Appendix 2: Central Borders Coalescence Study – Technical Note

1. Introduction

The Central Borders Coalescence Study is an exercise aimed at identifying and protecting areas of undeveloped land between settlements to prevent coalescence from occurring. The aim is to safeguard individual character and ensure the provision of greenspace for the local community.

The *Scottish Borders Structure Plan 2001-2011* identifies the Central Borders as a preferred area of growth, with a specific emphasis on the Galashiels-Melrose-St Boswells corridor. Policy EP3 – *Prevention of Settlement Coalescence* in the *Scottish Borders Finalised Local Plan 2005* has proposed the countryside between Darnick and Melrose as a protected area. This policy also states that it is the intention of the Council to identify further areas that may need to be safeguarded by this policy. The Central Borders Coalescence Study is therefore responding to this objective.

Policy EP3 was objected to at the Local Plan Inquiry and discussed at a hearing on 4th December 2006. In the Reporter's conclusions, he underlined the importance of recognising the separate historical origins of settlements within this area and the need to protect its green and open character. Moreover, he encouraged that further research be undertaken to consider other areas in need of protection. An extension to the policy area was therefore recommended and the resultant modification was accepted by the Reporter as a part of the Reporter's Examination Report on the Finalised Local Plan Amendment in September 2010. The Finalised Local Plan Amendment was considered by the Council on 28 October 2010 and the Reporter's modifications were accepted.

A Scottish Borders Development & Landscape Capacity Study has been carried out for the areas around Galashiels, Melrose, Darnick & Gattonside. This study had four main objectives:

- A landscape character assessment to identify potential areas for housing development
- An analysis of the character areas around settlements
- An identification of key design issues for individual sites
- Landscape guidance to help integrate new development into the wider landscape

The findings from the Development & Landscape Capacity Study have guided and influenced the approach taken by this current project, both through its identification of area where the landscape is considered to be constrained for development and through the proposed landscape enhancements that have been proposed.

2. Policy 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.

Local Plan Policy EP3 – *Prevention of Settlement Coalescence* is aimed at preventing the merging of these Central Borders settlements. Currently, the Local Plan has identified the countryside between Darnick and Melrose as an area in need of protection using Policy EP3. This recognises the distinct character and setting of these two settlements. The study now seeks to expand this area, extending the area from Galashiels to St Boswells (see Map 1). There are two other Local Plan policies that are particularly applicable to this study (see Map 2):

- **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 Abbotsford and Chiefswood within the Central Borders Coalescence Study 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.

Other Local Plan polices applied to this area include:

Table 1: Policy context

Policy	Aim
EP2: *Areas of Great Landscape Value*	To safeguard landscape quality.
G8: *Development Outwith Development Boundaries*	To ensure that most development is contained within Development Boundaries.
NE1: *International Nature Conservation Sites*	To give wildlife sites of international importance adequate protection from development.
NE2: *National Nature Conservation Sites*	To prevent development from having an adverse affect on SSSIs.
NE3: *Local Biodiversity*	To safeguard and enhance local biodiversity.
NE4: *Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows*	To give protection to the woodland

	resource and in turn to protect the character of settlements & countryside.

3. Objectives

The overarching aim of the study is:

- To identify additional areas in the Central Borders to be protected by Policy EP3.

Three further objectives are integral to this study:

1. To protect and enhance the character, landscape and identity of settlements within the Galashiels-Melrose-St Boswells corridor.
2. To provide countryside for recreational purposes, both formal and informal.
3. To direct development to brownfield sites within settlements.

4. Methodology

To determine what areas should be identified for further protection, a survey combining site visits and GIS mapping was undertaken. This study was also influenced by the Scottish Borders Development & Landscape Capacity Study, both in terms of the survey and the long term proposals that this study has identified.

A survey area was identified stretching from Galashiels to St Boswells (please see Map 1). The outer boundary of this area was based on contours lines, using 200m or 250m dependent on the local topography. In areas where this was not possible, other landscape features were used including: tree belts, roads, rivers and steep slopes. A wide survey area was chosen in order to identify the areas in most need of protection.

The survey area was sectioned into grids and numbered (see Map 2 for grid plan). Each of these grids was then marked on the following criteria: Biodiversity, Landscape, Accessibility and Historical value. Scores were then given to each grid reference combining the following information:

1. GIS Mapping

Information provided by the GIS was used to determine the grid scoring. The scoring was based on a series of issues:

Table 2: Biodiversity Criteria

Criteria	**Score**	**Rank**
SAC, SPA, Ramsar, NNR, SSSI LWS	3	High
AWI, Existing Woodland, Borders Grass, GCN Classified Natural Heritage Site, Borders Wetland Inventory, Community woodland, Hedgerow, Open water sites,	2	Medium
SSNWI, LCM 2000 sub-categories: Bog, Calcareous, dwarf shrub heath, open dwarf shrub heath None of the above	1	Low

Existing spatial datasets were used to score the study area based on the presence/absence of features within each survey grid square.

