

Inverclyde  
council  
**LOCAL  
DEVELOPMENT  
PLAN**

**MAIN ISSUES REPORT**  
MARCH 2017



**WEST RENFREW HILLS LOCAL LANDSCAPE AREA**  
**DRAFT STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE**

# **West Renfrew Hills Local Landscape Area**

## **Statement of Importance**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The West Renfrew Hills lie within the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park and stretch from Inverkip and Wemyss Bay in the west to the edge of Loch Thom in the east and adjoin the North Ayrshire Special Landscape Area to the south.

Patterns of hillside and coastal landscapes combine with the varied patterns of vegetation to help define the character of the rural areas and provide a functional setting for the urban areas of Inverclyde.

## **2. POLICY CONTEXT**

Scotland's landscapes are recognised as a major asset, contributing to national, regional and local identities, adding to the qualities of many people's lives and providing attractive settings which help promote social and economic development.

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) highlights the importance of an 'all landscapes' approach to landscaping and encourages more attention to their care and planning. This provides a framework for work on Scotland's landscapes based on a set of five principles:

- people, from all cultures and communities, lie at the heart of efforts for landscape, as we all share an interest in, and responsibility for, its well-being;
- the landscape is important everywhere, not just in special places and whether beautiful or degraded;
- landscapes will continue to evolve in response to our needs, but this change needs to be managed;
- better awareness and understanding of our landscapes and the benefits they provide is required; and
- an inclusive, integrated and forward-looking approach to managing the landscapes we have inherited, and in shaping new ones, is required.

In its national outcomes outlining what it wants to achieve over the next 10 years for the natural environment the Scottish Government identifies valuing and enjoying the built and natural environment and protecting it and enhancing it for future generations.

National Planning Framework 3 recognises how spectacular Scotland's landscapes are and how they contribute to our quality of life, our national identity and the visitor economy as well as supporting place-making and reinforcing Scotland's national

image. The wildest landscapes require continued strong protection whilst those close to settlements also have an important role to play in sustaining local distinctiveness and cultural identity, and in supporting health and well-being.

One of the Sustainability Policy Principles of the Scottish Planning Policy states that planning should protect, enhance and promote access to natural heritage, including green infrastructure, landscape and the wider environment whilst one of the Natural Environment Policy Principles states that the planning system should facilitate positive change while maintaining and enhancing distinctive landscape character.

Planning authorities are encouraged to limit non-statutory local designations to areas designated for their local landscape or nature conservation value:

The purpose of areas of local landscape value 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.

It is important therefore to understand the local landscape character and its sensitivity to change through the preparation of this Statement of Importance.

The West Renfrew Hills landscape has been recognised in development plans for over 30 years having been designated a Regional Scenic Area in the 1981 Strathclyde Structure Plan, with its boundaries defined in subsequent local plans. However, the Glasgow and the Clyde Valley Strategic Development Plan (SDP) 2012 did not identify the West Renfrew Hill Scenic Area amongst those listed and the Strategic Development Plan Proposed Plan 2016 does not make reference to any landscape areas.

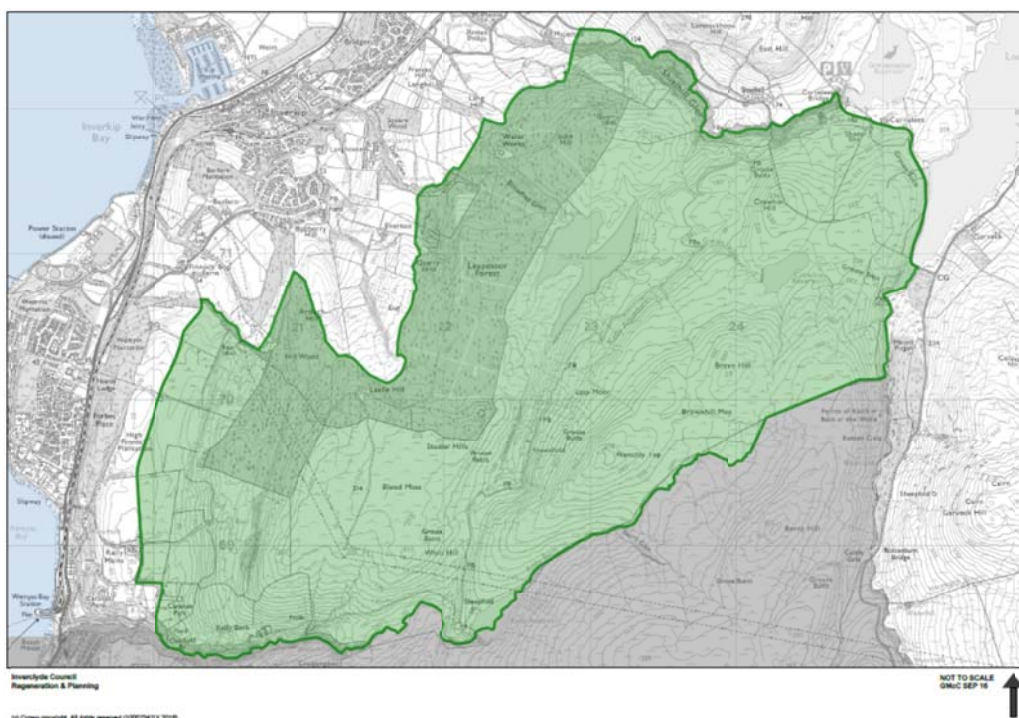
The Inverclyde Local Development Plan 2014 recognises the importance of the West Renfrew Hills and the need to protect them from inappropriate disturbance and development. Policy ENV1 'Designated Environmental Resources' protects natural heritage resources.

