



Hamilton Low Parks

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. LNRs 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: This composite LNR is to the north and east of Hamilton, in South Lanarkshire. The site is bounded by rivers Clyde and Avon, the M74/A725/A723 roads, Strathclyde Golf Course, Hamilton Race Course and Carlisle Road.

Site name: Hamilton Low Parks (which comprises Low Parks, Mausoleum Wetland, Raith Haugh, Clyde Strip, North Haugh and South Haugh).

Grid ref: NS 718 572

Site area: 138ha (of which 107.6ha is a Site of Special Scientific Interest [SSSI])

Site boundaries: the boundaries of the sites are based upon the extent of land owned by South Lanarkshire Council.

Site description: Hamilton Low Parks forms part of the mid-Clyde haughs which together form a virtually continuous wetland complex along the River Clyde from Carbarns to Bothwell Bridge, sandwiched between the major urban areas of Hamilton and Motherwell. The mid-Clyde haughs comprise a series of water bodies and associated wetlands formed primarily by mining subsidence. Hamilton Low Parks has become fragmented by major trunk roads, M74 and the construction of Strathclyde Loch. This fragmentation has created a series of discrete sites.

Low Parks (53.89 ha) is bound by the M74, River Clyde, Hamilton race course and Strathclyde Park golf course. It is an area of very wet grassland, fen and swamp with open pools in close association. There is woodland at Barmichael Estate and Low Parks wood to the south side of Island pond. The site is subject to regular flooding from the adjacent River Clyde.

Mausoleum Wetland (6.18 ha) lies to the east of Low Parks and is bound by the M74, Hamilton Service Station, the Mausoleum and Hamilton Sports Grounds. The site has two ponds (one of which dries out) surrounded by very wet grassland, with two wooded areas to the north and south west. The site is bound by a strip of trees. A motte can be found within the woods at the north of the site.

Raith Haugh (19.53 ha) occupies an area to the north west of Low Parks, on the opposite (north) bank of the Clyde, between the M74, A725 and the River Clyde. It is comprised of an area of open water, surrounded by wetland, wet woodland and parkland.

The **Clyde Strip** (14.68 ha) and **North Haugh** (16.44 ha) make up a ribbon of land which lies between the M74 and the diverted channel of the River Clyde. The Clyde Strip has been partly planted up with Scots pine, poplar and lime, with self-seeded willow scrub. North Haugh has a strip of planted mixed woodland adjacent to the M74, with willow scrub along the banks of the Clyde.

South Haugh (27.28 ha) lies at the southern most end of Hamilton Low Parks, bound along its eastern side by the River Avon (the confluence with the Clyde occurs approx. 500 metres downstream). The northern and western sides are bounded by the A723 and housing, respectively. The haugh is made up of 3 ponds with mixed deciduous woodland around the periphery and rough grassland. An area to the south east of the site is regularly mown (3.36 ha).

Site boundary map - Hamilton Low Parks

The map shows the Clyde River flowing through Hamilton, Scotland. The 'Low Parks' area is outlined in red and includes Strathclyde Country Park, Strathclyde Loch, and the Clyde Strip. Other labeled areas include Raith Haugh, North Haugh, and South Haugh. The map also shows the Bothwellhaugh Plantation, Roman Bath House, and various schools and parks. A scale bar indicates 1:14,100, and a north arrow is present.

1:14,100

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Habitats, flora and fauna

Hamilton Low Parks is comprised of sections of the Clyde floodplain with open water bodies, grassland, wet and mixed woodland throughout.

Low Parks, Raith Haugh, Clyde Strip and North Haugh were designated a SSSI in 1956. The qualifying interest is one of the largest tree nesting heronries in Scotland, located in Barmichael Plantation on the north side of Low Parks. The SSSI previously included a breeding bird

assemblage, however the construction of the M74 and subsequent cessation of grazing caused a reduction in the number and variety of birds, specifically a decline in wader numbers in favour of waterfowl and passerines.

Habitat	Area (ha)	%
Mixed deciduous woodland	32.9	23.85
Wet woodland	20.14	14.59
Open water	11.6	8.41
Wet grassland/fen and swamp	32.54	23.58
Grassland/scrub	19.75	14.31
Parkland	2.67	1.93
Amenity grassland	3.52	2.55
Riparian	14.67	10.63
Conifer/other	0.21	0.15
Total	138	100



Barmichael Plantation occupies an area of approximately 10 hectares in a 150 metre wide strip overlooking the west bank of the river Clyde, upstream of Bothwell Bridge. The wood is important for its veteran tree component and is comprised of predominantly beech, sycamore, ash, lime and horse chestnut, with a ground flora that includes bluebells, wild garlic and dog's mercury. Yew trees line the sides of the path between the golf course and the sewage works. It is mainly in the yew trees at this site that the herons nest. The nests and hatchings of the heronry have been monitored annually since 1998. Cormorants roost in an area to the north east of the woodland along the banks of the Clyde. Nuthatch, great-spotted woodpecker and tree-creepers can also be found within the woodland.

A number of the open water bodies throughout Hamilton Low Parks were formed in the early 1920s as a result of mining subsidence and subsequent flooding. Other ponds have formed naturally, were formed in 1976 to create water hazards in the Hamilton Golf Course, or as a result of earth moving works during motorway construction. In 2015, two ponds were created in the Mausoleum Wetland, as part of the "Living Waters" project in partnership with Froglife. The vegetation surrounding the open water bodies range from sedges, great reedmace, soft rush, water plantain, tufted hair grass, meadowsweet as well as common osier and birch. The ponds and surrounding wet grassland/fen host a variety of waterfowl, such as goldeneye, tufted duck, wigeon, teal, whooper and mute swans, greylag and Canada geese. Great crested grebe and little grebe as well as coot, moorhen, water rail and snipe can be found. Passerines such as reed bunting, sedge, grasshopper and willow warbler, meadow pipit and bull finch are found on site. Wetland Birds Surveys (WeBS) are carried out every month, contributing to the British Trust for Ornithology national surveys.



