

Statement of Importance

Pentland Hills Special Landscape Area

Name and location

The Special Landscape Area (SLA) of the **Pentland Hills** comprises, in addition to the hills themselves, the designed landscape of Penicuik House, the upper North Esk valley and Auchencorth Moss. This landscape is located on the western boundary of Midlothian. The Pentland Hills extend into neighbouring City of Edinburgh, Scottish Borders and West Lothian, where they are covered by a similar landscape designation.



Overview

Key reasons why this area is a SLA are:

- The highly scenic shapely peaks of the Pentland Hills which are seen widely across the Lothians, form key components of the landscape setting to Edinburgh and Midlothian and are also well-used for recreation.
- The rich diversity of the upper North Esk Valley, lying at the foot of the Pentland Hills, which forms the focus for the well-wooded designed landscapes of Penicuik House and Newhall.
- The open and expansive low-lying Auchencorth Moss which strongly contrasts with the hills and contributes to the richness of this SLA.
- The simple, open and expansive low-lying Auchencorth Moss which strongly contrasts with the hills and their fringes, contributing significantly to the overall scenic diversity of this SLA.

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The Pentland Hills form the key focus of this SLA. The adjacent upper section of the North Esk valley – which comprises the setting for the designed landscapes of Penicuik House and Newhall – and the open and expansive moss of Auchencorth, provide strong contrasts with the hills and contribute to the richness of the overall composition. This landscape is highly scenic, and the more visually prominent Pentland Hills form an essential part of the setting to both Midlothian and Edinburgh. The Pentland Hills are a highly valued recreational resource and are designated as a Regional Park, which encourages public access to them. The Penicuik House Estate is also well used for recreation, particularly by local residents.

Landscape description

Key components of this landscape are:

- The rugged and little modified character of the Pentland Hills which contributes to the distinct sense of wildness that can be experienced and contrasts with nearby urban areas.
- The rolling and strongly enclosed farmland on south-eastern hill slopes at the foot of the Pentland Hills.
- The designed landscapes of Penicuik House and Newhall which are centred on the River North Esk and are strongly contained by wooded policies.
- The deeply incised open section of the River North Esk which adds to the diversity of views to the Pentland Hills seen from the unclassified Moor Road.
- The open and largely uncluttered expanse of the low-lying Auchencorth Moss which provides a simple open foreground and strong contrast with the Pentland Hills, accentuating their apparent height and drama in key views from the east.

The conical peaks, undulating ridges and steep slopes of the northernmost Pentland Hills – the highest and most shapely peaks within the range – form a distinctive and recognisable backdrop to Midlothian and Edinburgh. Deeply incised narrow valleys separate peaks, accentuating the sculptural landform of these hills. These include the valley of the Logan Burn, which penetrates deep into the hills, creating an intimately scaled interior landscape accommodating isolated farms and cottages and small reservoirs. Although lying close to settlement, a sense of wildness can be experienced within the hills, with formal recreational facilities in the form of the Ski and Ranger Centres being restricted to the northern tip. The upper slopes and summits are dominated by rough grassland and moorland, contrasting with the rolling landform and rich pattern of woodlands, drystone walls, hedgerows and

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pastures of the sheltered south-east facing lower slopes of the Pentland Hills. These merge with the adjacent North Esk valley and the extensive wooded policies of Penicuik House, and add to the wide diversity of landform and land cover of this character area.

The North Esk valley is aligned at the foot of the Pentlands, and forms the setting for the designed landscapes of Penicuik House and Newhall. The river forms a natural amphitheatre of parkland at the core of the Penicuik House designed landscape, which is strongly contained by extensive policy woodlands and also features elevated walkways, avenues and planned vistas to follies and monuments. Newhall is also densely wooded, but with more ornamental gardens lying at its core. The valley of the upper North Esk is open and deeply incised between these two designed landscapes, with sheer, grassy slopes patterned by occasional crags and exposed scree.

No towns or villages lie within the SLA, with farmsteads scattered mainly across the lower hill slopes and adjacent valley, through which run the A702 and A766 main roads. A number of well-used tracks and paths criss-cross the Pentland Hills. Dramatic views, focusing on the shapely interlocking peaks of Carnethy Hill, Scald Law, South Black Hill and Cap Law, are experienced from the A701, the unclassified Moor Road and the A6094, where the low-lying and gently domed dark heathland and pasture of Auchencorth Moss provides a simple open foreground and strong contrast with the hills, accentuating their apparent height and drama. The site of the Battle of Rullion Green (1666) lies within the area and is listed on Scotland's Inventory of Historic Battlefields.

Choice of boundary

Where possible firm boundaries have been chosen for their longevity and robustness to define and identify the SLA. The boundaries to this SLA are formed by adjacent local authority boundaries, the A701, the outer edge of the Penicuik designed landscape and the A702.

