

Scottish Borders Local Plan

Supplementary Planning Guidance on

Countryside Around Towns

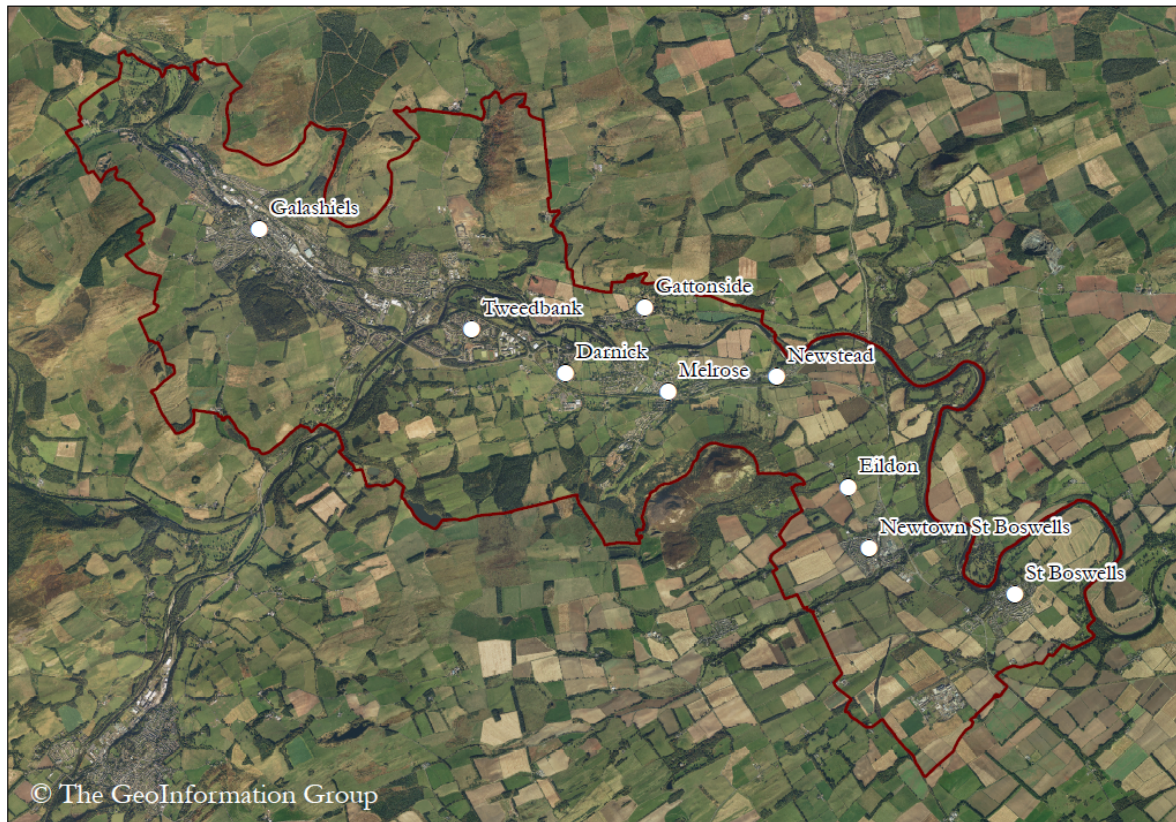
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Part 1: Countryside Around Towns SPG



1. Introduction

The Countryside Around Towns policy has derived out of a study into the prevention of coalescence. This study was initially an exercise aimed at identifying and conserving areas of undeveloped land between settlements to prevent coalescence from occurring and promoting landscape enhancements within the identified areas.

The objectives of this study were as follows:

1. To identify additional areas in the Central Borders to be protected by Policy EP3.
2. To conserve and enhance the character, landscape and identity of settlements within the Galashiels-Melrose-St Boswells corridor.
3. To encourage opportunities for recreation, both formal and informal
4. To encourage the re-use of brownfield sites.