Table 3: Landscape criteria

Criteria	**Score**	**Rank**
AGLV, NSA, Ancient Woodland, Slope >20 degrees	3	High
Landscape Constraints (Alison Grant), TPO, Water Course	2	Medium
None of the above	1	Low

Existing spatial datasets were used to score the study area mainly based on the presence/absence of features within each survey grid square.

Table 4: Recreation/Accessibility criteria

Criteria	**Score**	**Rank**
Core Path >3000m; Cycle Network >7000m; Road Network >6000m	3	High
Core Path 1000-3000m; Cycle Network 1000-7000m; Road Network 1000m-6000m	2	Medium
Core Path <1000m; Cycle Network <1000m; Road Network <1000m	1	Low

Scoring was based on the length of transport route within each grid square.

Table 5: Historical criteria

Criteria	**Score**	**Rank**
SMR >10 sites, HGDL, SAM, Listed Building	3	High
SMR 5-10 sites, within 100m of HGDL, SAM, Listed Building	2	Medium
SMR < 5 sites	1	Low

Presence/absence of features within each survey grid square and proximity to these features was used for scoring. Due to the widespread nature of Archaeological sites (SMR) an overall count within each survey grid square was used.

These marks were then mapped to provide an overall picture of the areas that had been scored within the high quality category. These overall scores were based on the following:

- A high score was given if the overall score was 10 to 12 – this needed at least two of the criteria to receive high scores.

- A medium score was given if the overall score was 8 to 9.
- A low score was given if the overall score was 7 or under.

2. Site surveys

Site visits were also undertaken to check the information provided by the GIS mapping. GIS Mapping was used to identify key issues for each of the criteria. Table 6 lists the information that was used.

Table 6: List of GIS mapping used for each criteria

Biodiversity	**Landscape**	**Accessibility**	**Historical**
Planted areas SSSIs/SACs Woodland Wetlands Hedgerows Land Cover Map 2000	AGLV/NSA Ancient woodland Contours Watercourses TPOs 20% slopes Landscape Capacity Study	Core Path network Road network Cycle network Footpaths Bridleways Golf courses Parks Playing fields	Listed buildings Archaeological remains Designed gardens & landscapes Scheduled Ancient Monuments

3. Input from Countryside & Heritage

Specialists from Countryside & Heritage have also assessed GIS mapping and the scores for each of the criteria and contributed their expert knowledge to the end results.

5. Summary of findings

The results for the survey were as follows:

- 54% of the study area was found to be of a high biodiversity value – see Map 3
- 87% of the study area was found to be of high landscape quality – see Map 4
- 58% of the study area was found to be highly accessible – see Map 5
- 63% of the study area was found to be of a high historical value – see Map 6
- Overall, 51% of the study area was scored as high quality (i.e. the area achieved a high score in all or the majority of the categories) – see Map 7

From the mapped results of this survey, a core area has been identified as being of a particularly high value. This area stretches from Tweedbank to Newstead and incorporates iconic sites such as the Eildons and Abbotsford (see Map 8). It is this core area that provides exceptional open space, good recreational opportunities, is very accessible and is of significant historical importance.

There is a potential to not only preserve but improve this area through the proposed landscape enhancements identified in the Development & Landscape Capacity Studies for Gattonside and Melrose (see Map 9). This could be achieved using one of two policy approaches.

6. Policy approaches

Two approaches could be applied to protect this high quality area. These are:

Countryside Around Towns policy

This would take a holistic approach, preventing housing development over a wide area to protect the high quality landscape and recreational resource. The strategy would incorporate the landscape enhancement proposals and emphasise the importance of this area both locally and nationally for recreation and heritage, as well as the outstanding landscape qualities.

Table 9: SWOT for Countryside Around Towns policy

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Protects a large area of amenity space • Encompasses a significant number of important landmarks (e.g. landscape features, archaeological remains & biodiversity) • Provide greater long-term flexibility to make adjustments in accordance with future plans	• Would need strong justification for boundaries • Larger area weakens defence of more pressured sites • Housing in the Countryside policy would already protect this area
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Holistic approach provides good protection for an important area • Initiate landscape improvements that enhance local area • Provide increasing support for recreation (e.g. walks, cycle routes & heritage tours)	• Found to be too restrictive in areas that need less protection • Boundaries might be challenged • No action taken over landscape enhancements

Green Wedge policy

This would be a site specific approach. It would rely primarily on the areas that were identified as constrained sites in the Development & Landscape Capacity Studies for Gattonside and Melrose. Map 10 demonstrates this option. This policy would emphasise the importance of ensuring the character of settlements is preserved and improved. The policy would also encourage a programme of landscape enhancement proposals that are suggested in the Development & Landscape Capacity Studies.

