



Neilsland and Earnock Community Woodland

Proposed Local Nature Reserve
Management Statement

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Introduction

Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are valuable places as they combine protection of the natural heritage with opportunities for people to enjoy, learn about and experience nature close to their homes. Local Nature Reserves are:

- Statutory designations made under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.
- Special places which are rich in wildlife.
- Generally, readily accessible and suitable for people to visit and enjoy.

In declaring these sites, South Lanarkshire Council (SLC) aims to:

- Protect them from unsuitable developments.
- Manage and enhance the habitats to help biodiversity flourish.
- Improve public access.
- Help people understand and become more aware of the importance of the LNR.
- Encourage community participation and volunteering.

SLC have identified sixteen new sites (and an extension to the existing LNR at Langlands Moss) to become designated as LNRs. These encompass a broad spectrum of habitats including ancient broadleaved woodland, open water, wetlands and grasslands. The site management statements are written in conjunction with the South Lanarkshire Biodiversity Strategy (2018-2022), SLC Sustainable Development and Climate Change Strategy (2017-22), SLC Local Development Plan (2013) and SLC Core Path Plan (2012).

Vision statement

Across South Lanarkshire, Local Nature Reserves are a resource for local communities that balance excellent recreational and educational opportunities with valuable habitats for wildlife that are rich in biodiversity.

General information

Location and site boundaries: Neilsland and Earnock Community Woodlands are a complex of riparian/gorge woodland, a former bingo site, and a designed landscape of Victorian parks and gardens located to the south-west of Hamilton, South Lanarkshire. The 44 hectare predominantly woodland site stretches for nearly 3 kilometres along the course of a disused railway track and contains surviving ancient and semi-natural woodlands typical of the Clyde and Avon Valleys. The communities of Woodhead, Fairhill, Earnock, Little Earnock, Meikle Earnock and Eddlewood have easy access to the site from an existing system of footpaths, bridges and walkways.

Site name: Neilsland and Earnock Community Woodlands

Grid reference: NS 7020 5389

Site boundary area: 44 ha

Current ownership and management: The boundaries of the park are based upon the extent of land owned by South Lanarkshire Council.

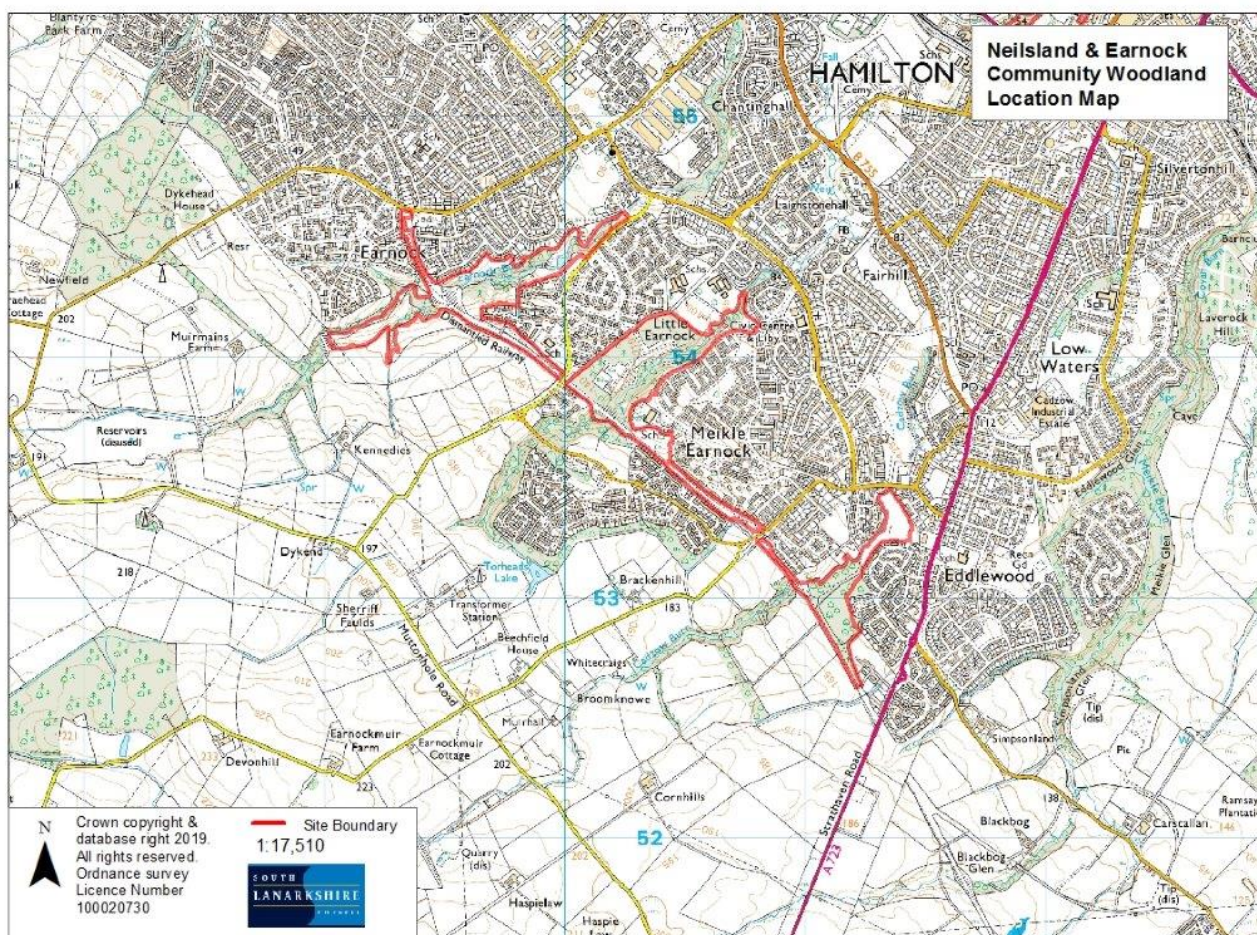
Site description: Neilsland and Earnock Community Woodlands form part of a complex of gorge woodlands that follow small burns through the heart of Hamilton. The ancient and semi-natural woodlands are set against the backdrop of a Victorian designed landscape that used the rugged character of the steep wooded gorges to create today's landscape.

