A96 DUALLING
INVERNESS TO NAIRN
(incl. Nairn Bypass)

A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass)

Environmental Statement

Non-Technical Summary

November 2016

TRANSPORT SCOTLAND
CÒMHDHAIL ALBA

Non-Technical Summary

Preface

This document is the Non-Technical Summary (NTS) of the Environmental Statement for the A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass). Copies of the Environmental Statement and the draft Road Orders are available to view during normal opening hours at the following locations:

Transport Scotland
9th Floor
Buchanan House
58 Port Dundas Road
Glasgow
G4 0HF

Telephone: 0141 272 7100

Ardersier Library and Service Point
Old School
Station Road
Ardersier
IV2 7SU

Tel: 01667 462658

Culloden Library
Keppoch Road
Culloden
Inverness
IV2 7LL

Tel: 01463 792531

Inshes Library
Inshes Road
Inverness
IV2 3RF

Tel: 01463 725928

Inverness Library
Farraline Park
Inverness
IV1 1NH

Tel: 01463 236463

Nairn Library
68 High Street
Nairn
IV12 4BS

Tel: 01667 458506

The Highland Council
ePlanning Centre
Glenurquhart Road
Inverness
IV3 5NX

Tel: 01349 886606

The Highland Council
Nairn Service Point
The Court House
High Street
Nairn
IV12 4AU

Tel: 01667 458570

The Highland Council
Planning and Building Standards
2nd Floor
Kintail House
Beechwood Business Park
Inverness
IV2 3BW

Tel: 01349 886608

The Environmental Statement (including this NTS) and draft Road Orders may also be viewed online at: www.transport.gov.scot/project/a96-inverness-nairn-including-nairn-bypass.

A bound paper copy of the Environmental Statement may be purchased at a cost of £250 or in DVD format at a cost of £10 by writing to Transport Scotland at the address above. Copies of the NTS are available free of charge from the same address.

Any person wishing to make representation on the Environmental Statement should write to Transport Scotland at the address above. Formal representations are invited until 31 January 2017.

Background

This document is the Non-Technical Summary (NTS) of the Environmental Statement (ES) for the A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) project. The project is promoted by Transport Scotland, an Executive Agency of the Scottish Government.

The A96 Aberdeen – Inverness Trunk Road forms a strategic link in Scotland's Transport Network, linking Aberdeen with Inverness, and is vital in supporting the growth and development of the economy in the north and north east of Scotland. Currently the existing A96 consists mostly of single carriageway with some overtaking lanes and sections of dual carriageway at the western and eastern ends of the road. The need for dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn, and the need for a bypass of Nairn, has long been recognised, with an ongoing Scottish Government commitment outlined in the Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) published in 2008.

The STPR proposals included the upgrade of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn to dual carriageway, and a bypass of Nairn. In 2011 the Scottish Government, through the Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) announced the commitment to dual the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030. Both the STPR and wider A96 dualling programme have been subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) which included the consideration of overall constraints, environmental sensitivities and opportunities for enhancement.

The A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) (hereafter referred to as the proposed Scheme) is illustrated in Figures 1-17 of this NTS. The proposed Scheme comprises the provision of approximately 31km of new dual carriageway to be constructed on a new route away from the existing A96. The existing A96 will be de-trunked and reclassified as a local road to maintain local access as appropriate. The proposed Scheme also incorporates:

- the provision of a shared use path suitable for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians (referred to in the ES as Non-Motorised Users or NMUs), approximately 30km in total length;
- six grade-separated junctions, which do not disrupt the traffic flow on the main dual carriageway;
- Twenty five principal structures including a crossing of the River Nairn and three structures over the Aberdeen to Inverness Railway Line;
- Twenty four new culverts where the proposed Scheme crosses local watercourses;
- local road diversions and the provision of new private means of access; and
- utility diversions including major diversions for Scottish Gas Networks and CLH Pipeline Systems.

The proposed Scheme will be submitted for authorisation through the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984. Once approved, the overall construction duration of the proposed Scheme is anticipated to be three to four years, although it may be possible to deliver the project in phases within the overall construction duration.

The Scottish Government has given a commitment to complete the full dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030.

A96 at Nairn

Environmental Impact Assessment

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the proposed Scheme is required under European and Scottish legislation. The ES reports the findings of the EIA work carried out on the proposed Scheme.

The purpose of the EIA is to investigate the likely significant impacts of the proposed Scheme on the biological, physical and historical environment, as well as on members of the public and on current or planned future use of the environment. This NTS presents a summary of the ES, including key aspects of the proposed Scheme and the associated beneficial and adverse impacts considered to be of particular importance.

Further details about the likely significant impacts of the proposed Scheme can be found within the full text of the ES. The ES documents have been subdivided into the following four Volumes for ease of use:

- NTS;
- Volume 1: Main Report;
- Volume 2: Technical Appendices; and
- Volume 3: Figures.