In order to achieve these objectives, a survey was developed and undertaken. The Technical Report for this survey is provided in Appendix 2. The results of this survey identified a core area surrounding Melrose, Gattonside and Newstead that featured high quality biodiversity, historical features, landscape and access. It is therefore this area that is proposed to be subject to the Countryside Around Towns policy.

2. What is Countryside Around Towns?

Countryside Around Towns describes countryside that is located closest to where people live. This often includes urban and rural fringes, combining a variety of uses and landscapes. These are crucial green spaces that can provide people with valuable recreational and open space opportunities that enhance the quality of their lives. The landscape surrounding many of the towns and villages within the Scottish Borders is not just significant locally but provides access to areas of countryside that attract both national and international visitors. Walking, cycling, horse-riding and fishing as well as archaeological sites and ancient monuments provide a wide range of activities and interests. This holistic approach exploits the environmental, social and economic potential of areas in close proximity to towns and promotes the opportunity to provide multi-functional landscapes for the local and wider community.

3. The need for a Countryside Around Towns policy

The Scottish Borders Council has identified a core area that would benefit from the Countryside Around Towns policy. This is located in the Central Borders and stretches from Galashiels to Newstead (see map on page 5). This policy designation has been identified through a survey of the area that investigated the value of four key issues: landscape, biodiversity, historical features and accessibility. The core area scored highly in all five categories – this highlighted the need to provide protection for the area and also to initiate a strategy that provided opportunities for enhancements. The Countryside Around Towns policy can not only assist in the prevention of coalescence and the protection of important greenspace opportunities but can also provide a framework in which these identified areas can be further improved through planting, landscaping and recreational facilities.

4. Countryside Around Towns Policy

Local Plan Policy EP3:

Within the area defined as Countryside Around Towns, proposals will only be considered if they meet the following considerations:

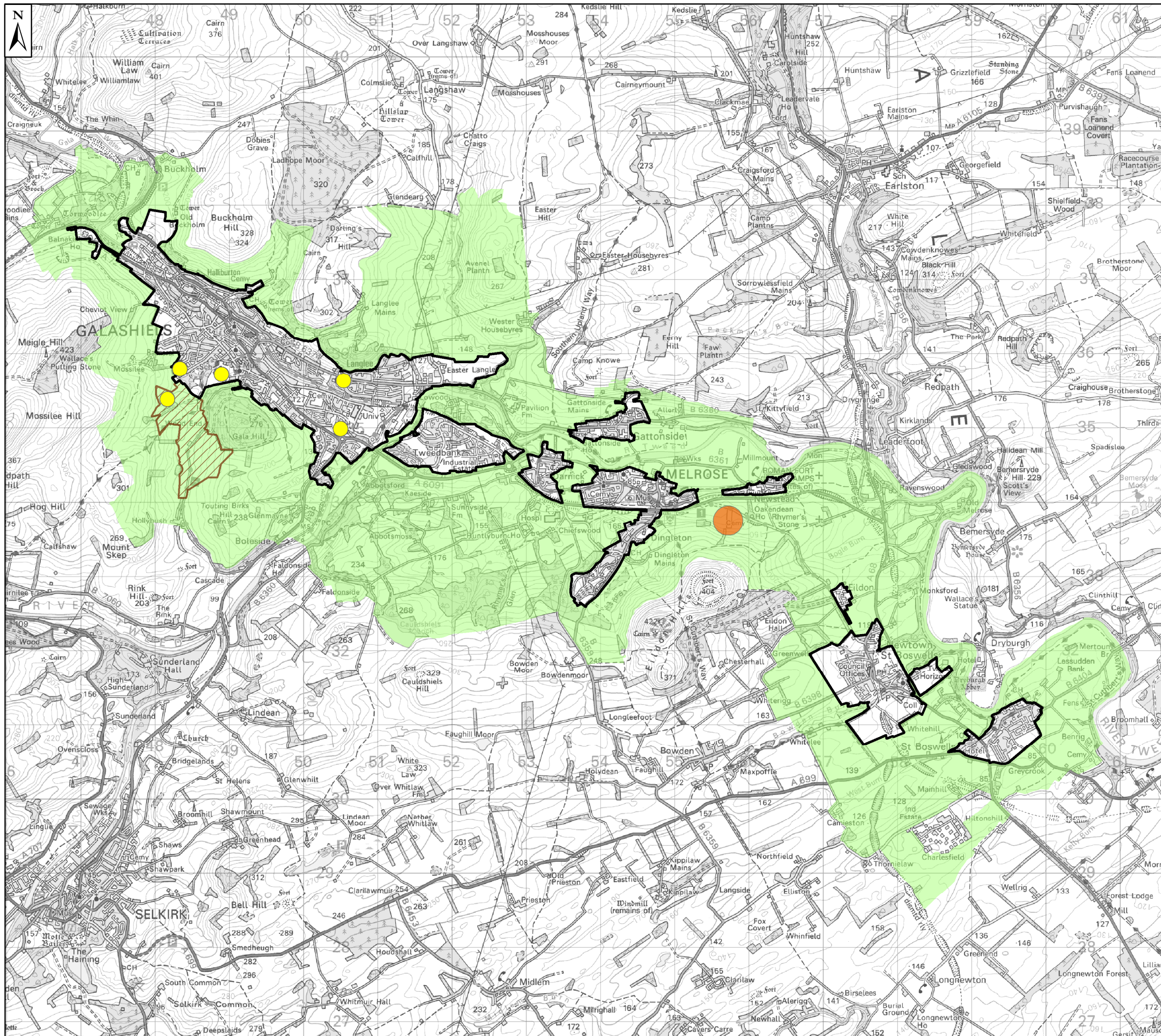
- a) There is an essential requirement for a rural location and the use is appropriate to a countryside setting e.g. agricultural, horticultural, forestry, countryside recreation, nature conservation, landscape renewal, community facilities, or
- b) It involves the rehabilitation, conversion, limited extension or an appropriate change of use of existing traditional buildings of character; and,
- c) It enhances the existing landscape, trees, woodland, natural & man-made heritage, access and recreational facilities, or
- d) Subject to satisfactory design and setting, it has a proven national or strategic need and no alternative is suitable