These smaller areas are ecologically similar in character to the larger, designated woodlands of the Clyde Valley and are generally in good ecological condition despite being located in the heart of a busy urban area. The woodland community types present are: upland mixed ashwood; upland oak woodland; mixed plantation woodland and broadleaf plantation woodland.

The woodlands are home to a huge array of plant and animal species, many of which are woodland specialists. Great spotted woodpeckers, spotted flycatchers, woodcock and a range of warblers benefit from a diverse insect fauna, which is supported by diverse habitats, with deadwood, open spaces and running water. Herons and dippers can be seen on the Earnock and Cadzow Burns, and a healthy population of badgers have excavated their setts in the rich woodland soils of the valley sides.

The site is located close to a large urban population, parts of which are in SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) areas, and adjacent to three primary schools and a children's nursery. The high conservation and recreation value of the woodlands and its cultural significance make it a popular place to visit within the local community. All parts of the site have good access infrastructure as a result of WIAT (Woodlands In and Around Towns) funded site works in 2011; the access network here is an important part of SLC's Core Path Network.





Habitats, flora and fauna

Neilsland and Earnock Community Woodlands were surveyed as part of an assessment of the urban woodland resource in Hamilton by Ironside Farrar and Central Environmental Surveys in 2005/6. Using the Forestry Commission Scotland "Native Woodland Condition Survey" methodology, the site was divided into sub-compartments and the main woodland vegetation types were surveyed using the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) system.

Earnock Glen is a linear woodland following the course of the Earnock Burn, with the majority of the woodlands on gorge slopes with rock exposures and crags. The woodlands are ancient and semi-natural and include:

- Upland oak woodland (NVC type W11) comprising sessile oak, sycamore, downy birch, beech and wych elm.
- Upland mixed ashwood (NVC type W9a) comprising ash, beech, birch (downy and silver), oak, wych elm and hazel.

The native ground flora includes ancient woodland indicator species indicative of these woodland types: dog's mercury, greater woodrush, sanicle, wood millet, lady fern and bluebell. Notable fauna recorded within this part of the site include otters on the Earnock Burn and badgers as previously mentioned. A Phase 1 Habitat Survey was carried out at Earnock Glen in 2000.

Neilsland is a woodland following the course of the Cadzow Burn (north), comprising a mixture of semi-natural and plantation type woodlands. Upland mixed ashwood (NVC W9a) comprises ash, beech, birch (downy and silver), oak, wych elm and hazel. The ground flora includes ancient woodland indicator species indicative of this woodland type: dog's mercury, water avens, opposite-leaved golden saxifrage, lady fern and broad-leaved helleborine. Notable fauna recorded within this site include roe deer and badger. As part of the WIAT project in 2011 control measures were introduced at both Earnock and Neilsland to remove rhododendron and laurel which were frequent in parts of the woodland. It is a priority to control regrowth of these invasive species to protect the integrity and semi-natural character of the woodlands.