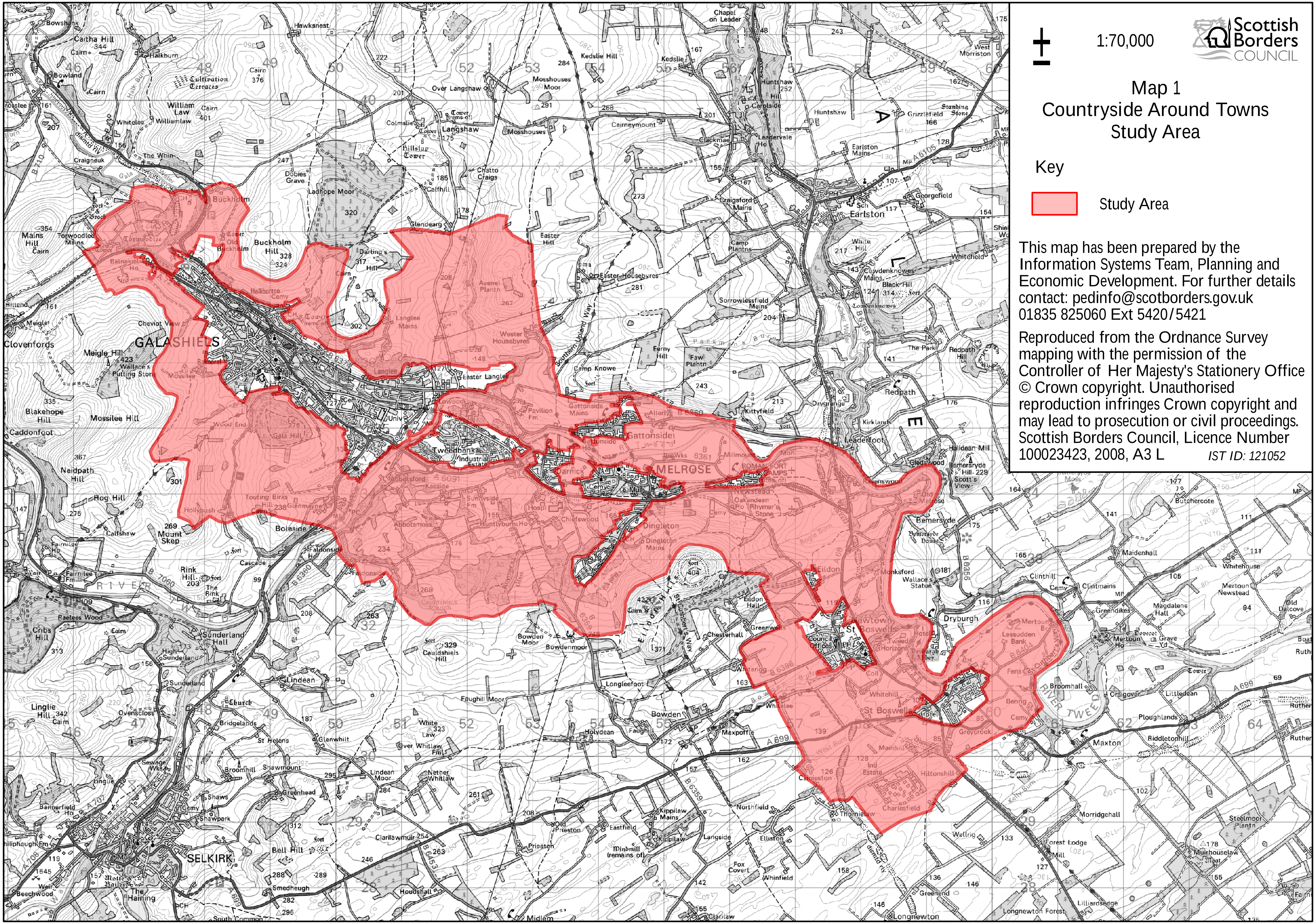
Table 10: SWOT for Green Wedge policy

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Contained sites that have strong constraints • Continues the approach already begun in Local Plan • Landscape Enhancement proposals already concentrate on these sites	• Does not encompass the wider area that has been identified as high quality • Does not fully encompass the landscape designations
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Landscape enhancements could be undertaken • Concentration on areas most at risk of development	• Permitted development close to wedges sites might impact on high quality open space • Restrictive in the areas it can protect

7. Conclusions & recommendation

The Countryside Around Towns policy recognises the sensitivity and importance of the wider context, encompassing the recreational and historic value of the area as well as the iconic landscape and settlement settings. Nevertheless, this policy would need to carefully assess the identified area of protection and ensure that further enhancements were made to the landscape as proposed in the Development & Landscape Capacity Studies. The Green Wedges policy approach recognises the importance of ensuring that settlements do not lose their individual character and setting and could concentrate on sites where development pressure has been identified. It would not, however, protect the wider area from piecemeal development (see Map 11 for planning applications received in this area) and does not fully recognise the importance of the landscape setting for the settlements.