The River Avon flows along the eastern edge of South Haugh and merges with the river Clyde close to North Haugh. Many of the waterfowl found within Hamilton Low Parks are also found on these rivers, along with kingfishers and dippers. There is a sand martin colony on a bank of the Avon to the south east of South Haugh. A butterfly transect has been carried out every month between April and September since 2005. Until recently North Haugh was a Constant Effort Ringing Site, undertaken by the Clyde Ringing Group.

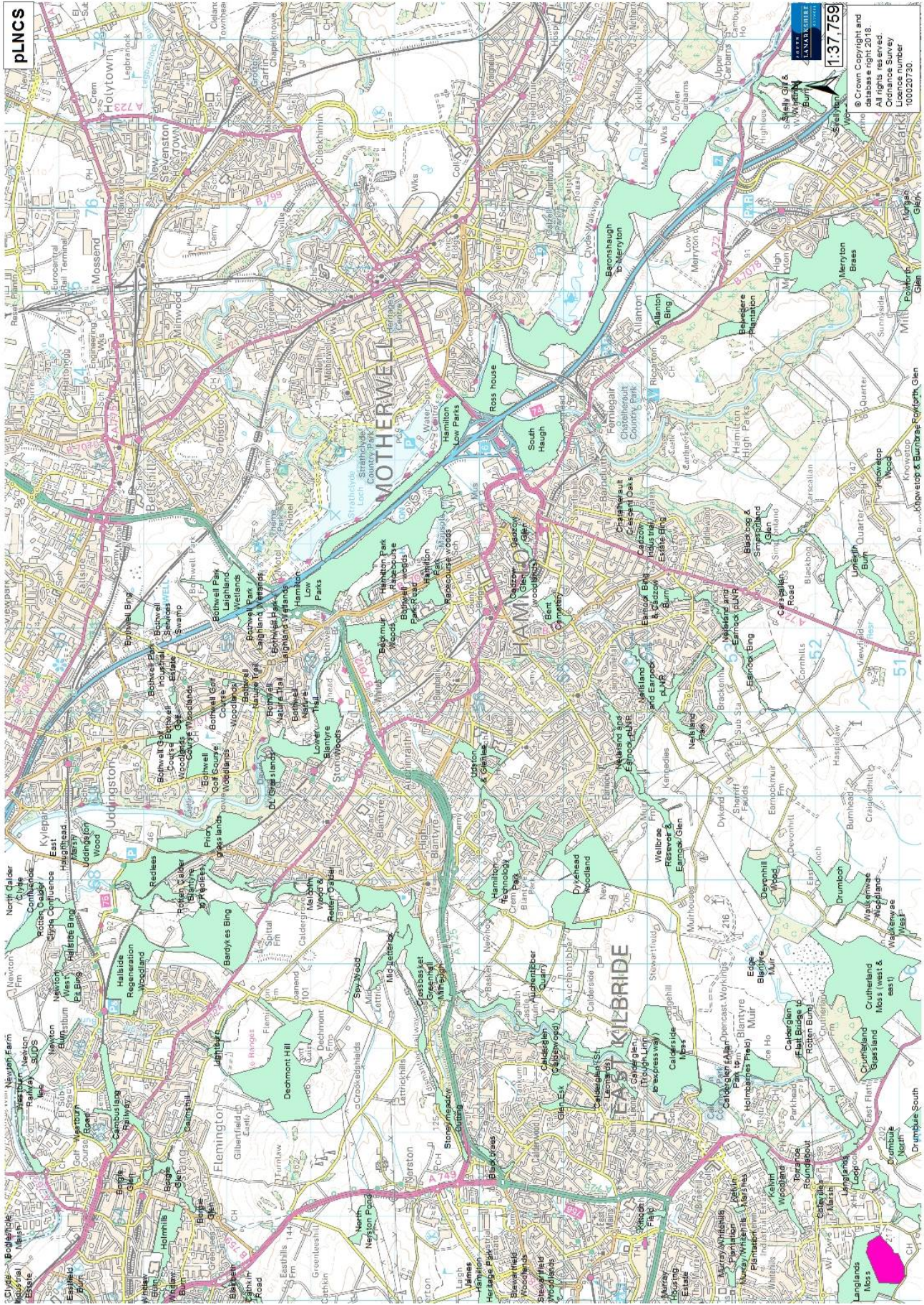
Overall, Hamilton Low Parks is home to species such as badgers, otters, foxes, roe deer, pipistrelle bats, Daubenton's bats, woodcock, tawny owls, sparrow hawks, kestrel and buzzards.

Invasive species are posing a concern throughout the Hamilton Low Parks sites. The river edges at South Haugh have Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam; the latter is controlled by volunteers annually. Some control has taken place at Low Parks to prevent the spread of Himalayan balsam into Barmichael Plantation. The other sites have had no intervention and Himalayan balsam is widespread. In 2018, signal crayfish remains were discovered at the base of some trees at the heronry; their origin is unknown.

Landscape

Hamilton Low Parks lies in the valley of the River Clyde, to the east of Hamilton and west of Motherwell. It was part of the largest formally designed landscape in Scotland until the loss of Hamilton Palace. A large area of the proposed LNR is already designated a SSSI (78%).

The habitat within the pLNR contributes significantly to the ecological network within the area. The wetlands and floodplains at Low Parks complement those nearby from Bothwell to Strathclyde Park, Baron's Haugh and along the River Clyde to Merryton. The woodland network in this area links to nearby pLNRs at Backmuir Woods and Blantyre/Bothwell/Uddingston. A large proportion of these are identified as potential Local Nature Conservation Sites (pLNCS) due to their local habitat importance. Such sites can be seen in the following map:



plncs

1:37,759

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Cultural information

Cultural heritage: past land use

Low Parks was originally part of a large estate owned by the Duke of Hamilton. The Hamilton Palace was built in the 1695 (where the Hamilton Palace Sports Ground now sits), which was part of what was formerly the largest formal designed landscape in Scotland. From 1882 the Hamilton family leased mineral rights to land within the palace grounds; the resulting subsidence led to the demolition of the Palace in the 1920s. Low Parks Museum in Hamilton has various displays and information on the Palace and surrounding grounds.