Cadzow Bing is a linear woodland following the course of the Cadzow Burn (south), bordered by a disused bing site. The majority of the woodlands are on gorge slopes with rock exposures. The woodlands are semi-natural with planted trees and characterised as upland mixed ashwood (NVC type: developing W9a) comprising ash, beech, birch (downy and silver), oak, wych elm and hazel. The native ground flora includes ancient woodland indicator species indicative of these woodland types: wood rush, wood millet, water avens, hart's tongue fern and woodruff. Single tree selection and removal of non-native species such as beech would be appropriate to encourage native regeneration; group felling would not be appropriate as there is a need to maintain canopy cover.

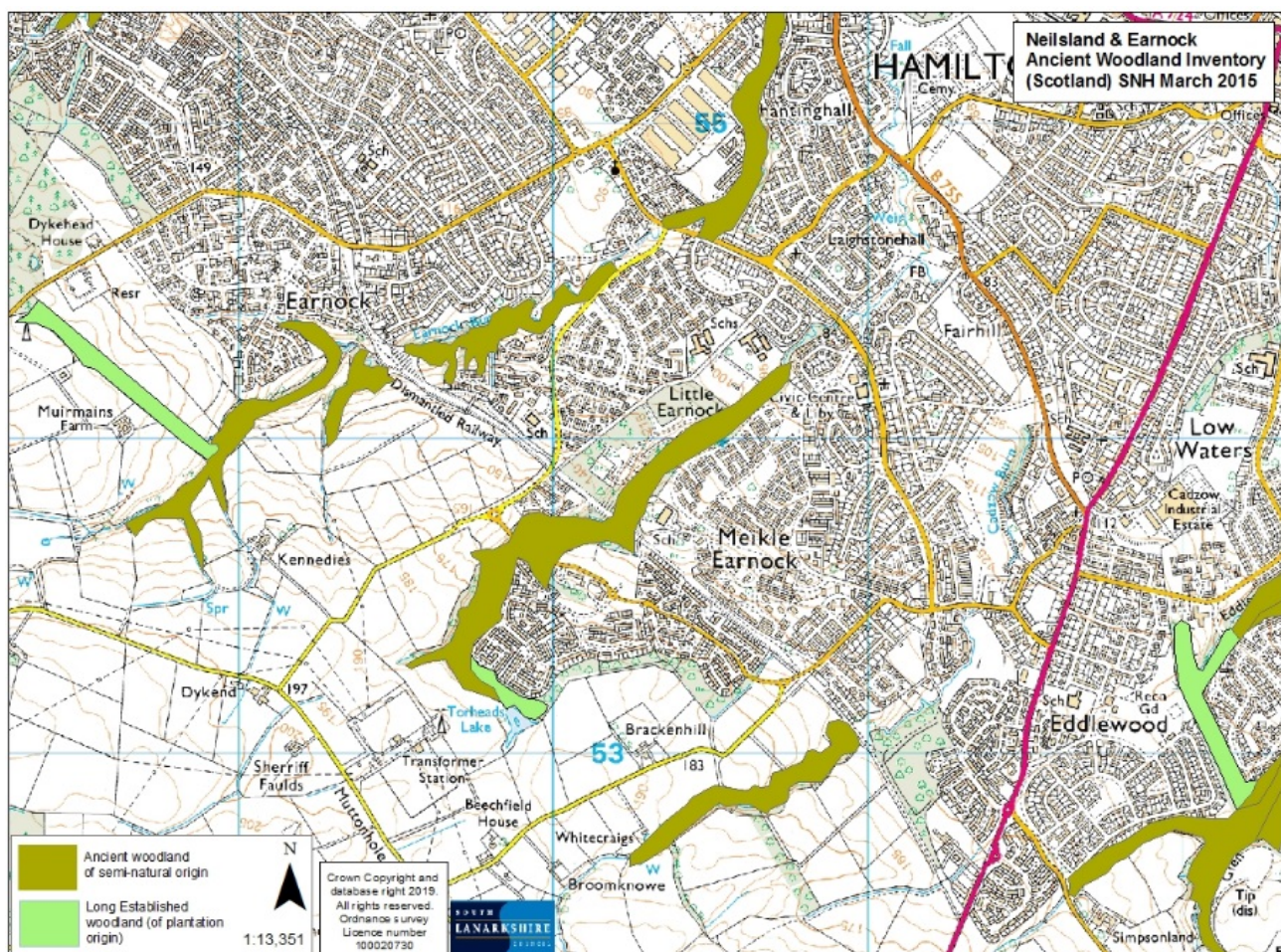
Habitat	Area (ha)	%
Semi-natural woodland	20	45.45
Broadleaved plantation woodland	16	36.37
Semi-improved neutral grassland/scrub	5	11.37
Amenity grassland	3	6.81
Total	44	100%

Landscape

Neilsland and Earnock Community Woodlands serve a number of communities including Earnock, Little Earnock, Meikle Earnock, Fairhill, Lighthall and Hillhouse. There are no statutory designations on the site although the woodlands are included in the “Scottish Ancient Woodland Inventory” (SNH, 1997) as can be seen on the map below.