This study recommends that the Countryside Around Towns policy approach is taken. This would underline the importance and sensitivity of the wider area and emphasise the recreational opportunities available for local residents and visitors to the area. The proposed landscape enhancements would need to be undertaken to reinforce this approach and could be one several initiatives which promotes the area as an outstanding location for recreation and heritage. In contrast, the Green Wedge policy approach is primarily a preventative measure aimed at solving a local problem. Whilst it could equally incorporate the landscape enhancement proposals, this approach would not fully recognise the value that the entire area holds locally, regionally and nationally. Furthermore, the identification of green wedges gives less long term flexibility as it is site specific and provides a more limited scope for change in terms of sustainable development and recreational opportunities.



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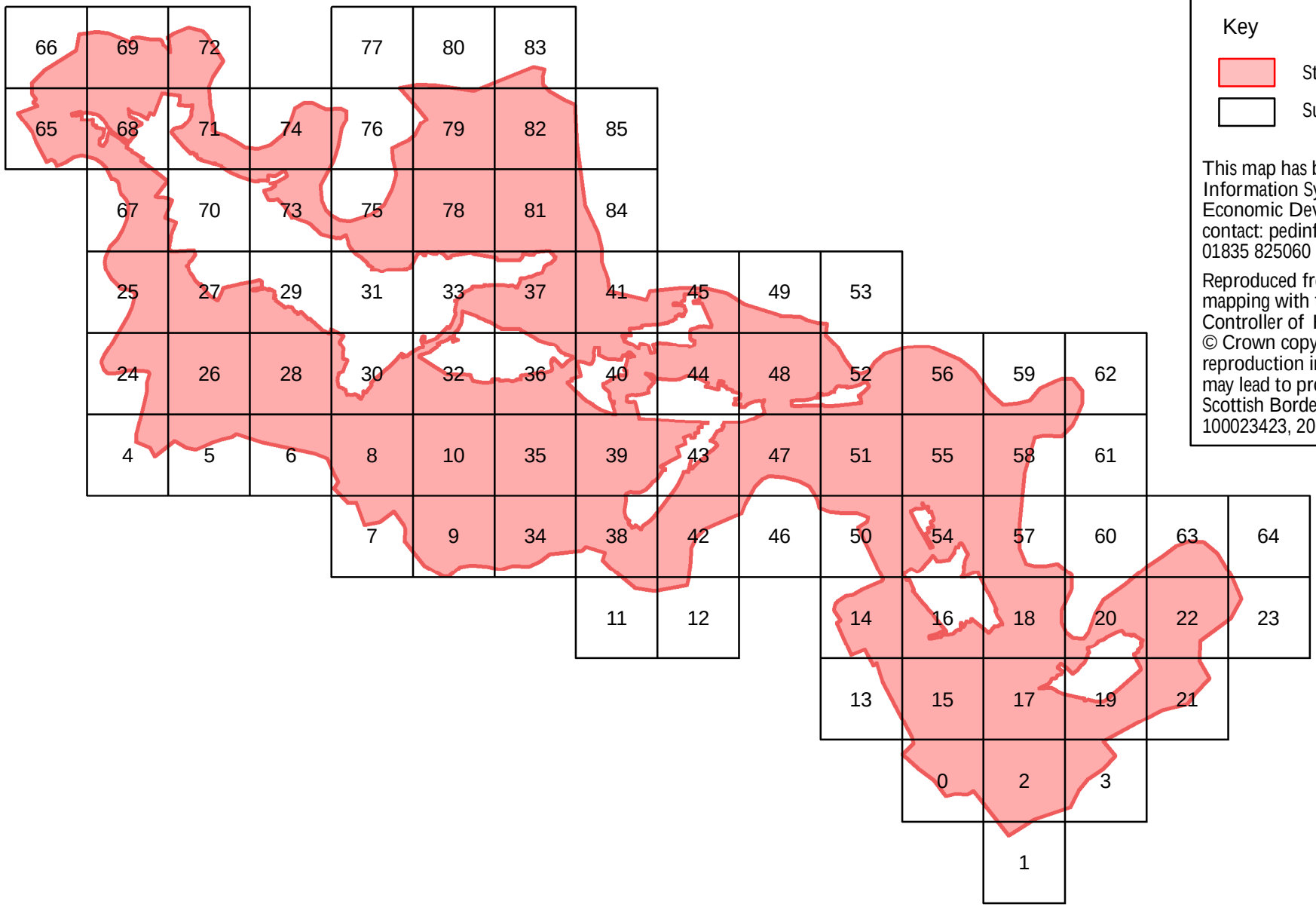
Map 1
Countryside Around Towns Study Area

Key

Study Area

This map has been prepared by the Information Systems Team, Planning and Economic Development. For further details contact: pedinfo@scotborders.gov.uk 01835 825060 Ext 5420/5421

IST ID: 121052



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Map 2
Countryside Around Towns Survey Grid