The extent of the 'Countryside around Towns' designation is identified in Policy Map 6 [see page 5]. Supplementary Planning Guidance will detail the policy in greater depth and provide an action plan regarding the approach to enhancements.

Justification

The aim of this policy is to ensure that the high quality living environment is protected and enhanced and that this area is not subject to piecemeal development that detracts from the area's outstanding biodiversity, landscape, historical and recreational context. It will also help to prevent the coalescence of individual towns and villages within the area thereby retaining their individual identity. The policy also seeks to allow further enhancement of the area through developments necessary to the rural setting that provide landscaping improvements.

The Structure Plan clearly states in its Principal Aim that growth should be encouraged when it supports the development of individual sustainable communities that have a range of multi-use green space, benefit from the enjoyment of Borders' countryside, rivers and cultural heritage. The area identified in the Proposal Map is of particularly high value in terms of biodiversity, landscape, heritage open space, sports and recreation and therefore requires further protection to ensure that these benefits remain an important resource for the Primary Development Hub. It is also important that the individual settlements within this proposed area are protected from coalescence. A key requirement of the Principal Aim within the Structure Plan is that these objectives are monitored through the Local Plan.



Scottish Borders Council
Consolidated Local Plan 2010
Policy Map 6 (P6)
Scale 1:50,000

Key

Policy Boundaries

Development Boundary (G8)

Protection of the amenity of established residential areas (H2) and open space (BE6) cover the whole area within the Development Boundary. Refer to Policy Maps P0-P5 for policy protection of environmental assets.