The EIA process provides a valuable opportunity to reduce potential environmental impacts through design refinement and has been undertaken as an integral part of the design process. Environmental constraints and issues were identified through consultation, extensive environmental surveys and technical assessments. The information gathered has informed decision-making throughout the design process, providing opportunities to address potentially significant impacts at an early stage, for example by refinement of route alignment or by the incorporation of mitigation measures into the proposed Scheme design.

Impacts have been assessed by comparing the existing situation (the baseline conditions) to the conditions that would occur with the proposed Scheme in place.

Looking east from Inverness towards Nairn

Need for the Scheme

The need for the proposed Scheme has been identified across a number of studies, primarily the STPR (2008), which sets out the Scottish Government's 29 transport investment priorities over the period to 2032. The review sets out a series of transport interventions that included upgrading the A96 between Inverness and Nairn to dual carriageway and targeted road congestion/environmental relief schemes including a bypass of Nairn. This was further considered in the IIP (2011), which commits to dualling of the A96 between Aberdeen and Inverness by 2030.

Scheme Objectives

The objectives for the proposed Scheme are:

- To improve the operation of the A96 and inter-urban connectivity;
- To improve safety for motorised and non-motorised users;
- To provide opportunities to grow the regional economies in the corridor;
- To facilitate active travel in the corridor;
- To facilitate integration with public transport facilities; and
- To minimise the environmental effect on the communities in the corridor.

Of particular relevance to the EIA process is the objective to minimise the environmental impacts on the communities located within the corridor of the proposed Scheme. This objective is addressed through the inclusion, within the proposed Scheme, of the appropriate measures to avoid and/or reduce impacts.

Alternatives Considered

An assessment of route options commenced in 2010 in relation to the proposed Scheme. A number of feasible route options requiring further investigation were presented for public exhibition in February 2012, following which, the route options were re-assessed and additional options developed.

Engineering, environmental, traffic and economic assessments were used to assess the route options being considered and the preferred option was presented to the public in 2014.

Since publication of the preferred option, the identified route has been subject to ongoing design development informed by a range of considerations, including landowner and other stakeholder consultations, as well as the EIA.

The Proposed Scheme

The road design and alignment which have been developed for the proposed Scheme form an outline design. This outline design would be used by the selected future contractor to prepare a detailed design for construction of the proposed Scheme.

The proposed Scheme comprises approximately 31km of new dual carriageway which starts approximately 850m east of Raigmore Interchange and continues in a north-easterly direction to Hardmuir, 3.5km to the east of Auldearn, where it connects with the existing A96 single carriageway.

The proposed Scheme is illustrated in Figures 1-17 of this NTS.

Access to the proposed Scheme would be by six new grade-separated junctions, which do not disrupt the flow on the main dual carriageway. These junctions are proposed at Smithton, Balloch, Mid Coul, Brackley, Nairn West and Nairn East. Side roads would be upgraded, as necessary, to provide access to the existing road network, and to the proposed Scheme, via the new junctions.

On completion of the proposed Scheme, sections of the existing A96 would be de-trunked and reclassified as a local road to maintain local access as required.

Existing single carriageway section of the A96 near Seafield

Facilities for NMUs are an integral feature of the proposed Scheme, with provision of improved access and safer crossings for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians. Proposed facilities include approximately 30km of new shared use path, with various links and accesses being provided to facilitate movement.

A number of new structures and culverts (not including the grade-separated junctions) would be required at certain locations and watercourse crossings, including the River Nairn, as part of the proposed Scheme.

The elevation of the proposed Scheme varies along the route with the majority of sections on embankments, some sections in cuttings and other sections closer to the existing ground level. Engineering and environmental constraints have dictated the heights of the embankments in each location.

The drainage design for the proposed Scheme has been developed in accordance with Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) guidance and through consultation with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), which is the regulator for flood risk and activities that may impact the water environment, and The Highland Council.

Delivering the Proposals

The ES presents the results of the EIA of the proposed Scheme. The design of the project may be refined through a Design and Build delivery model by a contractor that will be selected by Transport Scotland. The contractor that delivers the proposed Scheme must meet the requirements of the EIA documented in the ES. Should the contractor refine the design which has been assessed by this EIA, then an environmental review of those refinements will be undertaken to assess whether the residual impacts of the refinement could be greater than those reported in the ES, and as such if additional mitigation is required.

Construction is subject to completion of the statutory process, however, for the purpose of the EIA it has been assumed that 2019 would be the earliest that construction would commence.

Consultation and Scoping

As part of the design development and assessment process, a comprehensive consultation exercise was carried out with approximately 38 organisations including The Highland Council, Historic Environment Scotland (HES), SEPA and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). In addition, potentially affected landowners were also consulted.

Public exhibitions and other information events were held in November 2013, October 2014, August 2015 and February 2016 as part of a programme of ongoing public engagement and consultation for the A96 Dualling. There has also been ongoing EIA Consultation via an Environmental Steering Group, Community Councils Forum and NMU Forum.