The current SSSI section of Barmichael Plantation is on the ancient woodland inventory and dates back around 300 years, which predates later planting in the area (150 – 200 years ago) by the Victorians. The drive from the original lodge (now the site of the Bothwell sewage works) to the palace was laid out with yew trees, the remnants of which can be found today within the Barmichael Plantation heronry, visible on the OS 1843-1882 map.

General Roy's map from 1750 shows South Haugh as agricultural land, then rented off as rigs before being left as a flood plain. A large area in North Haugh, almost directly on the site of a 20th century Bowling Green and Pitch and Put Course, was also agricultural land until it merged into the Low Parks by the late 18th century.

The area of haughland has been known to ornithologists for at least 50 years for its rich and varied bird fauna. When Hamilton Low Parks was declared a statutory bird sanctuary by the Secretary of State for Scotland in 1958 it supported a large number of wintering wildfowl, resident and migrating waders and a large heronry. Subsequently, the area covered by the Bird Sanctuary Order and a further area of haughland known as Raith Haugh, were included in the SSSI notified to the Local Authorities by the Nature Conservancy under Section 23 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949).

Disturbance during construction of the M74 through the middle of the SSSI caused a reduction in numbers and variety of birds. Three of the ponds used by birds were either infilled or partly drained. However, the area settled down following completion of the motorway in 1968 and continues to support a variety of bird and other species.

Present land use

South Haugh and North Haugh are used by walkers and dog walkers, and the creation of the National Cycle Route 74 has led to a significant increase in cycling. Access to Low Parks is not promoted but there is evidence of poaching and fishing, which has also been evident at Raith Haugh and the Clyde Strip.

Site infrastructure

South Haugh is the most accessible component of the pLNR and has the majority of infrastructure, with two car parks, a surfaced path network (including the NCR74 which passes through North Haugh as well), benches etc. The other sites have less formal routes and access is not encouraged: North Haugh due to the marshy terrain and Low Parks due to potential disturbance to the heronry. Access maps in the Appendix show routes including core paths on land and in water.



Recreation and access

There are several parking areas for North and South Haugh with a number of additional pedestrian access points, as can be seen in the Appendix maps. An extensive network of surfaced footpaths links South Haugh and North Haugh with Strathclyde Country Park, Chatelherault Country Park and the Hamilton Palace Grounds. Informal paths allow access to Raith Haugh, Low Parks and the Clyde Strip. Being close to Hamilton town centre, the site is easily accessible via bus and train.

Local community

SLC CAG team have established good links with regular users of the site through targeted patrolling. A fortnightly Conservation Group has been operating since 2013 who carry out various tasks including path improvements and woodland management. South Haugh is regularly used by a local nursery for outdoor learning.



Conclusion

It is the intention of SLC's Countryside and Greenspace team to work in partnership with the local community to ensure that the ecological quality of the reserve is maintained and managed. We aim to foster an understanding and facilitate the enjoyment of the natural heritage of the reserve, by improving 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 other organisations and the local community. SLC CAG aims to establish a 'Friends of' group, building on our existing relationships with the local community. The Conservation group will be a key mechanism for delivering practical site management tasks.

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 Forest 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

Web: www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk

*Photographs provided by Lesley Farnan, Mike Brady, Chris Waltho and Melanie Craig.
Note that maps may not be to scale.*

Appendix 1: Objectives and actions

The management objectives include guidance from the Hamilton Low Parks SSSI Management Statement (Site Code 761). Some operations within the SSSI, or that could affect the SSSI, requires SNH consent.

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

Actions:

- Maintain the population of grey herons by minimising disturbance from development or inappropriate recreational use of the area.
- Maintain the population of grey herons by maintaining the tree nesting sites and investigating alternative nesting tree options.
- Maintain surveying and monitoring regimes.
- Maintain and monitor ancient woodland inventory as part of a wider Heritage Treescape.
- Investigate woodland management options.
- Manage encroachment and growth of non-native tree species within the wetlands.
- Maintain and monitor wetland birds.
- Monitor and investigate pollution sources and implement ways to deal with them e.g. vegetation barrier to deal with run-off from the M74.
- Investigate cutting / grazing / mowing options to benefit the wetland communities.
- Investigate the potential to increase floral diversity of existing grasslands.
- Contribute to monitoring data for national and local biological recording schemes.
- Ensure appropriate management informed by monitoring programmes and best practice.
- Continue to monitor and manage invasive, non-native species e.g. Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed.

Objective 2: Maintain and improve the hydrology of the Low Parks wetlands.

Actions:

- Investigate options for improving the hydrology of open water.
- Continue to monitor the wetlands and indicator species.
- Investigate / secure funding opportunities.

Objective 3: Maintain and increase the use of the access network.

Actions:

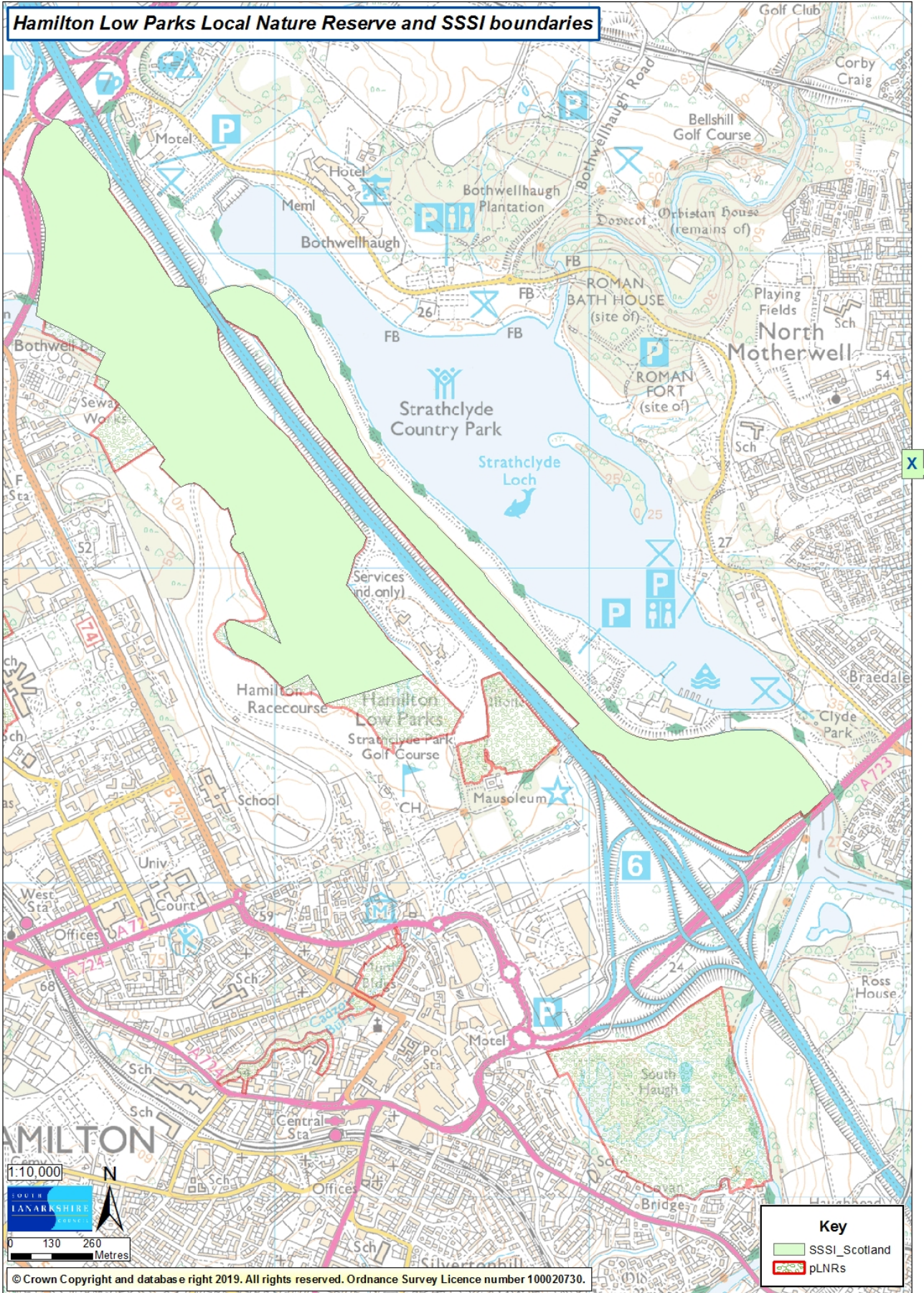
- Continue to enhance / maintain access points and the path network with the involvement of local community volunteers.
- Investigate / secure funding opportunities