All major footpaths form part of SLC’s Core Path Network. The path network follows an important green corridor linking the Earnock, Neilsland and Cadzow Bing sites to each other and to the surrounding countryside via the identified access network. There is a longer term aim to link the current Core Path route HM/2400/1 to the path network at the western edge of Chatelherault Country Park HM/5636/1 at Meikle Glen and to the National Cycle Route 74 (see Appendix for core path map).

Residential housing developments to the west of the pLNR and core path network on former mixed arable and pasture land will place additional pressure on the green corridor, but this will also offer opportunities for access and recreation to valuable greenspace for the new communities. The increasing pressure of encroaching development towards the woodland sites will offer both challenges and opportunities to maintaining their integrity while offering improved access. Adjoining land with shared access is managed by the Scottish Greenbelt Company. Other areas of amenity grassland within and bordering the site are managed by SLC Grounds Services.



Cultural information

Past land use

Various historical maps including the Roy Military Survey of Scotland (1747-1755), show the old estates of Neilsland and Earnock as wooded streams with cultivated grounds and gardens. Both estates included mansion houses which have long since been demolished. Associated with these buildings were extensive gardens, wider designed landscapes and "Pleasure Grounds". The carriageways that once transected the grounds now form the main pathways through the woodland. The route of the old Hamilton to Strathaven railway line forms the main core path (the "Black Path") that links the various sites.

Parts of the gardens were designed and inspired by a prominent romantic landscape designer Edward La Trobe Bateman in the 1800s. Bateman used natural landscape features such as streams and steep sided gorges to "tame" the wild surroundings whilst retaining a very naturalistic and romantic feel to the grounds. His work included damming the Cadzow Burn to create a woodland lake, creating a natural rockery and waterfall and constructing pathways and bridges that meant the Earnock and Cadzow Burns could be crossed and re-crossed at various points.

The other prominent monument in the woodlands is the site of a Covenanter's grave which has been marked with a well-tended memorial plaque and cairn. Three Scots pine trees mark the traditional spot of the grave and are an integral part of the overall memorial.

The ornamental gateposts and walls that once marked the entrance to the estates now serve the same function as they did in the past as access points to the woodland. Some of these are ornately carved and are a point of interest for people visiting the woodlands today.

South Lanarkshire Museums and New Roots community group have researched the history of the estates, discovering records showing the acreage of woodlands that were planted or enlarged during the late 1800s. The publication of a "Historical Background Report" by members of the local community forum helped to inform the previous site management plan in relation to the designed landscape and policy woodland.

Present Land use



Neilsland and Earnock Community Woodlands are regarded as being a very important resource for informal recreation by local residents. The results of a community consultation carried out by local volunteers in 2010, and the formal report published by Community Links in 2011, confirm that these wooded areas are very important to the local community and are regarded as a valuable local resource that should be managed accordingly.

Presently there are two community groups that are working to improve the area: New Roots Community Group and Earnock Resident's Association. Both groups have been working together for a number of years, raising the profile of Neilsland and Earnock Woodlands, organising community clean-up and work days, and other events including health walks. Local schools and nurseries continue to use the site for Forest Education Initiatives. Dog walking, walking, jogging and horse riding are popular activities along the path network which links residential areas, schools and local amenities.

Site infrastructure

During the 1970s a lot of work was done to open up and interpret various sites in South Lanarkshire, but like many greenspaces they have suffered from a lack of investment in subsequent years. At Neilsland and Earnock Glens, a successful bid was made through the Forestry Commission Scotland WIAT programme for a £110k project to regenerate the woodlands and improve site infrastructure; work was completed in 2012.

As part of this work, access points and entrance signs were installed and 2km of footpath within the woodland complex resurfaced. The restoration of the footpath network allows local residents to realise the full potential of the woodlands as places to relax and enjoy informal recreational opportunities. The installation of access control points has excluded motorised vehicles but the use of trail bikes and quads on the site is still an occasional problem; hopefully additional access control measures will make this less of a problem in the future.



