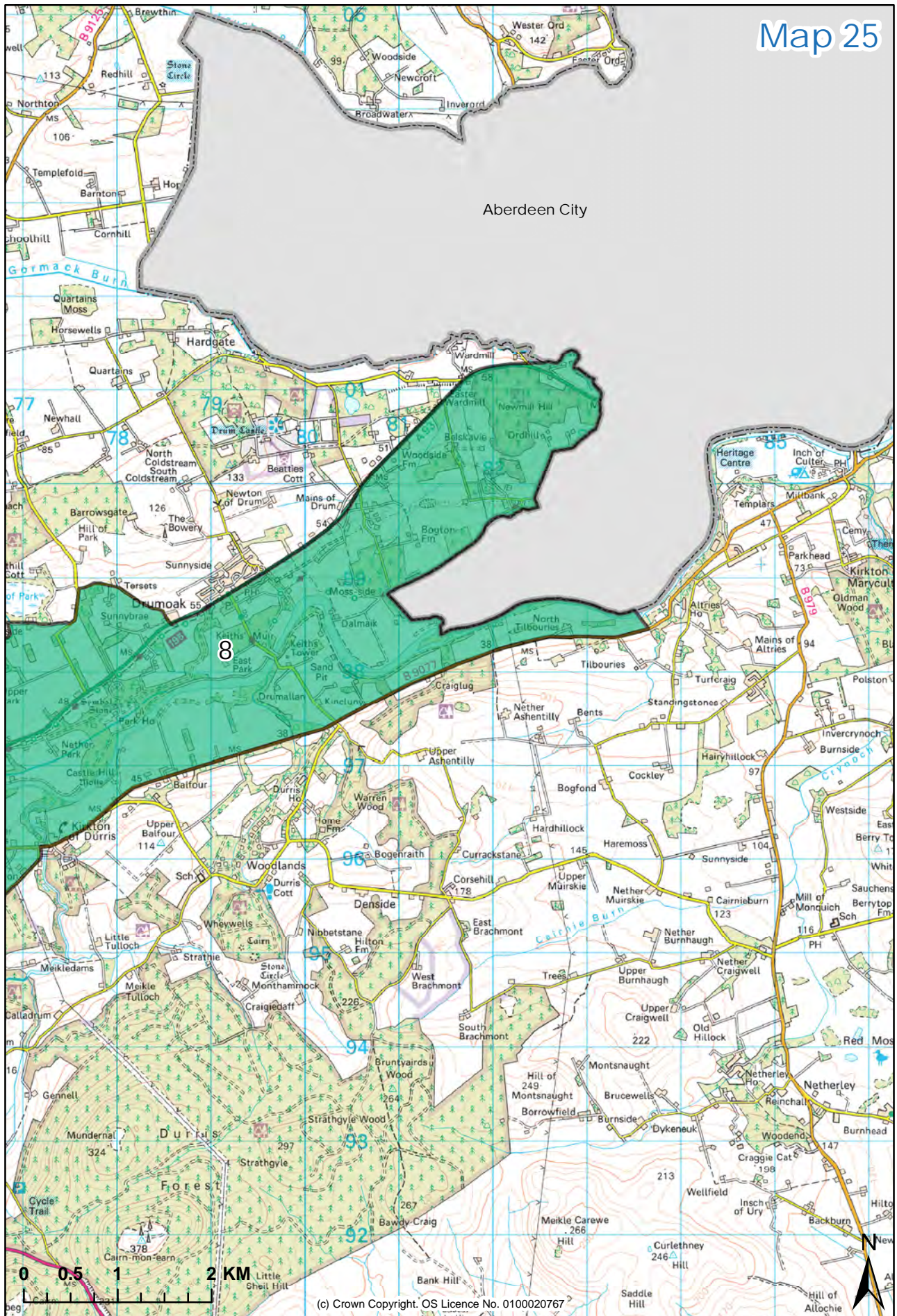
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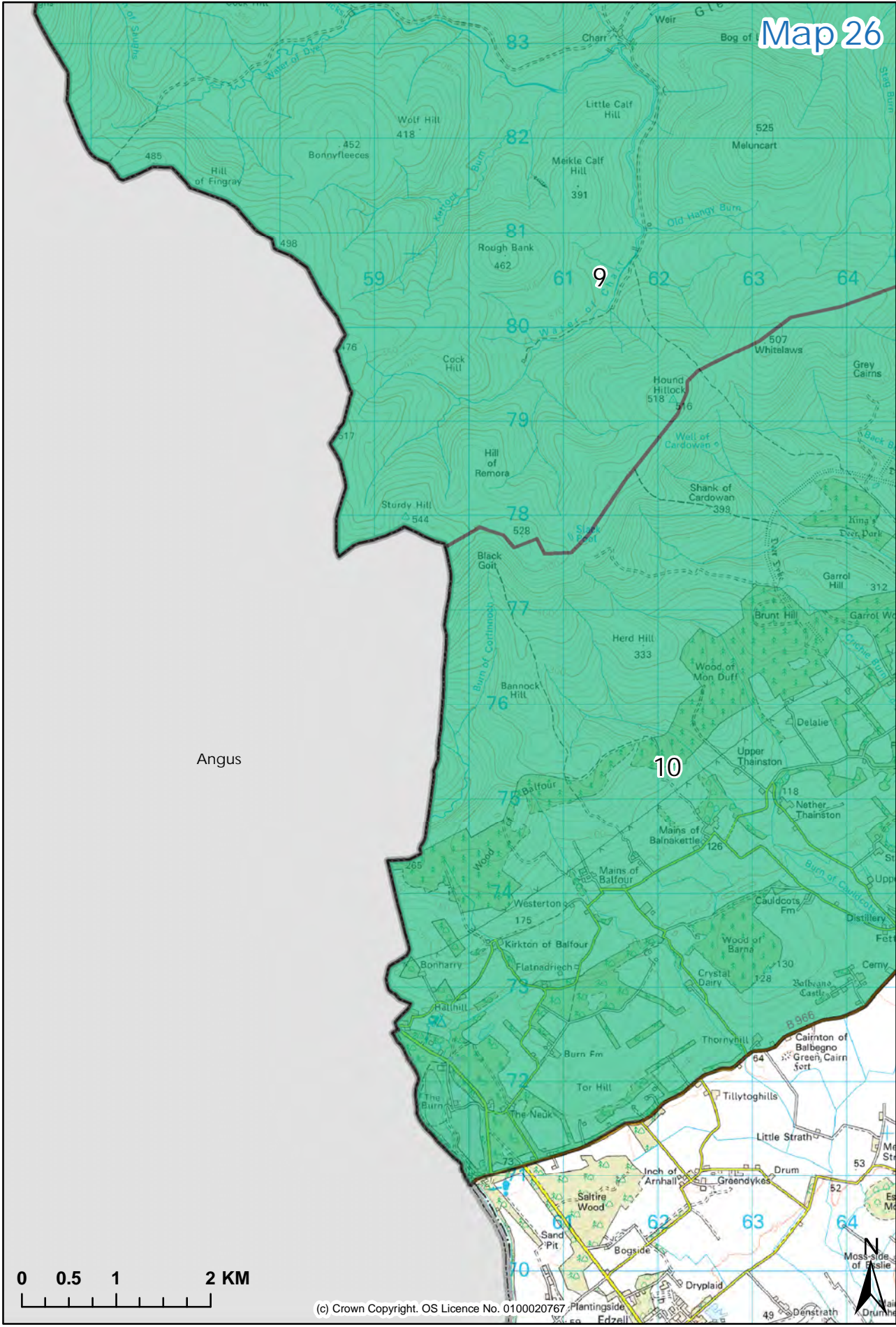