The project team has worked closely with all the key stakeholders to develop a proposed Scheme that aims to reduce the overall environmental impact by avoiding sensitive features through careful design. Stakeholder feedback was reviewed by the project team and incorporated into the assessment and design process where appropriate.

Impacts of the Proposed Scheme

The following sections summarise the likely significant impacts of the proposed Scheme on the environment including details of relevant mitigation measures. Full details of each assessment and the associated findings of the EIA are presented in the ES (Volume 1: Main Report).

Air Quality

Air quality modelling has been undertaken to determine the potential for changes to air quality as a result of the proposed Scheme, and any related impacts on local communities or designated ecological sites.

Air quality across the area where the proposed Scheme is located has been identified by The Highland Council as good and is primarily characterised by the emissions from current levels of road traffic.

The assessment for the proposed Scheme used air quality monitoring and modelling to consider the following pollutants emitted from vehicles: nitrogen oxides, nitrogen dioxide and fine particulate matter. Modelling was used to predict pollutant concentrations at the year of the proposed Scheme opening. A regional air quality assessment was also undertaken for the year of opening and 15 years after opening. The potential for air quality impacts during construction was also considered.

With the implementation of appropriate dust control measures, the construction phase of the proposed Scheme is not predicted to cause any significant impacts.

The operational phase assessment concluded that the proposed Scheme would result in an improvement in air quality at a number of receptors within Nairn and along the existing A96, as traffic is moved away from these receptors. The assessment also indicated that there would be minor worsening for some receptors located closer to the proposed Scheme, in areas which are currently remote from the existing A96. No impacts on ecological designated sites have been identified.

Overall there are no significant local air quality impacts during the operation of the proposed Scheme, with more receptors receiving an improvement in air quality than those which experience a worsening.

Noise and Vibration

The existing A96 begins to the east of Inverness and passes through the town of Nairn and other small villages, in a generally rural situation. Therefore the current noise environment is largely dominated by road traffic noise from the existing A96 and connecting side roads.

The noise assessment for the proposed Scheme used noise monitoring and modelling to identify potential noise and vibration impacts associated with the proposed Scheme from both construction and operation. Representative receptors included residential properties and other sensitive locations (e.g. schools and hospitals) which were identified and used for the modelling.

Potential for significant short-term noise and vibration impacts during construction is predicted for a number of the properties closest to the proposed Scheme, particularly during noisier activities such as the earthworks and carriageway surfacing phases. However, given that much of the construction work would be conducted at a number of different temporary locations along the new road alignment, the duration of impacts for the majority of receptors would be restricted to limited periods when construction is closest to these properties. Mitigation measures would be implemented to further reduce construction phase impacts, such as a proactive approach to community liaison, implementation of best practice and an appropriate mitigation strategy.

Baseline noise monitoring

There will be increased levels of traffic noise for residential properties, which are currently remote from the existing A96, but would be in closer proximity to the new dual carriageway. There will also be decreased levels of traffic noise levels for a number of receptors within Nairn and along the existing A96, as traffic flow is moved away from receptors.

The proposed Scheme includes measures to mitigate identified noise impacts such as, for example, low noise road surfacing on the dual carriageway, screening through design of the proposed Scheme earthworks and installation of noise barriers. Specific mitigation has been considered for those properties which are predicted to experience significant noise increases.

Following mitigation, immediately after opening, out of the 8,187 receptors modelled, there are predicted to be 2,522 dwellings that would experience an increase in noise level of at least 1 decibel and 2,826 dwellings that would experience a decrease in noise level of at least 1 decibel.

Landscape

The proposed Scheme is located in a landscape that is predominantly rural, characterised by the low coastal plateau of the Moray Firth which is backed by rolling hills. Areas of forestry, woodland and open farmland are cut through by the wooded River Nairn valley. Settlement is concentrated around Inverness and the coastal town of Nairn. The terrain typically slopes in a northerly direction and is characterised by floodplains, moss lands and undulating hillsides. There are no national or regional landscape designations identified within the immediate area. Land use in the area is primarily agriculture with a number of small settlements.

Potential impacts include changes to the landscape pattern and character and which have been assessed. The main changes that would occur would result from the introduction of proposed embankments and cuttings and from the loss of mature or established planting.

Mitigation measures to integrate the proposed Scheme into the landscape include careful alignment and grading out and sensitive profiling of embankments to reflect the local topography. Planting measures will improve the fit within the surrounding landscape, enhance the local landscape character and biodiversity, whilst reducing the impact of the proposed Scheme over time as vegetation establishes.

Once all the mitigation planting has been established, there are predicted to still be residual significant direct effects for four of the thirteen Local Landscape Character Areas identified in the study. There would be no residual effects to any locally designated landscapes in the study area.

Visual

The visual assessment considered the degree of anticipated change that the proposed Scheme would have on local receptors such as houses, footpaths and outdoor spaces.