### 3. STUDY APPROACH

The West Renfrew Hills designation has its origins in the Regional Scenic Area (RSA) designation from the Structure Plan 36 years ago. It is therefore considered necessary to update this designation, with a relevant policy in the new Local Development Plan which is under preparation. Inverclyde Council and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) have worked together to prepare this Statement of Importance for the proposed West Renfrew Hills Local Landscape Area (LLA) which identifies its extent and landscape character, including those qualities identified as special, explaining the reasons for the designation.

The Statement of Importance has been prepared following three key stages:

- I. A landscape review meeting was held in June 2016 with landscape and planning staff from SNH and Inverclyde Council to discuss key views and attributes of the West Renfrew Hills;
- II. A desk review was carried out of the Glasgow and the Clyde Valley Landscape Character Assessment (1999) and historic mapping and local documentation; and
- III. Fieldwork assessment within the West Renfrew Hills carried out over 2 days (8<sup>th</sup> September and 5<sup>th</sup> October 2016) by SNH Landscape Architects and Planning Officer and Inverclyde Council's Planning Officer.



Proposed West Renfrew Hills Local Landscape Area boundary

## 4. STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE

### 4.1 Landscape Overview

There is something very special and characteristic about the landscape along this part of the Clyde coast where a linear development of settlements along the waterfront is set against a steep rural hinterland stretching up to the moorland hills

### 4.2 Landscape Description

The following landscape qualities of the West Renfrew Hills are identified as being of special interest; they justify and explain the West Renfrew Hills' selection as a Local Landscape Area. The qualities identified consider not only key landscape and visual characteristics but look beyond these to encompass how the landscape is experienced and valued. They identify and explain the importance of specific locations and landscape features which are considered to contribute strongly to what is special about the area.

**Landform** - This landscape is underlain by basalts which are more resistant than surrounding rocks and have withstood glacial and fluvial erosion to leave rugged uplands moors with summits up to 500m. The lavas which cap the Renfrewshire Hills create the terraced or stepped slopes.

Key characteristics, features and qualities:

- distinct upland character created by the combination of terraced hill slopes, elevation, exposure, rugged landform, moorland vegetation
- extensive natural and man-made water bodies
- some areas of forestry
- the presence of archaeological sites on hilltops and sides. Neolithic and Bronze Age remains
- a sense of apparent naturalness and remoteness which contrasts strongly with the farmed and developed lowland areas;
- the predominant lack of modern development; and
- tall masts and pylons, visible on the skyline in places.

**Views and skylines** – West Renfrew Hills boast a panoramic view stretching to the south west over the Isle of Bute across the length of the Cowal Peninsula northwards to the Holy Loch and the Rosneath Peninsula. The Renfrew Heights and plateau moorlands separating the Clyde and the Ayrshire basin to the south create strong and containing skylines. These come together to emphasise this narrow part of the Inner Firth of Clyde. The coastal part of Inverclyde is one of the few areas where views extend beyond the Clyde basin, extending to the Argyll coast and into the



south west Highlands. These views across the Firth of Clyde emphasise the contrast between the remote upland and the developed lowlands.

**Natural heritage features** – the high ground supports three main habitats - upland pasture, heather moorland and coniferous forestry. The combination of these habitats over the seasons can impart characteristic ranges of colours and textures to the landscape with shades of green, brown, ochre and straw and at flowering periods, the vivid purple of the extensive heather.



The land cover of these hills is dominated by moorland plant communities including heather and rough grasslands. There are patches of bracken which generally impact on both the ecology and the landscape, and there are extensive areas of blanket bog within Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park. Extensive areas of peat deposits, as defined on SNH's Carbon and Peatland Map 2016 are found in a number of upland and moorland parts of the West Renfrewshire Hills.

On the more accessible hillsides and lower slopes, agricultural improvements create a brighter green sward, contrasting with the paler hues of the unimproved grassland. Fields enclosed with walls and hedges push onto some of the slopes around the edges of the hills. Some have been abandoned and invaded by bracken.



In general, the less intensively used upland areas provide a valuable resource for wildlife with a wide range of invertebrates, birds and mammals supported including, for example, the skylark, curlew, golden plover and lapwing, red grouse and hen harrier.



Hen harrier (m)



Lapwing

**Woodland** - the hills are generally unwooded in character. The principle exception is the commercial plantation found on the western slope at Leapmoor Forest. Deciduous trees and shrubs are also found in some of the gully and burn-side areas, and around some of the hill fringes.