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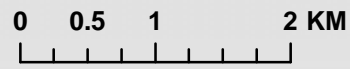


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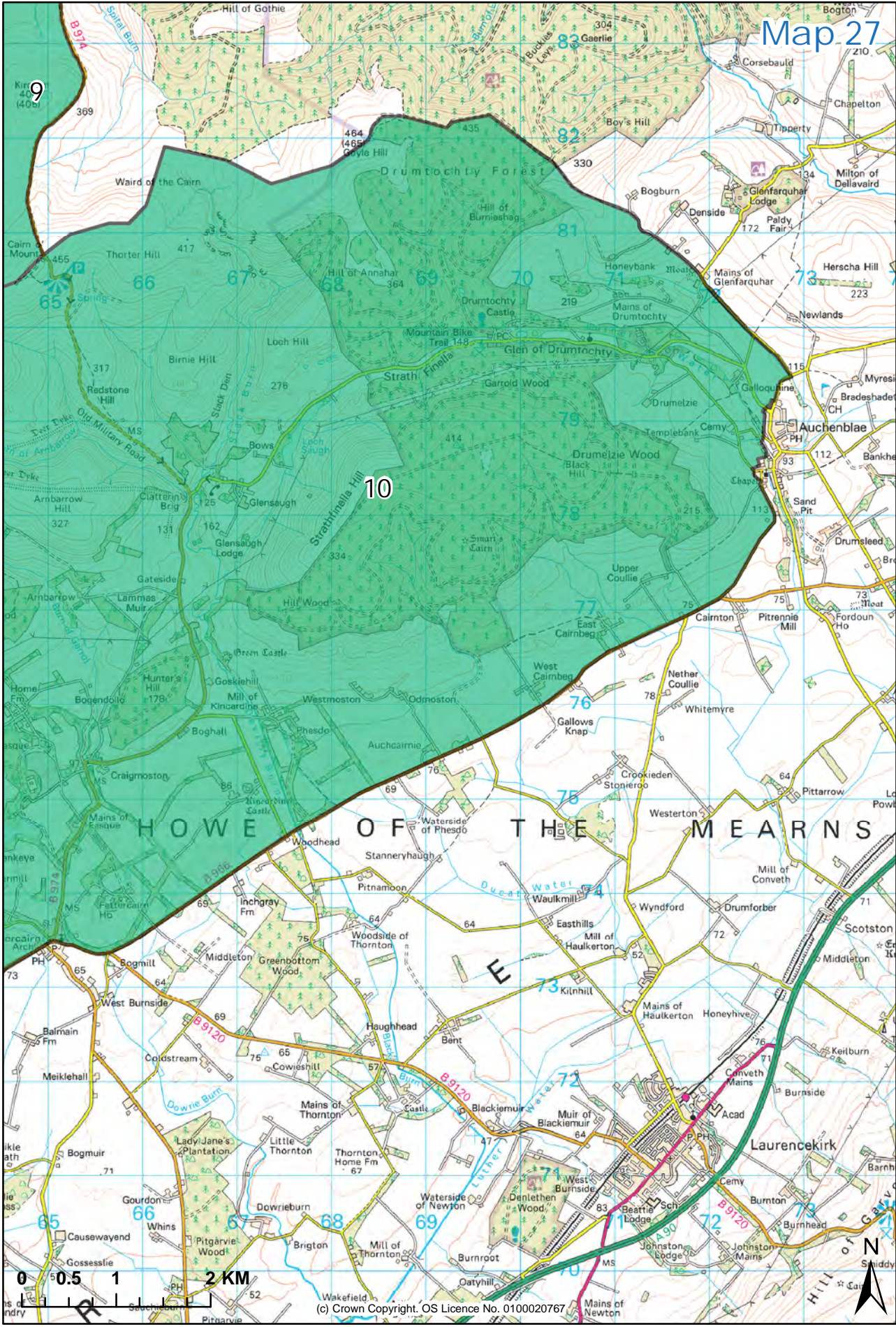


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