The gentle rolling topography and scattered mature woodland landscape would limit visual impacts of the proposed Scheme for much of the route corridor. Impacts would be further limited in some locations as the proposed Scheme would be visible in close proximity to the existing A96, so the new dual carriageway would effectively create similar views to those that are experienced currently on the existing A96.

The most significant impacts would occur as a result of the realignment of the proposed Scheme to the south of Nairn and across the farmland to the north of Auldearn as this would result in the introduction of a new transport corridor to the largely undeveloped rolling farmland of these areas.

The design includes measures such as planting to screen views of the proposed Scheme and to replace areas of woodland if removed during construction. The landscape design also considered views of the surrounding area experienced by drivers on the existing A96, including opportunities to maintain or enhance open views. The landscape and visual planting proposals are illustrated on Figures 1-17 of this NTS.

View from Gollanfield Road towards the existing A96

Visual impacts of the proposed Scheme include views of new structures, traffic and moving headlights. Approximately half of the built receptors (e.g. houses) assessed would experience a significant visual impact in the winter year of opening, before the mitigation measures such as planting have been fully established. In the long-term, when all mitigation would be fully established, the number of built receptors experiencing a significant visual impact would be reduced by half.

For the outdoor receptors assessed, comprising roads, rail, paths, cycle route and recreational locations, approximately half would experience a significant visual impact in the winter year of opening. In the long-term when all mitigation would be fully established, the number of outdoor

receptors experiencing significant visual impact would be reduced by a third.

Habitats and Biodiversity

The assessment considered the potential impacts associated with the construction and operational phases of the proposed Scheme on terrestrial and aquatic species, habitats and ecosystems. There are four statutory designated sites within the study area. These are:

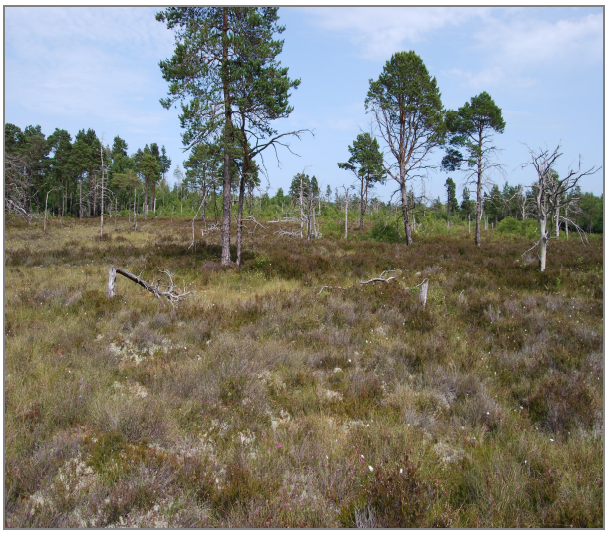
- Inner Moray Firth Special Protection Area (SPA);
- Loch Flemington SPA;
- Longman and Castle Stuart Bays Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); and
- Kildrummie Kames SSSI.

Arable land and other types of farmland comprise the main habitat types within the area together with smaller areas of semi-natural habitats represented by woodland, scrub, marshy grassland, wet heath and aquatic habitats. Some of these are valuable habitat supporting protected species, including; badgers, breeding and wintering birds, otter, water vole, bats, pine martin, reptiles and red squirrel. A number of specialist field based surveys were undertaken to assist in determining the presence and status of these habitats and species.

Potential impacts on habitats and biodiversity that have been identified in relation to the introduction of the dual carriageway include the direct loss of habitat (e.g. tree removal) and the prevention of easy movement of species between different areas. During construction there is also a potential for disturbance and pollution risk. Proposed mitigation measures to reduce or offset potential impacts on habitats and biodiversity include:

- creation/enhancement of habitats through replacement planting, and maintenance of existing habitats;
- provision of bat boxes and replacement badger setts;
- appropriate fencing to prevent mammal access to the dual carriageway;
- provision of ledges in culverts, separate dry mammal underpasses and an enhanced overbridge at Hardmuir to allow easy movement for species between habitats;
- the presence of an Ecological Clerk of Works on site during construction to ensure the implementation of mitigation; and
- development of species and habitat protection plans.

The provision of the mitigation measures means that there are no significant residual adverse impacts on habitats and species, once the measures have become established. Significant positive residual impacts are anticipated with increased safe permeability of the A96 for species, which is predicted to lead to a decrease in wildlife vehicle incidents and therefore a reduction in road related mortality.



Example raised bog habitat at Blar nam Fiadh

Geology, Contaminated Land and Groundwater

The assessment looked at the geology, groundwater and contaminated land assessment associated with the construction and operational phases of the proposed Scheme.

The proposed Scheme is underlain by several types of soil and other material, comprising peat, clay, silt, sand, gravel, and glacial till. Areas of peat have been identified, including within the Kildrummie Kames SSSI and Blar nam Fiadh (a raised bog remnant). The solid geology (rock) underlying the proposed Scheme generally comprises sandstone. A number of groundwater abstractions were identified during the assessment, not all of which are currently active.