Two pedestrian bridges within the woodland gorges were replaced as part of the WIAT programme giving easy access from residential areas into the larger part of the woodland. A future aim is to develop a signage plan that will help visitors access the site and orientate themselves within the woodland.

In September 2014, an additional £10,000 grant by The Mushroom Trust was awarded to the New Roots Community Group for improvements to historically important gateposts and masonry walls within the former Neilsland Estate.

Recreation and access

There are six formal entrances to the pLNR with an additional 13 informal access points from residential housing areas. The site is well served by public transport links from Strathaven Road, Sherry Drive, Neilsland Drive and Wellhall Road. There is a main Core Path centred on HM/2344/1 that connects all parts of the site.

The provision of high quality access points has seen an increase in visitor numbers and generated a positive reaction from residents. The health benefits are also apparent with Health Walks taking place weekly within the woodlands from the nearby Fairhill Lifestyles Community Centre as part of the “Get Walking Lanarkshire” programme.

Local volunteer Path Surveyors monitor the path network as part of SLC Countryside Ranger Service’s “Adopt a Path” scheme. Regular work parties from the New Roots community group, as well as the “Cadzow Crew” conservation volunteers from LAMH (Lanarkshire Association for Mental Health), make sure that the funding investment in the access infrastructure of the site will leave a legacy for future generations. Since 2011, LAMH have contributed 91 volunteer days over 19 work sessions to path maintenance, and there have been an additional 273 volunteer days from the local community. This represents a combined economic value of over £38,000.



Local community

In 2011 a group of local residents got together with the intention of restoring the pathways and footbridges so that children could get safe access to the nature trails from the three primary schools and nursery on the edge of the woodlands. The group was formally constituted in 2011 as “New Roots” Neilsland and Earnock Heritage Group, and with the support of South Lanarkshire Council were awarded £110k from the Forestry Commission’s Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) grant scheme to improve the woodlands and path network.



The grant allowed for infrastructure improvements which means residents and schools can now use the path network safely. From New Roots’ small beginnings of a handful of local parents and other residents, membership via their Facebook Group has grown to over 500. The community organise regular work days, litter picks and activities attracting volunteers from the local community who are helping where they can to improve access and the visitor experience. The community is excited by the prospect of a LNR designation for the site and will continue to support this effort.

Conclusion

It is the intention of the SLC Countryside and Greenspace (CAG) team to continue to work in partnership with New Roots and the wider community to ensure that the ecological and recreational quality of the site is maintained and managed. We aim to foster an understanding and facilitate enjoyment of the natural heritage of the park and to increase public use through access, interpretation, education and promotion of the site.

The management statement will meet these objectives by seeking to deliver a number of practical health, environmental education and community outcomes in partnership with external organisations and the local community.

Contacts

For more information on this site, or LNRs in South Lanarkshire, please contact:
Countryside and Greenspace Service, Facilities, Waste and Ground Services, Community and Enterprise, South Lanarkshire Council, 18 Forrest Street, Blantyre G72 0JP.
Email: CAG@southlanarkshire.gov.uk

If you need this information in another language or format, please contact us to discuss how we can best meet your needs.

Phone: 0303 123 1015

Email: equalities@southlanarkshire.gov.uk

www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk

Photographs taken by C. McGinley (SLC CAG) and New Roots.

Note that maps may not be to scale.

Appendix 1: Objectives and actions

Objective 1: Maintain, enhance and monitor the biodiversity value of the woodland.

Actions:

- To maintain and enhance, where possible, the natural species composition of the upland mixed ash and oak woodlands by removing non-native regeneration.
- To maintain and conserve notable fauna, particularly invertebrates and badgers by ensuring dead and decaying wood remains within the site to benefit invertebrates.
- Contribute to national and local biological recording monitoring schemes.
- Assess the open amenity grassland and bog areas for species diversity; intervene with management as necessary.
- Carry out fixed point photography and habitat surveys to demonstrate improving ground flora from post clearance rhododendron and laurel sites.
- Monitoring to identify any regeneration of invasive, non-native plants and implementation of further eradication measures as appropriate.
- Maintain historical landscape features such as specimen trees.

Objective 2: Maintain and increase the use of the access network.

