

Statement of Importance

North Esk Valley Special Landscape Area

Name and location

The Special Landscape Area (SLA) comprises the **North Esk Valley**. It is situated in northern Midlothian, and follows the North Esk river and valley on its route between the outskirts of the towns of Penicuik in the south-west and Dalkeith in the north-east.



Overview

Key reasons why this area is a SLA are:

- The densely wooded and often dramatically incised North Esk Valley which accommodates a number of designed landscapes and is of high nature conservation interest.
- The rich cultural interest of this landscape and its popularity for recreation which is increased by its close proximity to urban areas.

This narrow, steep-sided river valley is densely wooded and lined by the estates of several country houses and castles, interspersed with fields of pasture. Overall it is of high scenic, cultural, ecological and recreational interest, and is well-used by people in adjacent settlements.

Landscape description

Key components of this landscape are:

- The densely wooded and deeply incised valley of the North Esk which is particularly dramatic and strongly contained in the Roslin Glen area.

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- The strong sense of naturalness and seclusion that can be experienced in the valley, including in areas relatively close to transport corridors and settlements which lie on the valley fringes.
- Extensive policy woodlands and other designed landscape features associated with the Dalkeith, Melville Castle, Mavisbank and Auchendinny estates.
- Small pastures on valley sides, enclosed by hedgerows and shelterbelts.
- The rich cultural interest of this river valley which includes the internationally renowned Rosslyn Chapel and the romantic Roslin Glen, mansion houses and historic buildings as well as a number of industrial heritage sites.
- The wooded setting this landscape provides to the historic settlements of Lasswade, Polton and Dalkeith.
- The continuity of recreational routes through much of the valley.=
Immediately north-west of Dalkeith lies the confluence of the North and South Esk rivers within Dalkeith Country Park. The sinuous route of the North Esk between Dalkeith and Penicuik is predominantly confined within a steep-sided valley; in some sections, such as Roslin Glen, the river is flanked by a precipitous gorge; in other parts, contrastingly, it becomes more open – such as the rounded valley shoulders that slope down to the river south-west of Lasswade and Roslin Castle. At Auchendinny at the southern end of this SLA, an incised fan of several small burns – mainly originating in the higher moorland to the south – feeds into the North Esk.

Much of the valley of the North Esk is heavily wooded. Around Dalkeith House, the land cover is a mix of parkland, handsome mature specimen trees, and woodlands. Policy woodlands, with occasional specimen conifers or spruce plantations, are also associated with other designed landscapes such as Mavisbank House, Roslin Glen and Melville Castle. Many woodlands are of ancient or semi-natural origin and much of the SLA is recognised and protected through wildlife designations. The woodlands line long stretches of the valley and are a strong and distinctive influence upon its lush, linear, contained character. Fields of improved pasture and occasional arable land occur on the more open valley slopes and terraces, often divided by well-kept hedgerows with hedgerow trees, and shelterbelts separate areas of farmland on the upper ground of the valley. Stone walling is commonly found as a boundary treatment surrounding or in the vicinity of the designed landscapes within the valley.

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The 18thC country houses such as Dalkeith House, Mavisbank, Melville Castle and Auchendinny House – in addition to earlier buildings from the 14th to 17thC such as Rosslyn and Hawthornden Castles and Rosslyn Chapel – which line the valley of the North Esk, are prominent contributors to the highly diverse architectural and historical interest of the area. In contrast, some associations with the past mill and railway industrial heritage of the valley

remain in places. The site of the Battle of Roslin (1303) lies within the area and is listed on Scotland's Inventory of Historic Battlefields.

A network of B-roads, minor roads and access tracks runs parallel to and occasionally crossing the valley, connecting the adjacent settlements such as Loanhead and Lasswade, Rosewell and Roslin. Within the valley clusters of stone cottages and Victorian villas at Polton and Lasswade are designated Conservation Areas, fitting harmoniously into the surrounding wooded landscape. Connected with the towns and villages within and around the SLA are numerous paths, cycle routes and bridleways running along the river and through the designed landscapes – a section from Dalkeith to Penicuik forms part of the National Cycle Network. The high recreational value of the area is further enhanced by the Country Parks and associated visitor facilities at Roslin Glen and Dalkeith.

Topography and vegetation combine to give this area a predominantly enclosed and secluded character, with restricted views to the surrounding landscape. Views into it from nearby roads are also similarly limited to glimpses of castles and country houses within dense woodlands.

Choice of boundary

Where possible firm boundaries have been chosen for their longevity and robustness to define

and identify the SLA.

The boundaries of this SLA follow a combination of designed landscape and settlement edges in combination with roads, tributary valleys, field boundaries and woodlands.

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Opportunities for change

Management

The North Esk valley woodlands are substantially covered by ancient/semi-natural woodland and ecological designations. The historical richness of this SLA is similarly acknowledged by the Conservation Area and the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes designations that cover much of the length of the valley. Good management of the existing designed landscapes, extensive woodlands and areas of well-managed and uncluttered open pasture is important to the value and appearance of this landscape.