Kildrummie Kames SSSI and Blar nam Fiadh have been identified as partially fed by groundwater. However no habitats that rely on groundwater supply (known as Groundwater Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems) have been identified.

Potential impacts are associated with dewatering, accidental spillages and leakages, contaminated runoff and the excavation and management of peat and/or lands contaminated from previous land uses.

The previous land uses include backfilled quarries; former landfills and former mining and industrial

facilities. The potential contamination caused by these use may require specific measures to be taken by the contractor during construction.

Taking into account the measures proposed to reduce impacts no significant residual impacts on contaminated land have been identified.

A series of mitigation measures have been proposed including: development of a Peat Management Plan, adhering to SEPA guidance, and monitoring of groundwater and groundwater abstractions. Overall, with the implementation of these mitigation measures, no significant residual effects on geology and groundwater are anticipated.

Road Drainage and the Water Environment

Several environmentally sensitive watercourses could potentially be impacted by the proposed Scheme. The assessment looked at impacts of the proposed Scheme on these watercourses and the surface water environment including flood risk.

All of the watercourses identified and that receive flow from the existing A96, eventually flow into the Moray Firth, which has a number of key ecological designations. The proposed Scheme would result in a requirement to extend existing culverts (which carry water under the road) as well as creating new culverts and watercourse crossings including a crossing over the River Nairn.

River Nairn looking downstream in vicinity of the proposed crossing point

Potential impacts include the effect of increasing the area of water impermeable surfaces leading to increased runoff, changes in the flow of water and movement of sediments within watercourses, the potential for increased flood risk and susceptibility to flood damage, the potential for contaminated runoff, particularly contaminated silt from the road, and an increased risk of fine sediments and accidental spillages.

Measures that would be implemented to reduce the potential for adverse impacts on the surface water environment and flood risk include:

- best practice construction and pollution control measures during construction, including temporary SUDS;
- surface water quality monitoring during construction;
- provision of compensatory flood storage from adjacent lands when the proposed Scheme is in use; and
- implementation of SUDS when the proposed Scheme is in use.

Following the implementation of mitigation measures, the majority of residual impacts during construction are assessed as 'not significant'. The exception are adverse impacts which may arise should a potential pollution incident occur within some watercourses. The potential for these residual impacts would not continue beyond the construction phase, during which mitigation would be applied to reduce the potential for such an incident to occur.

The proposed Scheme includes measures to reduce adverse impacts during the operational phase. These will include SUDS features to provide filtering of water and storage basins or ponds to treat runoff before it reaches watercourses via the drainage system. With the inclusion of the proposed drainage system no significant residual operational impacts have been identified.

Cultural Heritage

Over 300 cultural heritage assets including Scheduled Monuments, archaeological remains, historic buildings and historic landscapes (including Auldearn Battlefield), dating from the Mesolithic period to the recent past were identified by the assessment.

Potential impacts, in relation to the proposed Scheme, were identified in relation to aspects such as changes to the setting of cultural heritage sites, or the requirement to remove known and potential buried archaeological remains.

Through the design process, and in consultation with HES and The Highland Council's Historic Environment Team, the proposed Scheme has

been positioned to avoid any direct impacts on Scheduled Monuments.

To mitigate potential impacts, a programme of archaeological evaluation comprising trial trenching is proposed. Based on the results of the archaeological trial trenching, archaeological mitigation excavations will be undertaken, along with a programme of earthwork survey and historic building recording in advance of, or during, construction. The landscape planting mitigation proposed would also help to reduce potential impacts on the settings of cultural heritage assets.

Isle View Ring Cairn, approximately 800m east of Allanfearn taken from the north

It is predicted that the presence of the new dual carriageway will affect the views and setting of two assets, namely the Isle View Ring Cairn Scheduled Monument and the Auldearn Battlefield. These are indirect significant impacts, although proposed landscape mitigation will be designed to help soften the impact of the proposed Scheme on these views.

Community and Private Assets

The main settlements along the section of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn are Inverness, Smithton, Culloden, Balloch, Nairn and Auldearn. The study area contains land used for agricultural, forestry, residential, commercial, community, development and recreational purposes. The majority of residential properties, commercial premises and community facilities in the study area are located in the settlements of Inverness and Nairn.

The proposed Scheme requires approximately 409 hectares of land-take. The impact and significance of land-take has been evaluated in the context of each land use type. Where land-take is required, landowners would be compensated financially in accordance with relevant legislation.

With the proposed Scheme in place, there would be changes to access routes for some properties. Significant residual impacts were identified for nine properties/establishments as a result of access changes and the length of the resulting diversion required with the proposed Scheme in place. However, it is considered that the new routes would be significantly safer than the existing accesses directly off the existing A96.