Countryside Around Towns Area

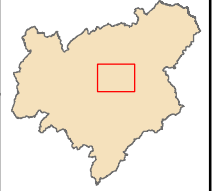
Long Term Housing Allocation

Crematorium Search Area

School Site Search Areas

For further information, including help reading this document, please contact:

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Disclaimer: Scottish Borders Council uses spatial information from a range of sources to produce the mapping contained within this document. The mapping is for illustrative purposes only. The original sources should be consulted to confirm information. This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office

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6. Supporting SPG Policies

Policy A:

Proposals for community facilities within the area defined as Countryside Around Towns will be considered against the following criteria:

- The impact that the proposal has on local infrastructure;
- The mitigation of potential adverse impacts on biodiversity, landscape, the historical context and any recreational facilities;
- The existing use of the proposed site;
- Whether the proposal provides substantial community benefits.

Justification:

This policy aims to ensure that any development permitted within Countryside Around Towns designated area will significantly benefit the community and provide a new or enhanced service that is required either locally or regionally. Community facilities might encompass the following: education, employment, health and welfare, cultural, sports and recreational services. It should be recognised that employment related to community facilities would have to fit with Policy EP3 a) and that provision of employment does not constitute a 'community facility'

Policy B:

Development proposals with a potentially adverse effect on existing or proposed access and recreational facilities within the Countryside Around Towns designated area will be refused unless there are exceptional reasons and:

- The proposal retains and enhances access or recreational facilities;
- The proposal offers alternative access/recreational facilities that are no less attractive, safe and convenient.

Justification:

The aim of this policy is to prevent development from impacting on the high quality access and recreational space within the designated area. Furthermore, where the proposed development cannot avoid impacting on access or recreational facilities, the proposal must ensure that there are good alternatives provided which are as attractive, safe and convenient for usage by the general public.

Policy C:

Within the Countryside around Towns area, the identification and implementation of measures for the conservation and enhancement for sites and their environs will be an integral part of the evaluation of any proposals. The Council will in addition seek to:

- Identify budgets in partnership for pro-active work in the area, maximising external resources where practicable; Work with specialist implementation agencies such as Borders Forest Trust and Tweed Forum to achieve these objectives;
- Seek to assess and undertake these works within the context of an overall plan for implementation, linked to an Action Plan.

Justification:

This policy aims to ensure that the Countryside Around Towns area provides a valuable resource for the local and wider community through the identification of rural and recreational enhancements. These proposed enhancements should create a more defined sense of place for residents whilst enhancing the local landscape character and habitats and safeguarding the natural and historical features of the area. This would allow for greater contact between people and nature and, in turn, could potentially attract greater numbers of visitors to this special area. The designation will also encourage opportunities for cross sector partnerships, providing a framework which individual projects complement and contribute to the overall aims of Countryside Around Towns policy.

7. Action Plan & Key Monitoring

In order to promote the value of the Countryside Around Towns Policy Area, an Action Plan has been designed to ensure a proactive approach, not only allowing for the protection but enhancement of the identified area. The Action Plan represents Scottish Borders Council's commitment to achieving a working green infrastructure policy that will promote enhancements within this key area in terms of landscape, recreation, agriculture, biodiversity and historical setting.

The production and update of Supplementary Planning Guidance will be reviewed regularly to support policy development within the Local Development Plan. The following actions should be taken in the next five years:

Countryside Around Towns Monitoring:

- Introduce an annual audit of development in the CAT Area, assessing best/worst practice and the successful application of the SPG.

Effective enforcement:

- to ensure that the high quality living environment is protected and enhanced and that this area is not subject to piecemeal development that detracts from the area's outstanding biodiversity, landscape, historical and recreational context;
- to ensure that any development permitted within Countryside Around Towns designated area will significantly benefit the community and provide a new or enhanced service that is required either locally or regionally;
- to prevent development from impacting on the high quality access and recreational space within the designated area;
- to ensure that the Countryside Around Towns area provides a valuable resource for the local and wider community through the identification of rural and recreational enhancements.

Plan of Enhancements:

- Work is already being undertaken regarding Whole Farm Plan Reviews which provides grant opportunities for farms to support public access, wildlife and habitat management and land based skills such as hedge laying and planting. Farms within the Countryside Around Towns area are being encouraged to apply for the funding opportunities to help reinforce the importance of this area in terms of accessibility, biodiversity and landscape.
- Another source of funding to reinforce the positive aspects of the Countryside Around Towns policy has been identified through the promotion of woodlands around towns. This would involve the identification of appropriate areas for new planting, raising the awareness of local landowners to potential funding and assisting with applications for planting.