Key

Study Area

Survey Grid

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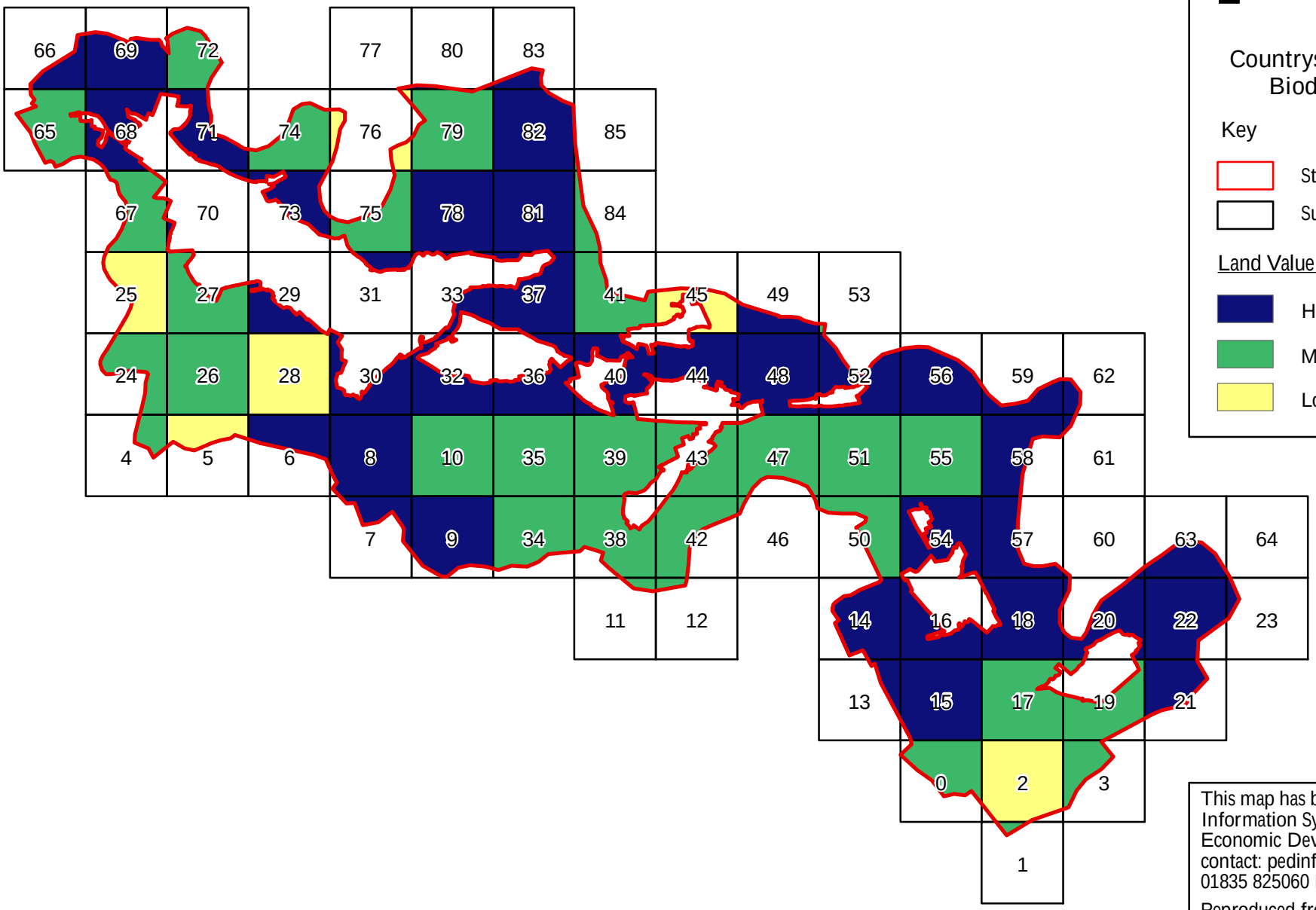

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Map 3
Countryside Around Towns
Biodiversity Results