It is anticipated that local businesses and those in the wider region of the Highlands will benefit from improvements in safety and journey time as a result of the proposed Scheme, although there is potential for temporary impacts during construction on access and customer amenity for the businesses which were evaluated.

Following the implementation of mitigation (e.g. roadside signage), the viability of the assessed businesses would be not be impacted, as the businesses would be able to operate in a manner similar to, or the same as, that which they currently operate. The impact on agricultural operations was assessed. Significant adverse impacts were identified for some operations but for the majority of these, the overall future viability would not be impacted.

The assessment also considers the potential for future development in the area. The proposed Scheme is not considered to materially affect current planning applications or strategic development zones, though it is recognised that the development zones may benefit from improvements in A96 safety and journey times.

Agricultural land in the vicinity of Boath House

The development of the proposed Scheme has sought to avoid sensitive land and buildings.

Additional measures to reduce potential impacts identified include, reinstatement of access and measures such as signage for diversions to reduce disturbance during the construction period.

All Travellers

Potential impacts of the proposed Scheme on NMUs were assessed. This considered changes to journey lengths and amenity value, and access to the outdoors and public transport. The assessment took into account elements of the design such as the new shared use path, which forms part of the proposed Scheme.

The existing A96 provides limited connectivity along its route for cyclists and pedestrians (NMUs). There are minimal controlled crossings of the trunk road and these are primarily located within Nairn. A number of public transport stops exist along the existing A96, although access to the stops is poor.

With the proposed Scheme in place, significant beneficial impacts for pedestrians and cyclists have been identified in the assessment, with the provision of the shared use path for NMUs between Inverness and Nairn. The total length of the shared use path is approximately 30km. This includes the route between Inverness and Nairn as well as provision at junctions, NMU underpasses, connections to bus stops and links to the existing path network. There are no at-grade crossings of the dual carriageway. Crossings are provided at grade-separated junctions or NMU specific underpasses. Lighting provided at the grade-separated junctions will assist NMUs to navigate through the junctions and NMU underpasses will also be provided with lighting. In addition, landscaping plans have sought to enhance the amenity value of the shared use path wherever possible.

From an equestrian perspective a slight beneficial effect is predicted as the new shared use path would provide safe crossings of the trunk road, which is not currently experienced. Overall, residual impacts of the proposed Scheme on NMUs during operation are considered to be beneficial.

This assessment also considered vehicle travellers in relation to changes to views from the road. For the most part, the views from the proposed Scheme are broadly similar in nature to the views currently experienced on the existing A96, which are mainly views over agricultural land and woodland, with longer distance views to the Black Isle and the Moray Firth. However, whereas the existing A96 passes through the town of Nairn, the proposed Scheme passes to the south of the settlement through farmland. Overall, vehicle travellers would experience an improvement in views from the proposed Scheme in comparison to the views experienced from the existing A96.

For vehicle travellers, driver stress on the existing A96 can be caused by frustration, fear of a potential accident and route uncertainty given congestion and limited overtaking opportunities. Given the limited carrying capacity of the existing A96, there is also the potential for drivers to currently feel frustrated, particularly during peak times. With the proposed Scheme in place driver stress is expected to reduce with the proposed Scheme providing for improved safety, a reduction in congestion and improved connectivity between Inverness and the communities to the east.

Materials

Significant earthworks are required to construct the proposed Scheme, which requires large volumes of imported material to support the construction of the embankments. The potential impacts associated with these activities during the construction of the proposed Scheme were considered in this assessment.

By applying key material and waste management principles, the impacts on natural resources and need for permanent disposal of wastes will be reduced. In particular, this would be achieved by maximising the re-use of existing soils and infrastructure, taking into consideration the environmental impacts of products during their purchase, and maximising the volume of materials which can be sourced locally.

Ground investigation works for the scheme

Potential impacts will also be managed and reduced through the development and application of management plans addressing different aspects of construction site management. With these management principles and plans in place, the

potential for impacts relating to the management of natural resources and waste by the appointed contractor is considered not to be significant.

The magnitude of the Scheme's carbon emissions associated with construction and operation was estimated to be major. However, essential road infrastructure of this scale would be expected to require large amounts of material to be constructed and the emissions estimation is comparable with other similar scale infrastructure projects. Appropriate material and waste management principles would be applied to reduce the overall requirements for the proposed Scheme.

Policies and Plans

The proposed Scheme embodies a Ministerial commitment to improve connectivity to the local and regional area, which would promote opportunities for regeneration and social and economic growth. The proposed Scheme and its wider improvements to the A96 are outlined as a strategic improvement in national policy, including National Planning Framework 3.

An assessment of compliance of the proposed Scheme against relevant policy has been undertaken in the Policy and Plans Chapter. It concludes that the proposed Scheme will comply with the majority of policies and policy aims, but results in a conflict with a small number of specific local policies. It is noted, however, that potential non-compliance should be balanced against the overarching benefits of the proposed Scheme, as referred to above, such as improving connectivity, enhancing safety for all users, and promoting social and regional economic opportunities.