Part 2: Context to Countryside Around Towns SPG



7. Area Context

7.1 Biodiversity

The habitats within the Central Borders valley are predominantly grassland farmland and associated farm boundaries of a fragmented hedgerow and woodland habitat network with some arable land within this. The land grades into marginal hill ground with acid grassland and scrub habitat and on the Eildon Hills there are areas of heather moor land.

The habitats of highest biodiversity value are within the River Tweed SAC/SSSI and associated riparian semi-natural woodland, including ancient woodland and floodplain habitats associated with the designated site. Other SSSI sites and regionally important (Local Wildlife Sites) woodlands, grasslands and wetlands, including a regionally important network of great crested newt ponds are also found within the Central Borders Corridor. It is important that these priority habitat networks are protected and enhanced through any settlement expansion.



7.2 Historical

The whole Central Borders corridor has a long history of settlement, with evidence of human activity since pre-Roman times. The older parts of the settlements are sited discreetly in the landscape, with newer fringe developments more prominent up the valley sides. Significant historical landmarks such as Melrose Abbey and Newstead Roman fort provide a focus for tourism and there are considerable archaeological remains throughout the area.

There are many important listed buildings both within and out with the settlements, including Abbotsford House and Chiefswood. The surrounding grounds to these two houses are also recorded in the Inventory of Gardens & Designed Landscapes. This highly sensitive landscape is an integral factor in the need to ensure that any settlement expansion does not eclipse the historical importance and recreational qualities of the area.



7.3 Landscape

The Galashiels-Melrose-St Boswells corridor is an upland fringe valley, densely settled with farm land and woods. The Tweed is joined by two tributaries, the Ettrick and the Gala, to create a broad, flat valley, enclosed by the surrounding hills. This valley gradually opens into gentle, wooded hills characteristic of the area around St Boswells. The Eildon Hills are a dominant feature throughout much of this landscape.

According to the *Borders Landscape Assessment*, the following attributes were evaluated:

Positive attributes:

- Clear landform identity
- Visual enclosure by hills
- Woodland
- Harmony of landform
- Views of river/floodplains

Negative attributes:

- Densely settled and development pressure
- Visually sensitive
- Contrast between modern and traditional architecture
- Declining woodland/hedgerows

The area encompasses parts of the Eildon and Leaderfoot National Scenic Area. This designation underlines the scenic importance of the area nationally, containing prominent landforms that are part of the country's natural heritage. Views from within the NSA area and from land out with of it provide a vital context for the settlements contained within this region. The Eildon Hills/Bowhill Area of Great Landscape Value, the River Tweed Special Area of Conservation and several Sites of Special Scientific Interest further highlight the importance of the local countryside.

7.4 Accessibility & Recreation

The Central Borders corridor is a popular destination for walkers, cyclists and horse riders and it has an extensive network of old tracks, disused railway lines and hill walks. Important routes through this area include the Southern Upland Way, St Cuthbert's Way and Borders Abbeys Way. The Four Abbeys Cycle Route and the Tweed Cycle Way also pass through the corridor. The draft Core Path Plan has identified several key access routes within this area.

Golfing and rugby are other popular activities in the Scottish Borders and Melrose Golf Course is located close to the Eildon Hills above the town. Furthermore, the Tweed attracts canoeing and fishing and provides an attractive backdrop for short local walks around the small settlements. The wealth of recreational activities in this area underlines the importance of retaining and enhancing the countryside and ensuring that it remains accessible for locals and visitors to the area.



8. Policy Context

8.1 National Context

In February 2010 the Scottish Government published the document Scottish Planning Policy (SPP). SPP updated a number of Scottish Planning Policies including SPP21: Green Belts.