for maintenance and improvement.

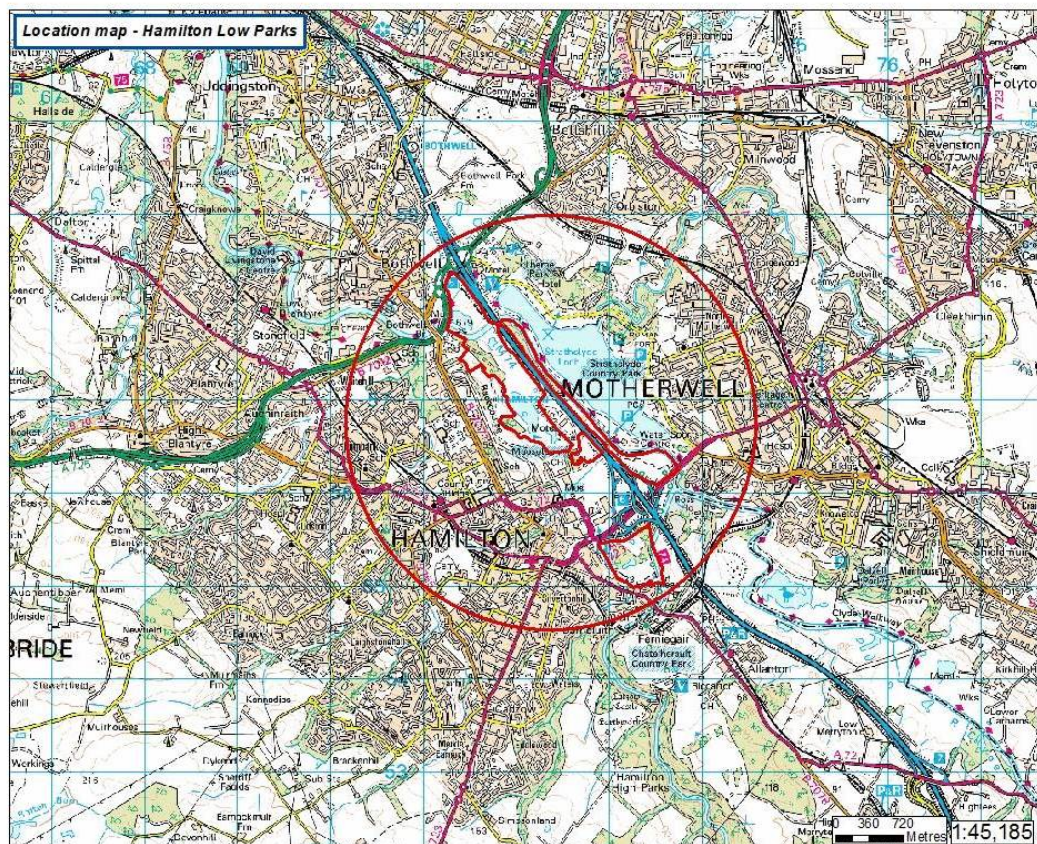
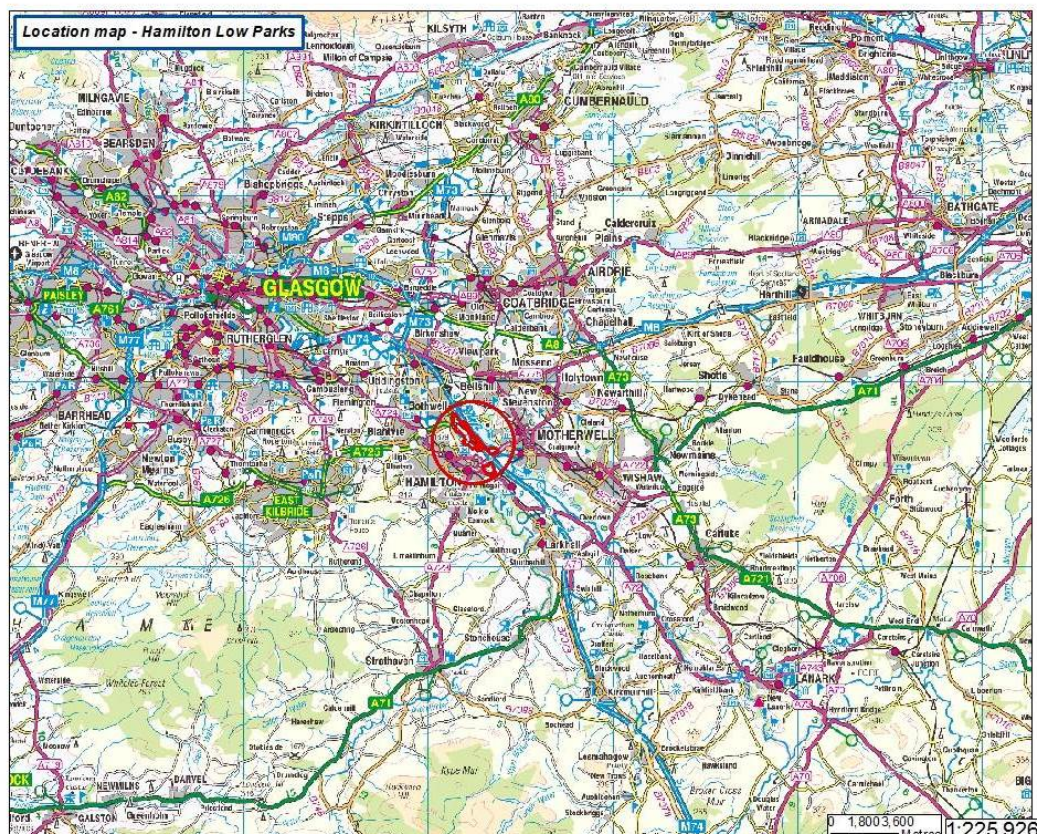
Objective 4: Encourage and facilitate community involvement in the reserve.