Assessment of Cumulative Impacts

The cumulative assessment provides an overview of the combined impacts of the proposed Scheme and also includes impacts from other proposed developments.

Potential for cumulative impacts due to the combined effect of a number of different environmental impacts of the proposed Scheme were assessed, based on the findings of the environmental topic chapters. No significant cumulative impacts were identified.

The potential for cumulative impacts resulting from the proposed Scheme in combination with committed development within the vicinity was reviewed. This included consideration of the overall A96 Dualling Programme. If construction programmes of the committed developments and the proposed Scheme were to overlap, there is the potential for cumulative impacts associated with the likes of noise and visual amenity. However, no additional mitigation over and above that put forward for the proposed Scheme has been found necessary and the interaction of construction activities of other committed developments will be managed through the Construction Environmental Management Plan.

A96 at Newton of Petty

The traffic model for the proposed Scheme has taken into account future committed developments. The cumulative environmental impacts of these traffic changes has been incorporated into the ES within air quality, noise, road drainage, water quality and driver stress assessments. No additional mitigation measures have been found necessary.

The A96 Dualling Inverness to Aberdeen Strategic Business Case (2014) indicated that with the full dualling programme in place, traffic volumes are forecast to increase. However, dualling of the full route also reduces journey times and accident numbers. The effects of increased traffic volumes will be assessed as future schemes progress and will continue to be considered at a strategic level by Transport Scotland as more information becomes available.

Non-Technical Summary
Figures 1-17

Legend


Proposed Scheme as per Draft Orders


Cutting


Embankment


Carriageway


SUDS Detention Basins/Retention Ponds


Existing Woodland

Watercourse

Waterbody

Buildings

Constraints


Ancient Woodland Inventory (Ancient and Roy Woodland)


Scheduled Monument


Battlefield Inventory


Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Special Area of Conservation (SAC)


Special Protection Area (SPA)