Key

- Study Area
- Survey Grid

Land Value

- High
- Medium
- Low

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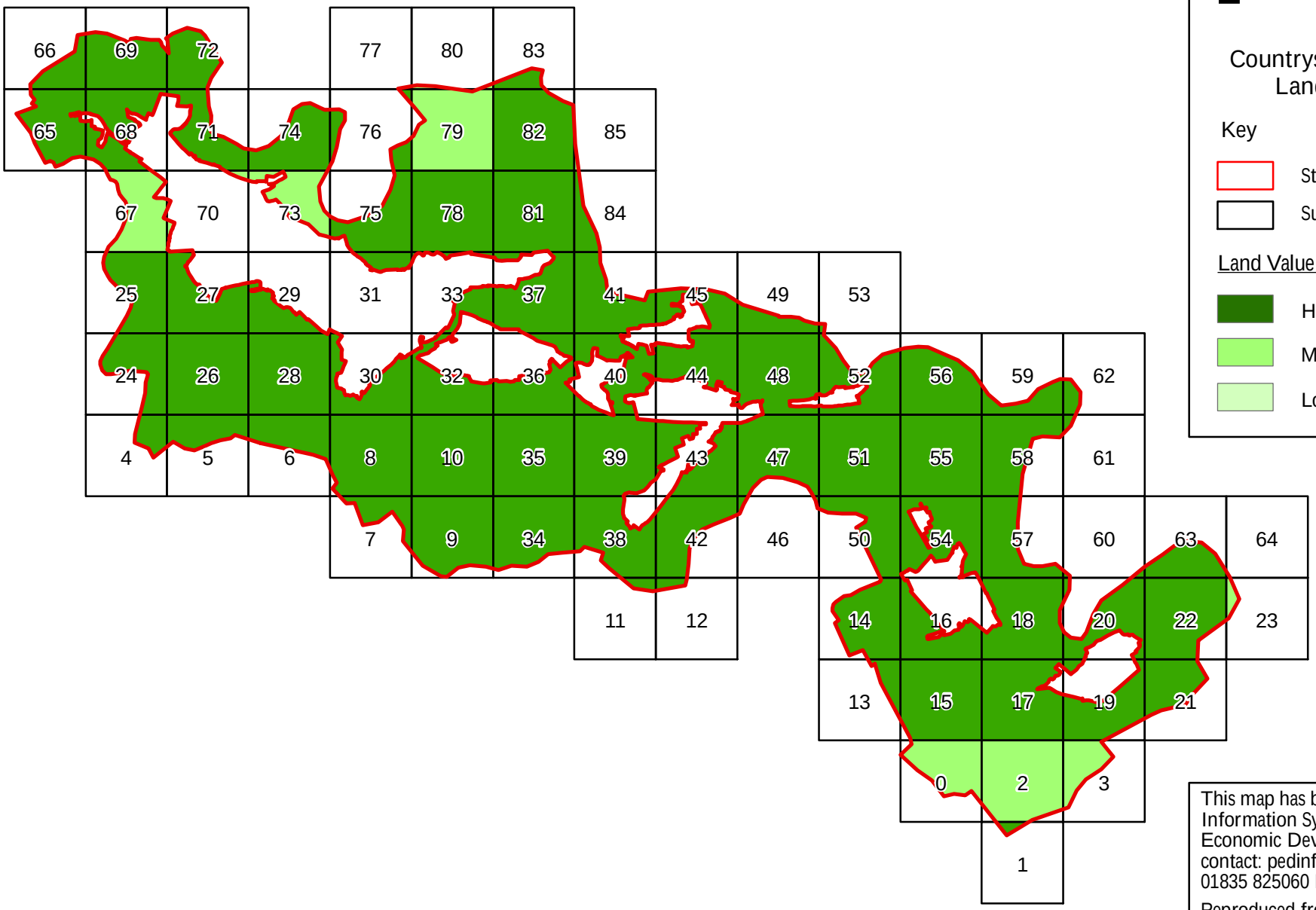
IST ID: 121052



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Map 4
Countryside Around Towns
Landscape Results

Key

- Study Area
- Survey Grid

Land Value

- High
- Medium
- Low

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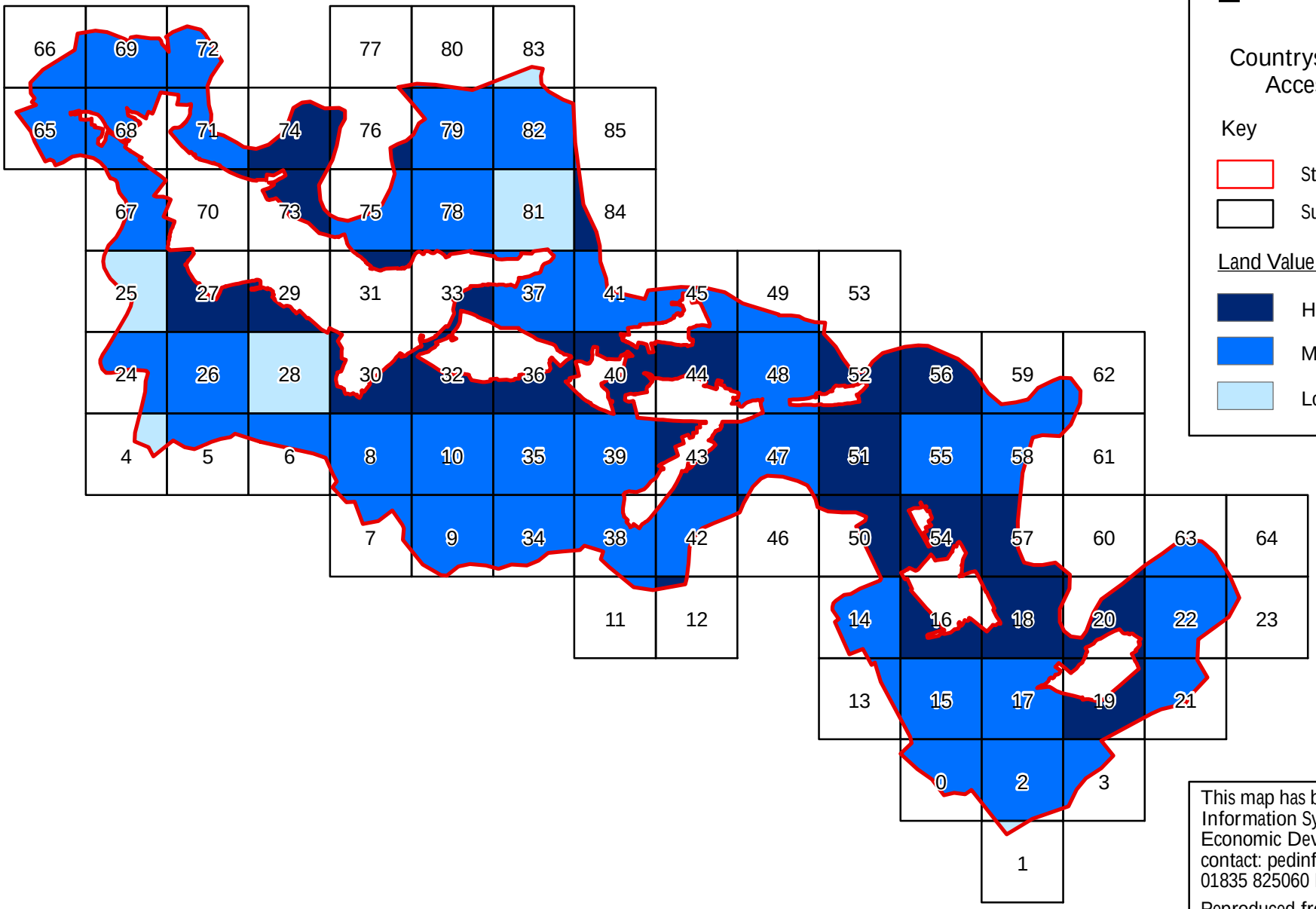
IST ID: 121052