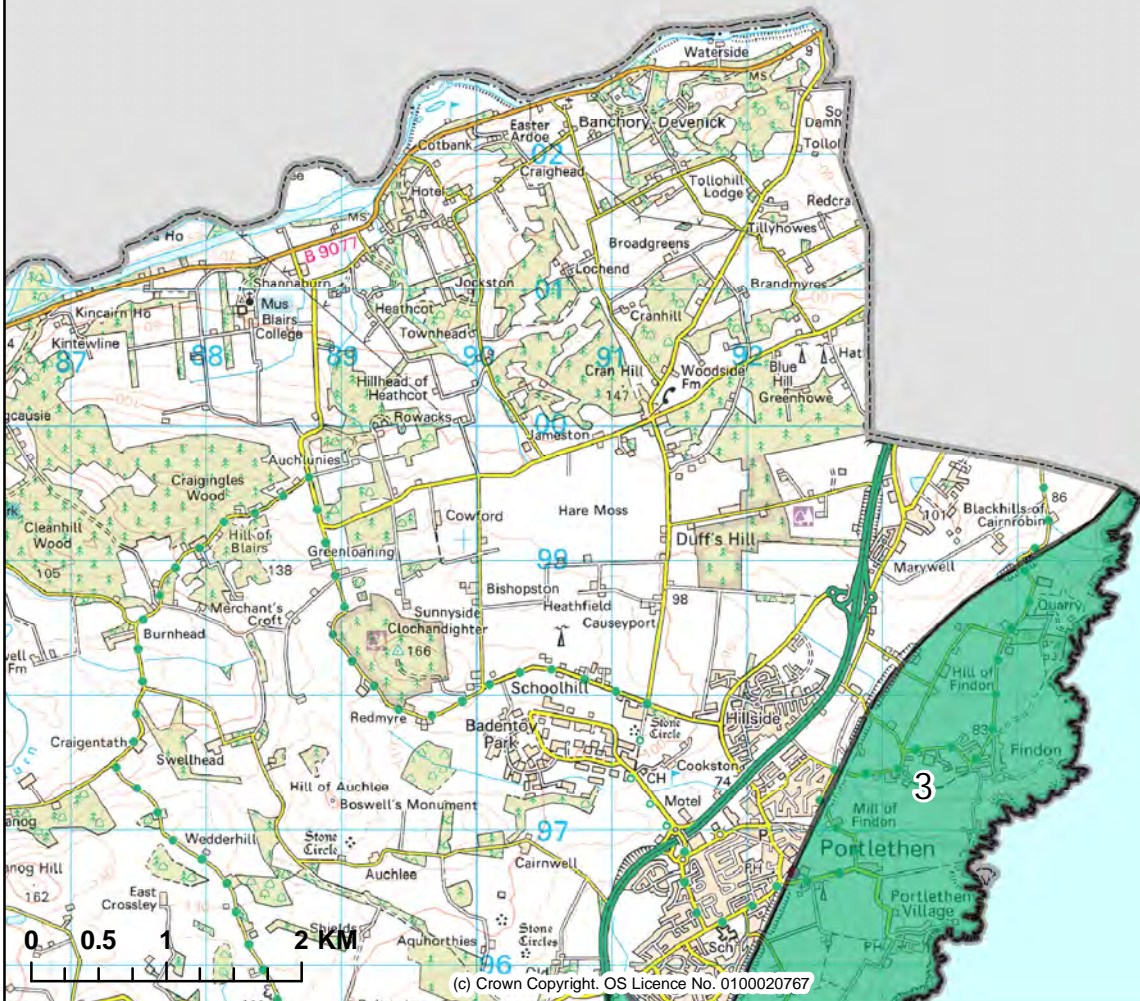


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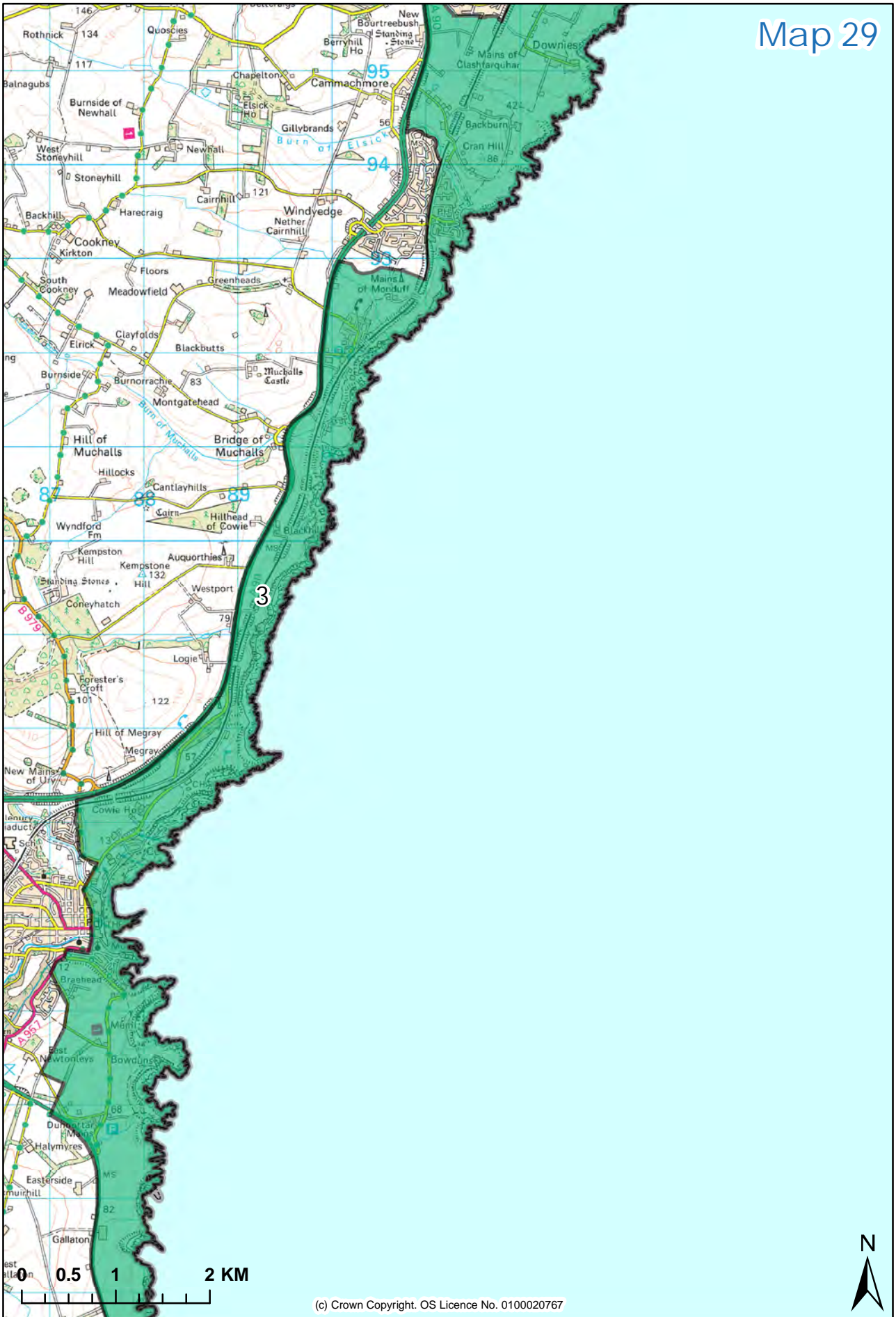