Actions:

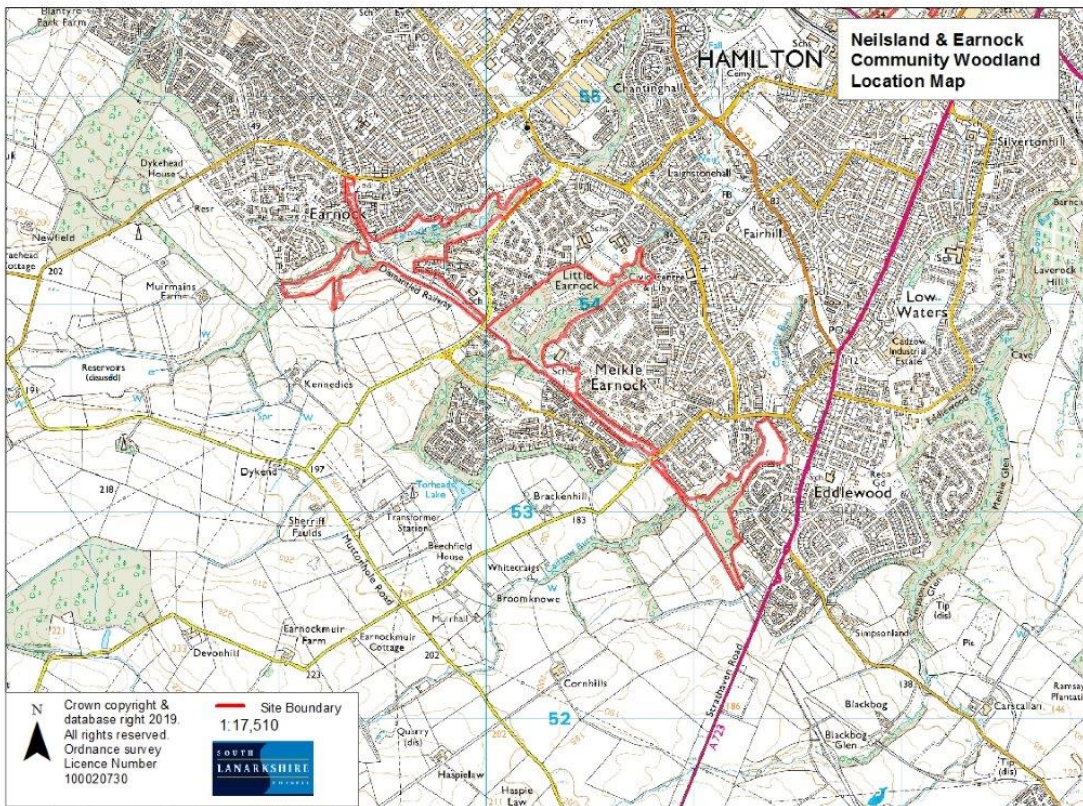
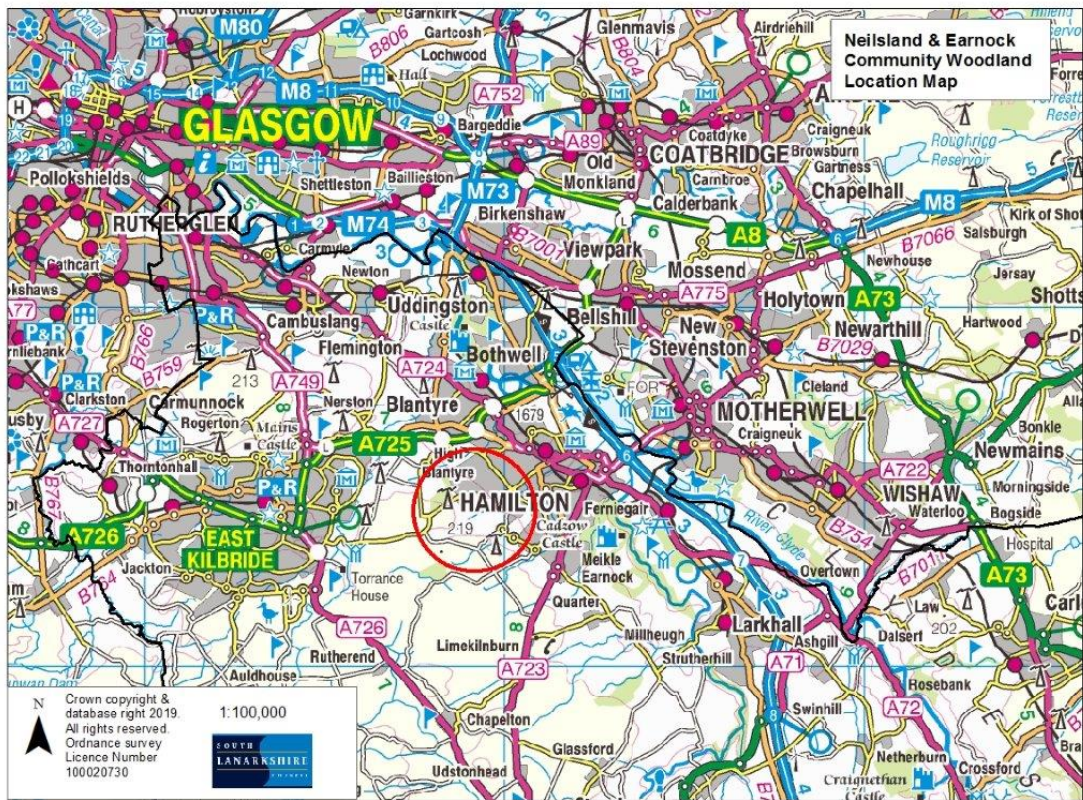
- Maintain the existing access network.
- Investigate the opportunity to use signage and interpretation to highlight access points and routes and features of interest.
- Investigate a new access route to link with Chatelherault Country Park.