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Map 5
Countryside Around Towns Accessibility Results

Key

- Study Area
- Survey Grid

Land Value

- High
- Medium
- Low

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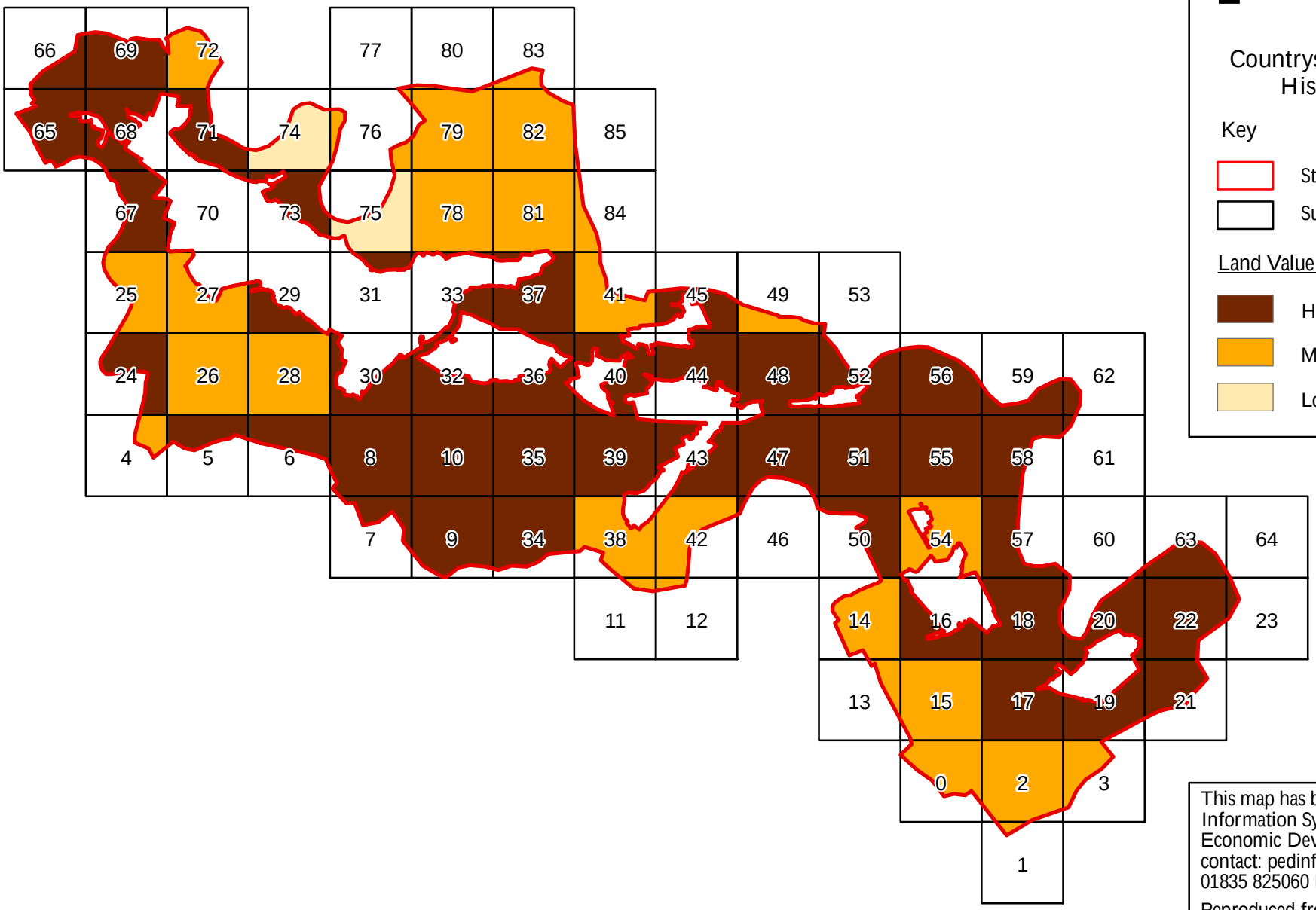
IST ID: 121052