The SPP section on Green Belts states that the purpose of green belt designation is to

- direct planned growth to the most appropriate locations and support regeneration
- protect and enhance the quality, character, landscape setting and identity of towns and cities, and
- Protect and give access to open space within and around towns and cities

The document states that Green Belt design should provide clarity and certainty on where development will and will not take place. Green Belt designation should be used to direct development to suitable locations, not to prevent development from happening. For towns and cities with a distinct character and identity that could be harmed by unplanned growth, Green Belt designation and relevant policies may help to manage that growth more effectively.

It is also stated that Green Belts can encircle settlements but can also take other forms including buffers, corridors, coastal strips or wedges. Green Belt designation can be used to prevent coalescence, where it would not create a sustainable settlement pattern.

In the context of the Central Borders corridor, a need has been identified to prevent settlement coalescence. This acknowledges the pressure of development focused within this specific area. Policies devised to protect green space, however, should also provide a framework to enhance access to open space and recreational facilities. The Countryside Around Towns policy approach promotes the development of a green infrastructure, ensuring that green space is not made redundant by over-protective policies, but rather that land is developed in meaningful ways to encourage and support local amenities.

8.2 Local Context

The *Scottish Borders Structure Plan* strategy promotes three Development Hubs: a Primary Hub in the Central Borders, an Eastern Hub and a Western Hub. The Primary Hub is the preferred area of growth within the Scottish Borders and incorporates six Central Borders towns including Galashiels, Hawick, Jedburgh, Kelso, Melrose and Selkirk. Housing, retail and employment-generating development will be encouraged throughout the Primary Hub. The Structure Plan anticipated an initial focus on the Galashiels-Melrose-St Boswells corridor due to the concentration of services and facilities within this area.

The *Scottish Borders Consolidated Local Plan* has identified the Central Borders as the location for substantial development to meet the housing requirement. Local Plan Policy EP3 – *Prevention of Settlement Coalescence* is aimed at preventing the merging of these Central Borders settlements. The area identified is the countryside between Darnick and Melrose in need of protection using Policy EP3. This recognises the distinct character and setting of these two settlements. It is stated in the justification for this policy that it is the Council's intention to identify further areas for protection and undertake the development of an open space/greenspace strategy. The Countryside Around Towns strategy now seeks to expand the area, extending it from Galashiels to Newstead. There are a further two key Local Plan policies that are particularly applicable to this study:

- **BE3: Gardens and Designed Landscapes** – this aims to protect the character of historically important sites within the landscape and ensure that development does not damage the integrity of their design and context. This policy protects a number of sites within the CAT area.
- **EP1: National Scenic Areas** – this aims to prevent development that may compromise the scenic qualities of the National Scenic Area. This policy is appropriate because the Central Borders Coalescence Study area encompasses parts of the Eildon and Leaderfoot NSA.

Table 1: Local Plan Policies relating to Policy EP3

Policy	Aim
BE1: <i>Listed Buildings</i>	To protect Listed Buildings from development that would spoil their character and setting.
BE2: <i>Archaeological Sites & Ancient Monuments</i>	To give Scheduled Ancient Monuments and other archaeological/historical sites strong protection from potentially damaging development.
D1: <i>Business, Tourism & Leisure Developments in the Countryside</i>	To allow appropriate employment generating development in the countryside.
D2: <i>Housing in the Countryside</i>	To encourage long term sustainable patterns of appropriate rural housing development.
EP2: <i>Areas of Great Landscape Value</i>	To safeguard landscape quality.
G4: <i>Flooding</i>	To discourage development from taking place in areas that might be subject to flooding.
G8: <i>Development Outwith Development Boundaries</i>	To ensure that most development is contained within Development Boundaries.
NE1: <i>International Nature Conservation Sites</i>	To give wildlife sites of international importance adequate protection from development.
NE2: <i>National Nature Conservation Sites</i>	To prevent development from having an adverse affect on SSSIs.
NE3: <i>Local Biodiversity</i>	To safeguard and enhance local biodiversity.
NE4: <i>Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows</i>	To give protection to the woodland resource and in turn to protect the character of settlements & countryside.