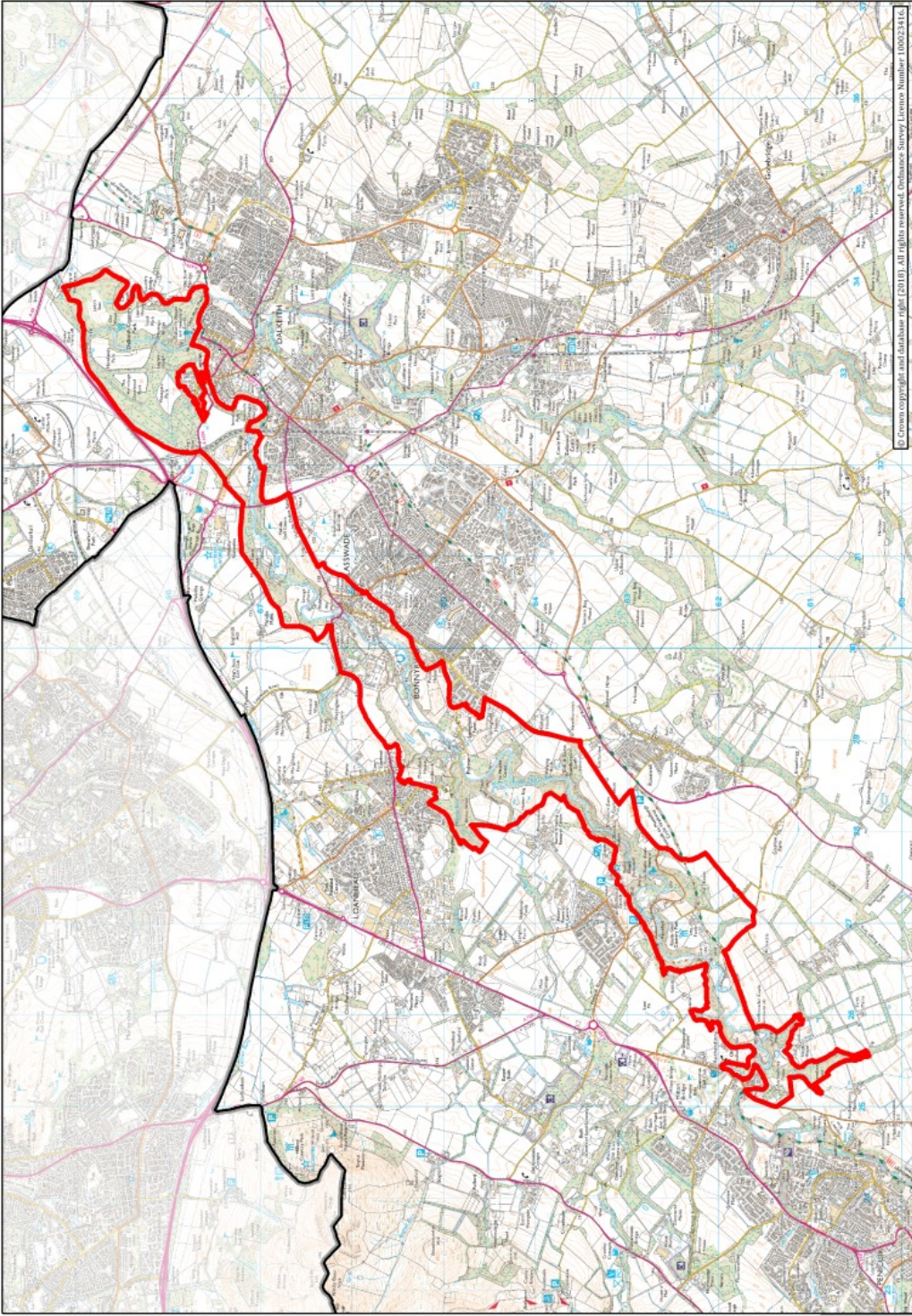
The focus for landscape improvements should be on the management of built features and plantings within designed landscapes including visitor facilities within Dalkeith Country Park. Woodland planting should be undertaken to screen intrusive housing and industrial development seen on sensitive skylines above the valley in the Polton area. Establishment of new recreational routes is also needed within the valley between Dalkeith and Lasswade to improve connectivity.

Development

Important considerations for landscape impact in the preparation and assessment of development proposals include:

- Potential for intrusion on designed landscapes which are strongly contained by woodland and any impacts on their key components.
- Impacts on the character and setting of historic settlements and buildings.
- Impacts on sensitive skylines on the edge of the valley.

Further dispersed built development within the valley should be strongly discouraged to conserve the sense of seclusion and naturalness which is a key quality of this landscape.



North Esk SLA