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Map 6
Countryside Around Towns
Historical Results

Key

- Study Area
- Survey Grid

Land Value

- High
- Medium
- Low

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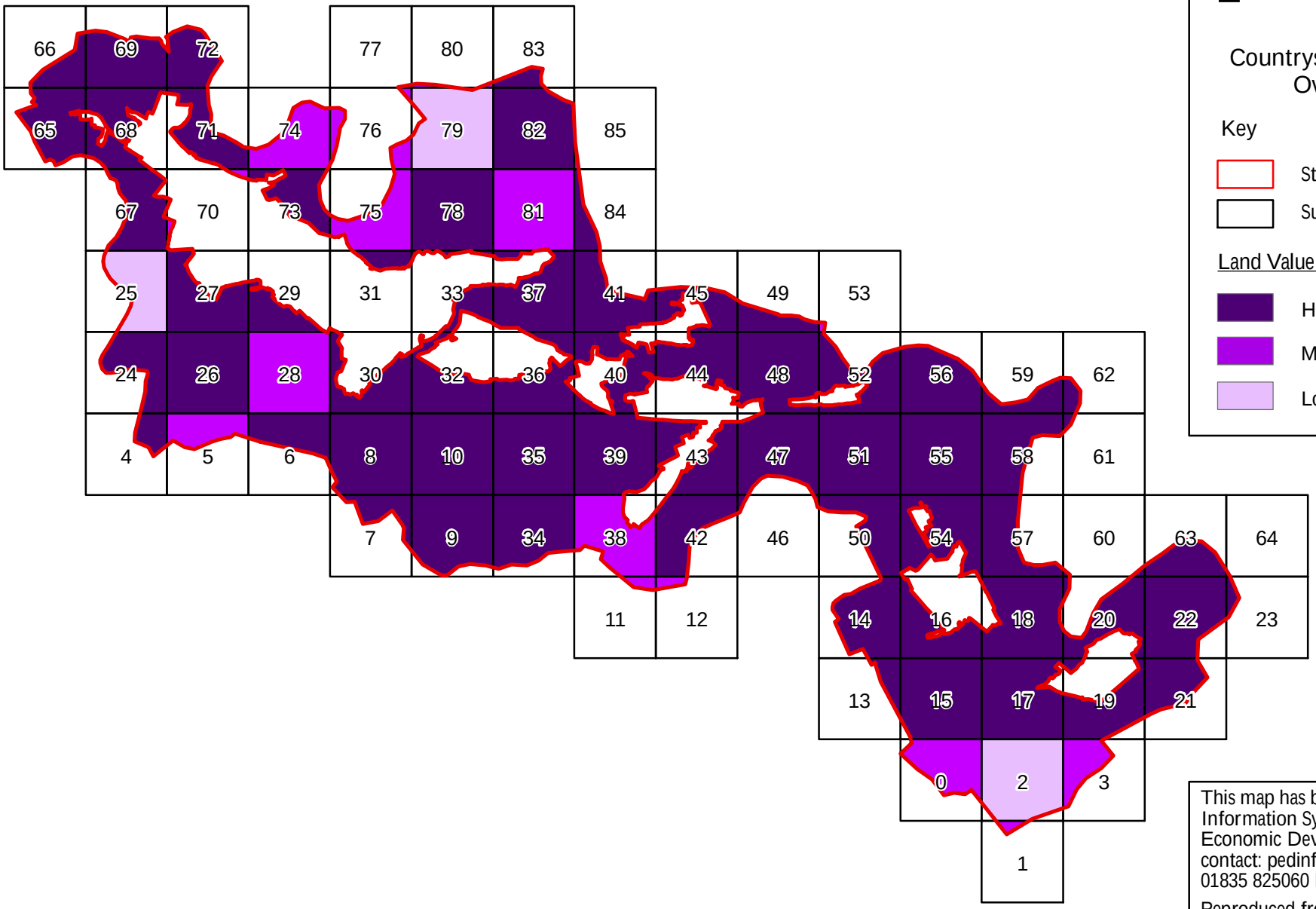
IST ID: 121052



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Map 7
Countryside Around Towns
Overall Results

Key

- Study Area
- Survey Grid

Land Value

- High
- Medium
- Low

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