Objective 3: Encourage and facilitate community involvement in the reserve.

Actions:

- Develop community involvement within the site.
- Investigate and develop opportunities for conservation volunteering.
- Work with local people and other stakeholders towards meeting the objectives of the management plan.
- Identify and promote opportunities for people to enjoy the wildlife of the area.
- Investigate possibilities of promoting the community woodland in new and different ways.
- Encourage and promote the use of the community woodland for the local community, schools, colleges and other interest groups.

Appendix 2: Maps



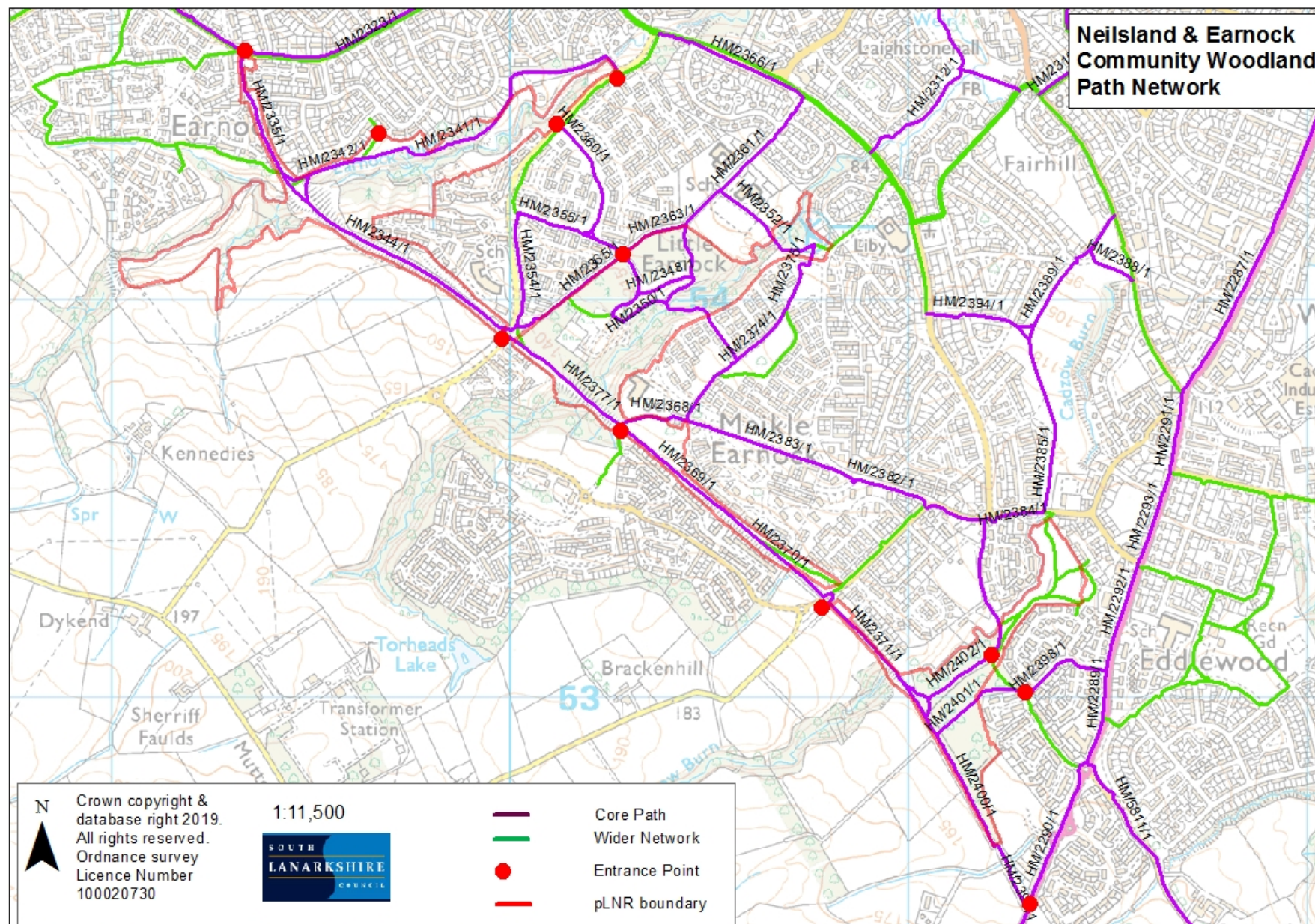
**Neilsland & Earnock
Community Woodland
Aerial Map**