Opportunities for change

Management

The Pentland Hills Regional Park Management Group working with the Pentland Hills Ranger Service are responsible for the management of the Regional Park. A long term programme of woodland restructuring and landscape restoration and management works is being carried out within Penicuik designed landscape.

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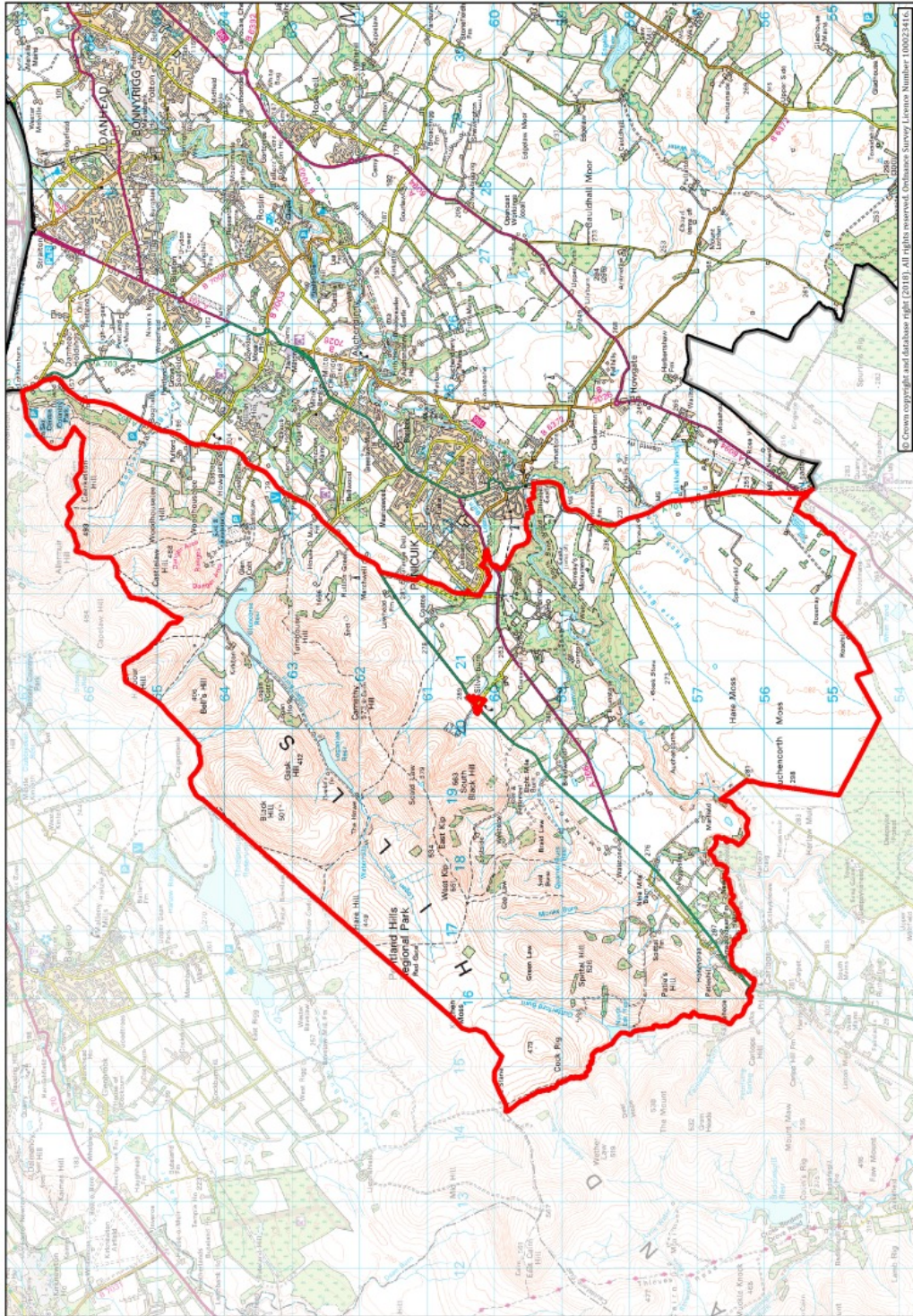
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Opportunities for improvement focus on screening intrusive development visible from the Penicuik House designed landscape, management of Auchencorth Moss to enhance its natural qualities and creation of circular recreational routes within the North Esk Valley with links to the Pentland Hills.

Development

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

- Impacts on the sense of wildness experienced within the Pentland Hills and potential for significant intrusion on key views to and from the hills.
- Potential for intrusion on the strongly contained nationally important designed landscapes of Penicuik House and Newhall and impacts on their key components.
- Any change that may occur to the simple and largely uncluttered character of Auchencorth Moss which may diminish its scenic juxtaposition with the Pentland Hills and intrude on key views.



Pentland Hills SLA