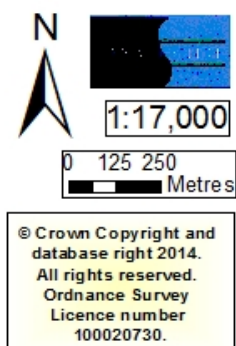
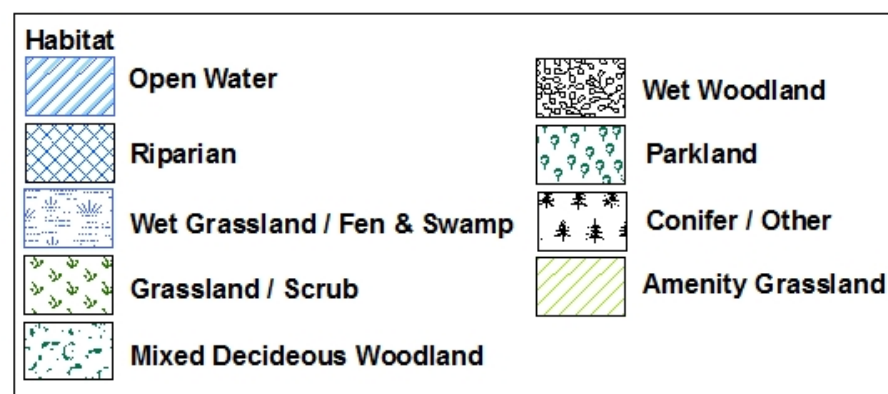
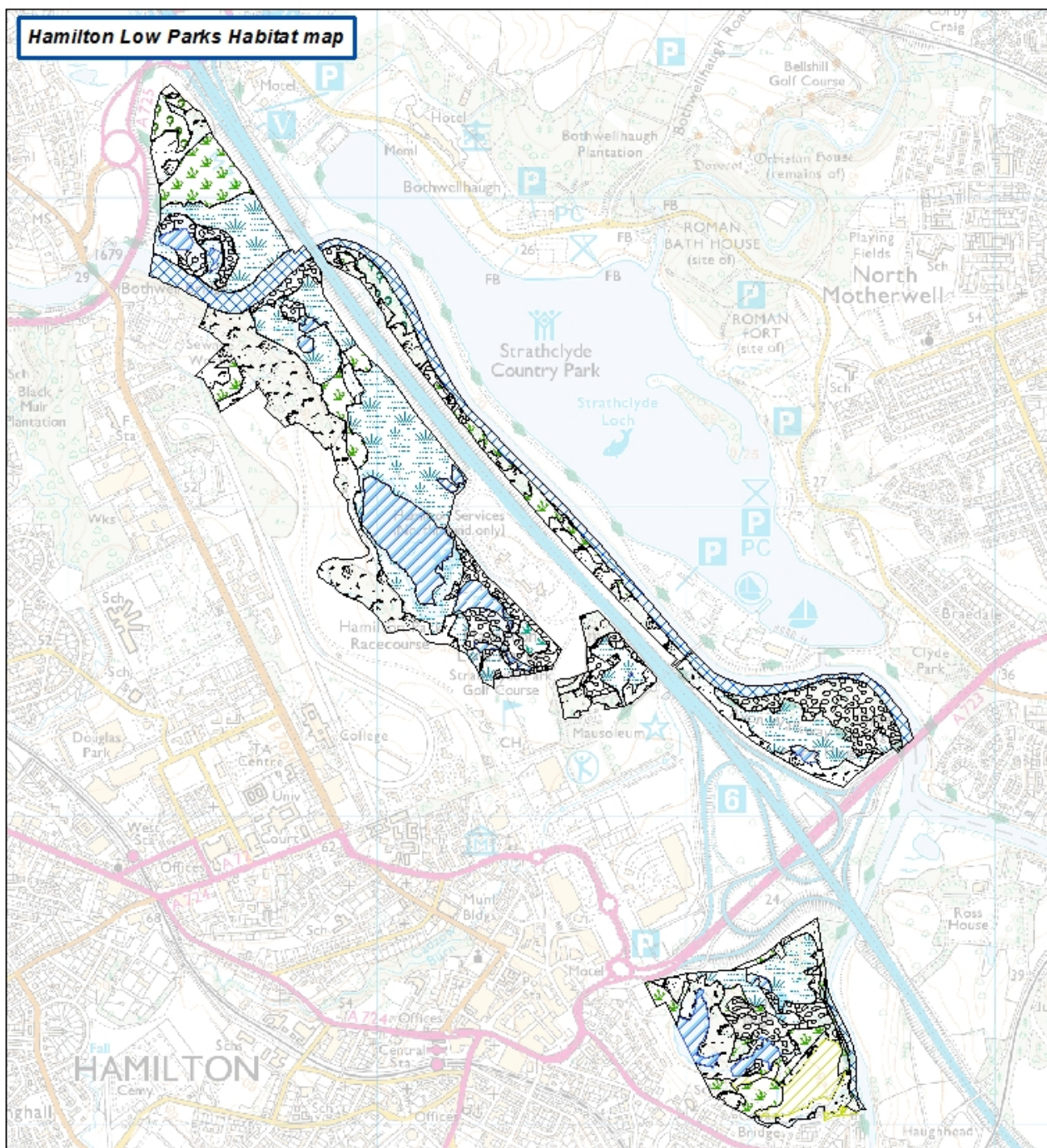
Actions:

- Undertake a community consultation to help direct future management of the sites.
- Develop community involvement in management of the sites.
- Continue to support the volunteer conservation programme.
- Promote the reserve e.g. producing information leaflets, interpretation and signage.
- Encourage and promote the use of the reserve by the local community, schools and other interested groups.
- Involve and train local volunteers in future monitoring.

Appendix 2: Maps







Aerial photograph - Hamilton Low Parks

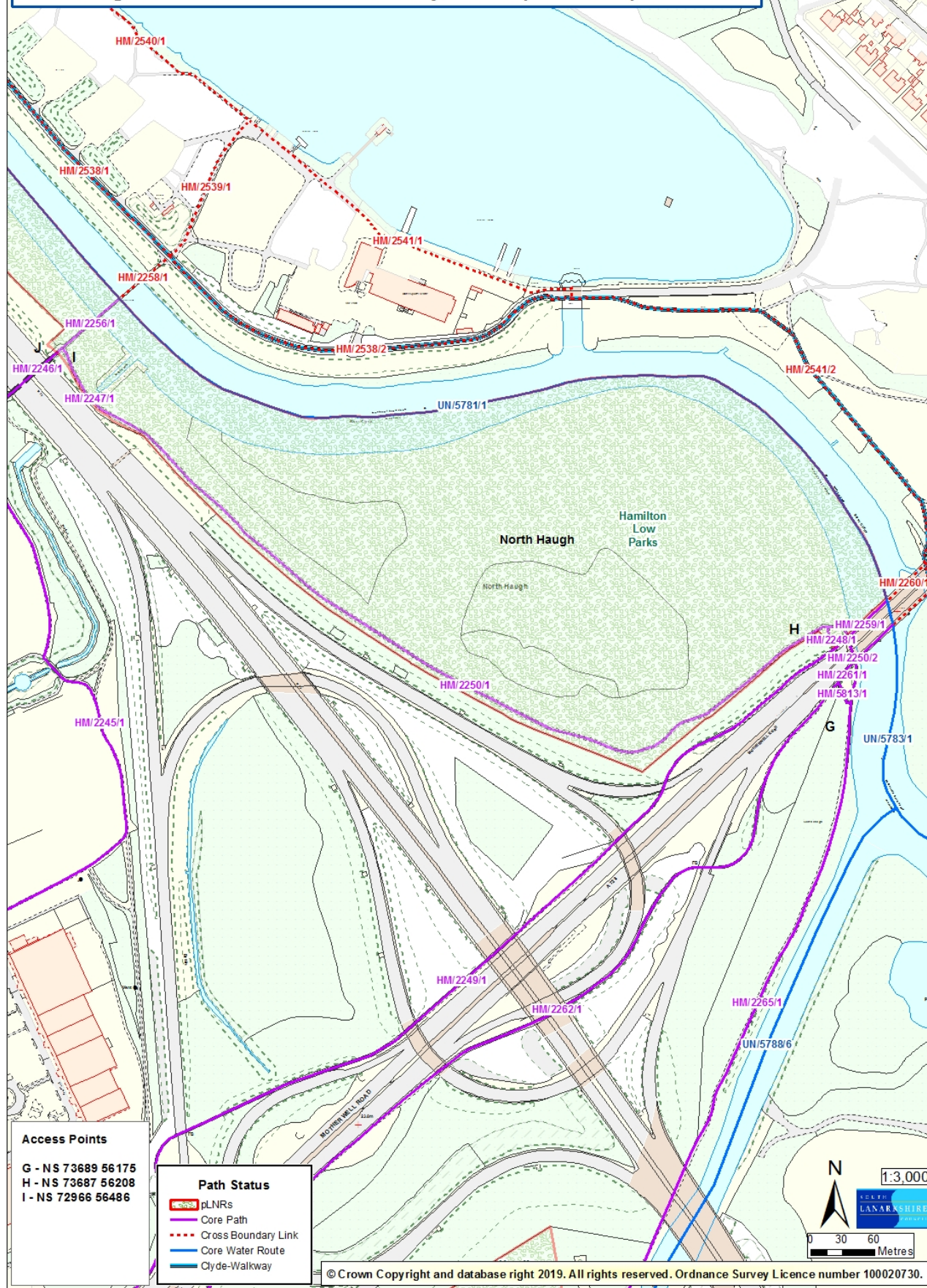


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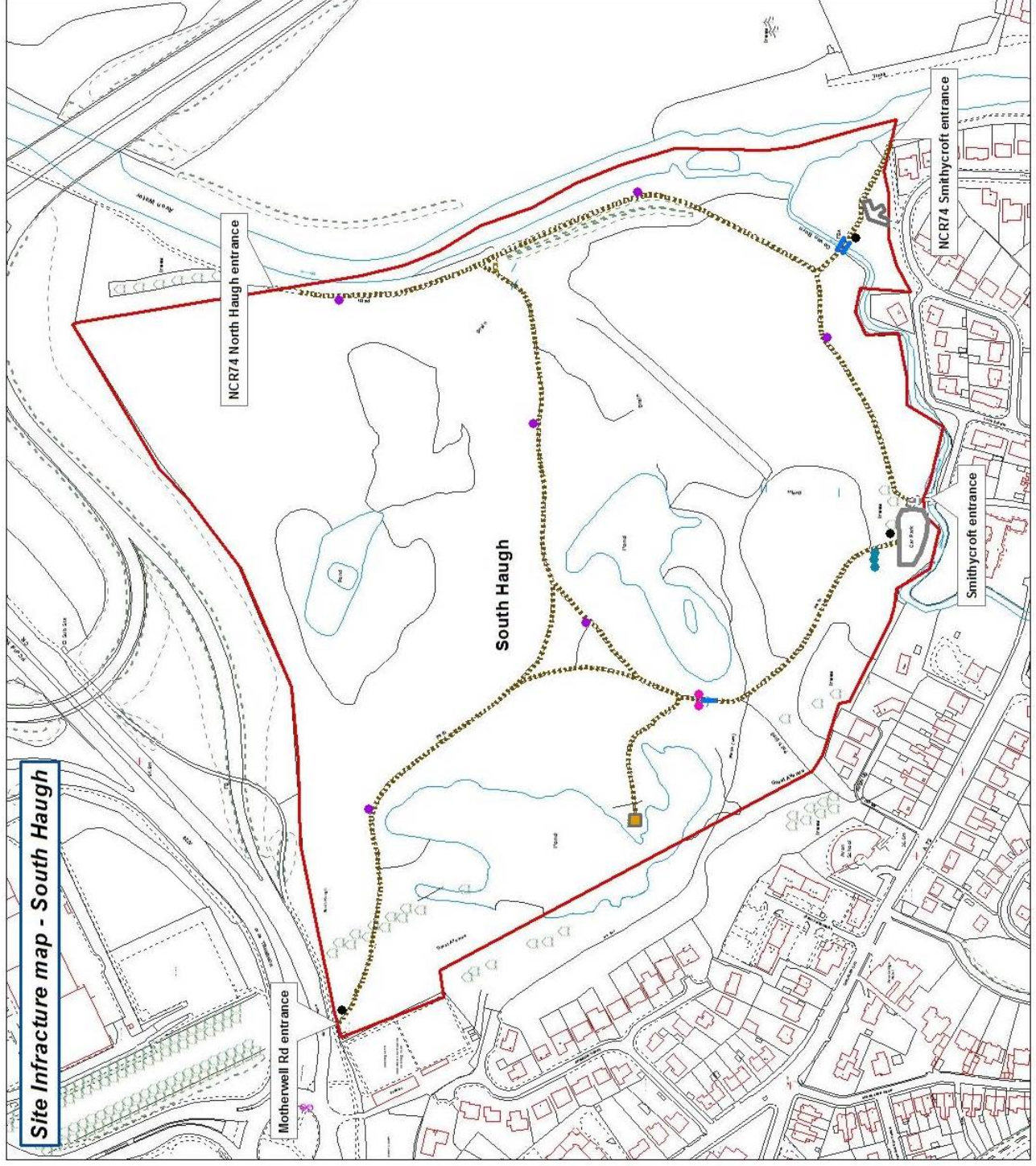
North Haugh Local Nature Reserve boundary, access points and path network