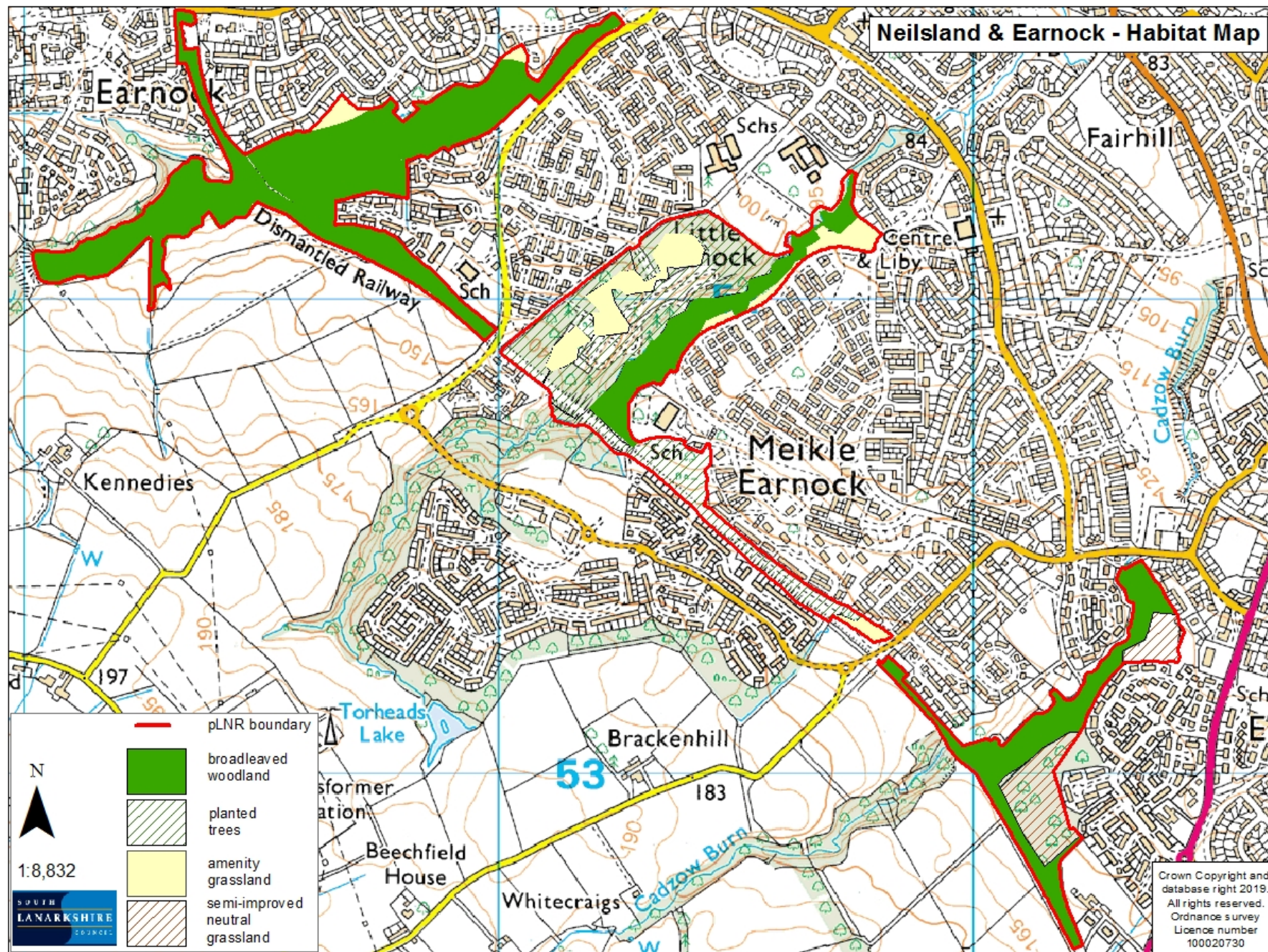



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