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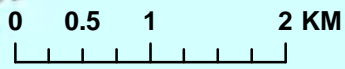
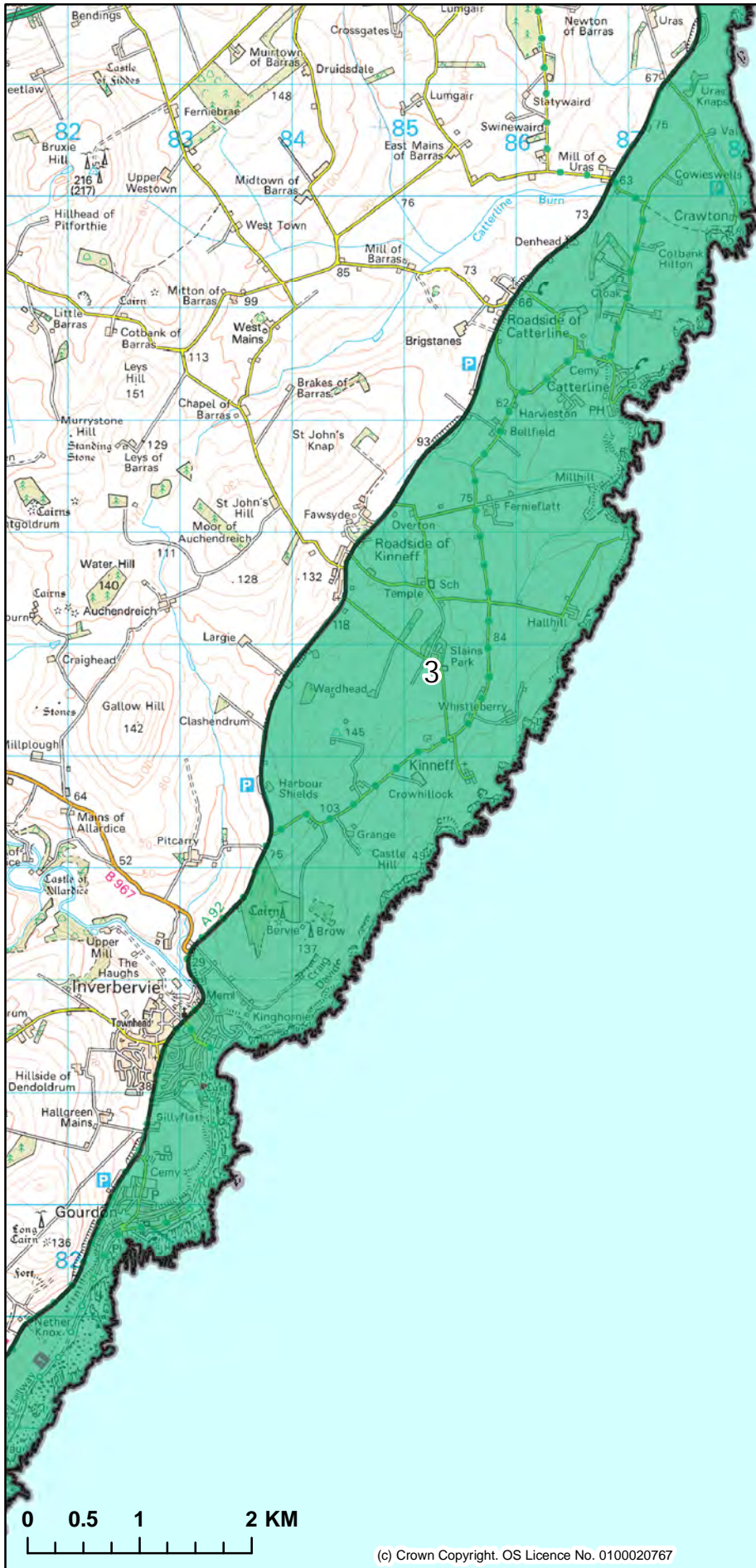
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# Map 29



# Map 30



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