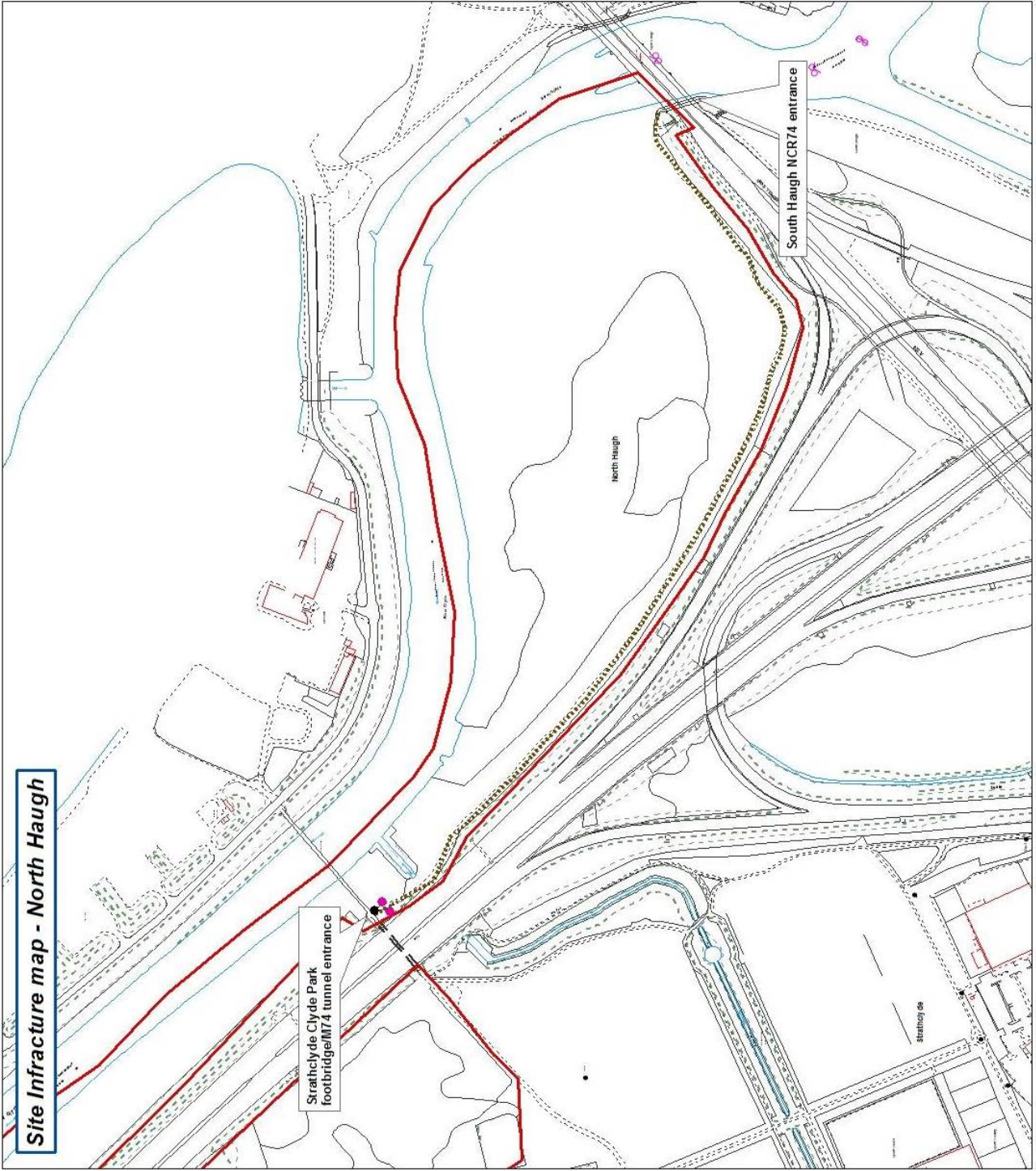


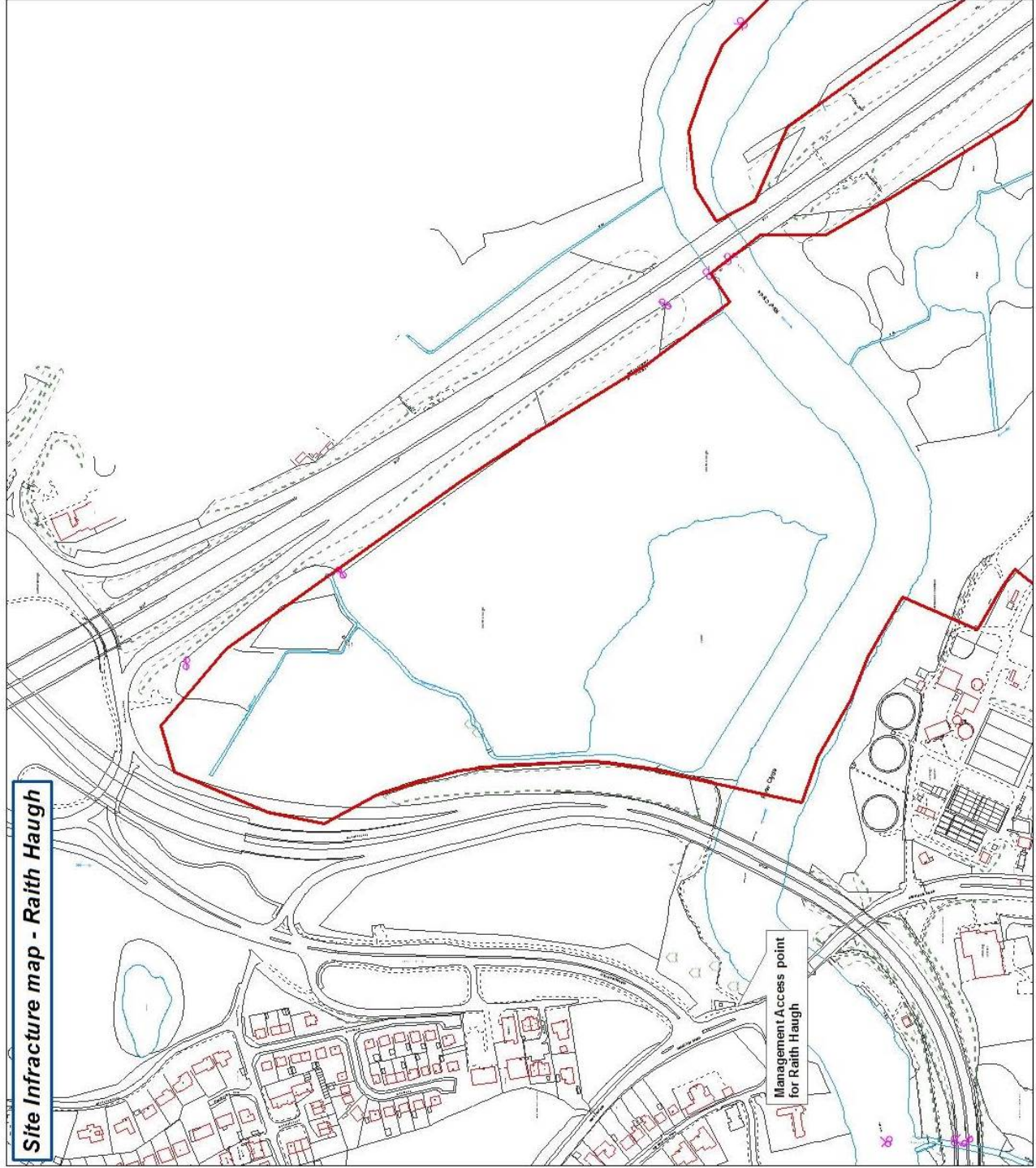
Site Infrastructure map - South Haugh

- Key**
- Site Boundary
 - Surfaced Path
 - Car Park
 - Bridge
 - Information Board
 - Bench
 - Picnic Bench
 - People Counter
 - Birdwatching Screen



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Key

— Site Boundary



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