**Water** - there are three reservoirs in the West Renfrew Hills - Daff, Crawhin and Kelly - which were constructed to serve the nearby urban areas with water. There is also the Kelly Cut, a narrow non-navigable aqueduct, built in 1845 by engineer Robert Thom which fed water into the nearby Greenock Cut. It intersects the moorland running around Wenchly Top , Brown Hill and Crawhin Hill around 500m



above sea level for a distance of 6 miles (9km) from Cornalees down to Wemyss Bay. A path following the line of the Cut is provided for walkers and cyclists. The hills are connected to the wider green network by 11 core paths running through them, allowing residents and visitors to Inverclyde to enjoy them.

**Remoteness** - in this exposed upland area, buildings are generally very sparse. Shielhill Farm is located just outside the area at the northern edge. However, it soon disappears from view when venturing deeper into the Hills. There are telephone lines, pylons and tracks criss-crossing the area but it is largely uninhabited. The moorlands are vast and there are vistas opening out across the Clyde toward the Isle of Bute, the Cowal Peninsula and beyond. Besides the industrial archaeology cutting through the area in the form of Kelly Cut, there are historic cairns scattered around giving the perception of an undisturbed historic landscape. Despite being within easy access of the urban area, the Hills provide a contrasting solitude where it is possible to enjoy remoteness, solitude and isolation.



Shielhill Farm

**Recreation** - the uplands are also of recreational importance with the Greenock Cut Visitor Centre and Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park providing informal and semi-formal recreation close to the urban fringe. Core paths provide access to the area by foot or cycle and the variety of birds and wildlife offer interest to both residents of the area and visitors alike.

### **4.3 Local Landscape Area Boundary**

As part of the fieldwork assessment carried out in formulating this Statement of Importance, the boundary of the existing Regional Scenic Area was assessed on the ground to establish if it was appropriate to continue as the boundary of the proposed Local Landscape Area.

The mapped Regional Scenic Area boundary had a few anomalies when compared to what was on the ground. It was established that these were due to GIS mapping issues. When these were resolved the boundary was assessed against the following criteria which establishes that it was robust:

- use of clear, permanent features that are easy to identify on the ground;
- consideration of the visual experience in the landscape; and
- drawing of boundaries close to, or within, settlements and larger urban areas with smaller areas of lesser merit falling within the Local Landscape Area where this allows better physical definition.

### **4.4 Landscape Change**

A key principle in the policy approach to landscape is that landscapes are constantly changing and evolving in response to our needs. Positive change should be facilitated whilst maintaining and enhancing distinctive character. Human activity has already had notable effects on parts of the landscape of the West Renfrew Hills including:

- management of land for grazing;
- the creation of water supply reservoirs at Daff and Crawhin and the aqueduct at Kelly Cut to serve nearby urban areas;
- management of commercial forestry at Leapmoor Forest with associated infrastructure and tracks; and
- the erection of masts, pylons and wind turbines.

All of these have cumulatively detracted from some of the special landscape qualities in some locations, particularly the characteristics of remoteness and perceived wildness and naturalness.

Landscape planning and management should aim to conserve the character and special qualities of these Rugged Moorland Hills. Developments and land use changes which undermine the sense of perceived wildness, naturalness and remoteness should be resisted.

## **4.5 Other Designations and Interests**

### Natural Heritage

#### **Renfrewshire Heights Special Protection Area (part) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (part)**

The Special Protection Area was designated in 2007, the boundary of which is coincident with that of the Site of Special Scientific Interest designated in 2005. Part of these designations cover the West Renfrew Hills and comprise an upland moorland area which supports a diverse mosaic of habitats suitable for nesting and foraging hen harriers. These habitats include blanket bog, acid grassland, wet and dry heath, rough grassland and small sedge mires/flushes. Blanket bog communities predominate, accounting for approximately 70% of the upland vegetation.

The area qualifies for designation due to it regularly supporting a breeding population of hen harriers of European importance (an average of 10 breeding females annually recorded between 1998 and 2004), although the last assessment in 2010 indicated that numbers were unfavourably declining.

### Cultural heritage

There are four Scheduled Monuments within the West Renfrew Hills. All are remains of cairns with burial cists which were probably built between 3000 and 1000 BC in the late Neolithic or Bronze Age. Three Monuments are located in the vicinity of Kelly Bank Cottage, Wemyss Bay while the fourth is located near Glen Everton House, Inverkip.

Further information available at: <http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/>

### Recreation

#### **Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park**

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park is one of three Regional Parks in Scotland. Designated in 1990, it covers 28,000 ha (108 square miles) in Inverclyde, Renfrewshire and North Ayrshire. It includes of Castle Semple Loch and Collegiate Church, the Greenock Cut Centre (formerly Cornalees Bridge), Muirshiel Country Park, Barnbrock Farm, Lunderston Bay, Locherwood, Haylie Brae and Knockendon.

The purpose of the Regional Park is to:

- provide the oversight and resources needed to integrate recreation with other activities;

- undertake wider landscape and habitat management; and
- promote the area for the benefit of residents and visitors.  
(Clyde Muirshiel Park Authority Park Strategy 2008 – 2011, extension to 2012)

Further information available at: <http://clydemuirshiel.co.uk/>



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