Proposed Mitigation

Shared Use Path for NMUs

Noise Mitigation


Woodland Planting/Retention


Scrub Planting

Grassland

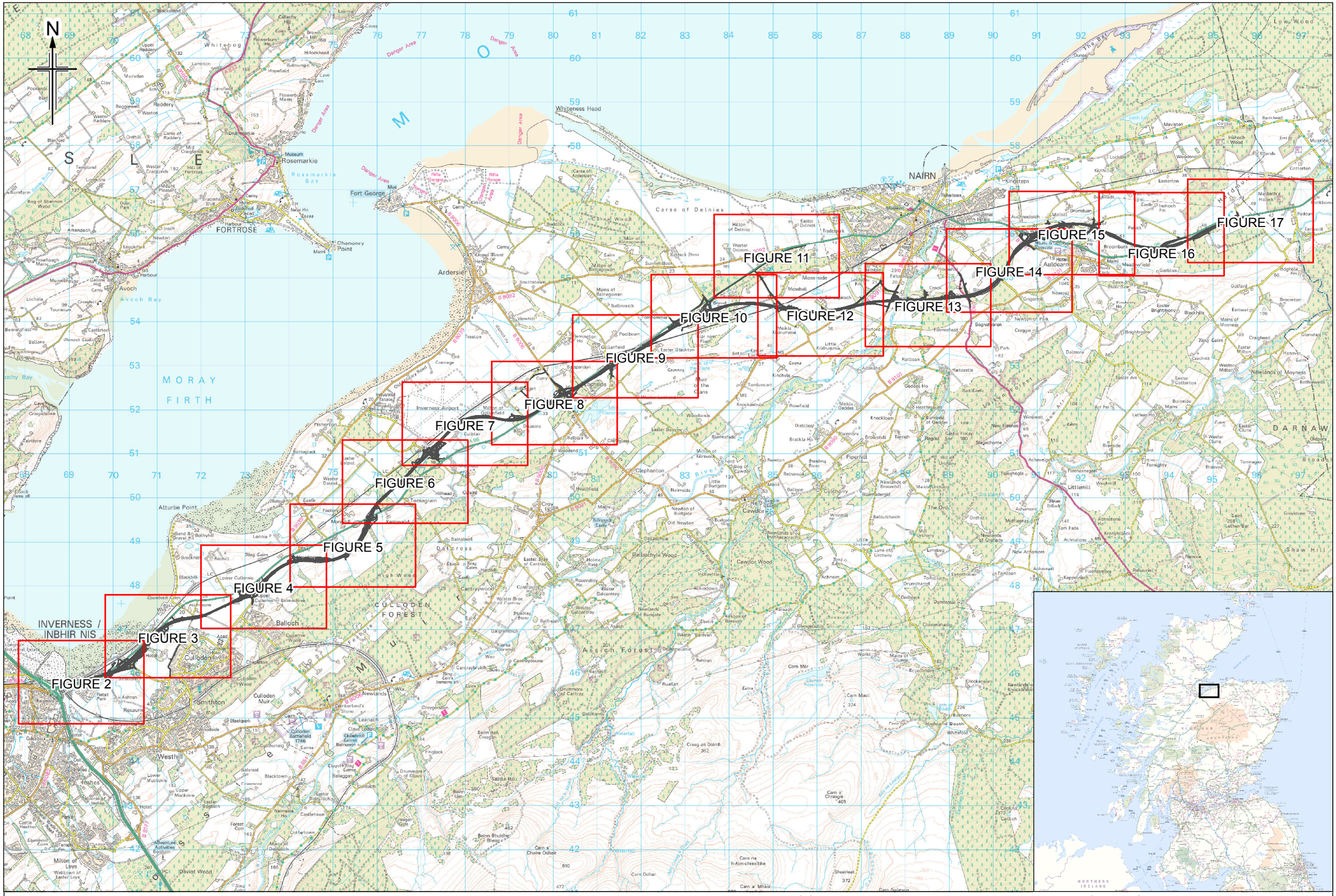


FIGURE 1

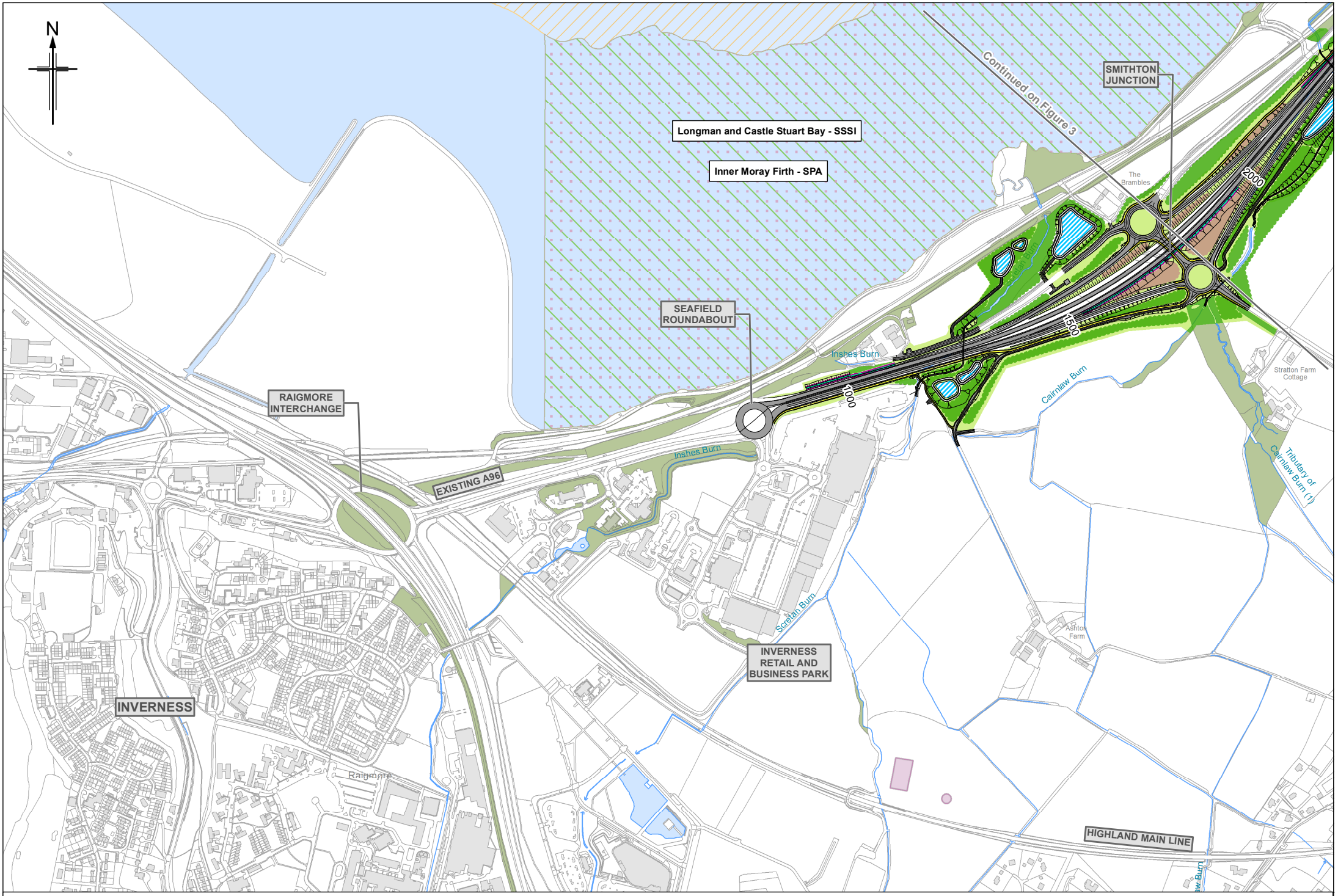


FIGURE 2

0 0.25 0.5 1 Kilometres

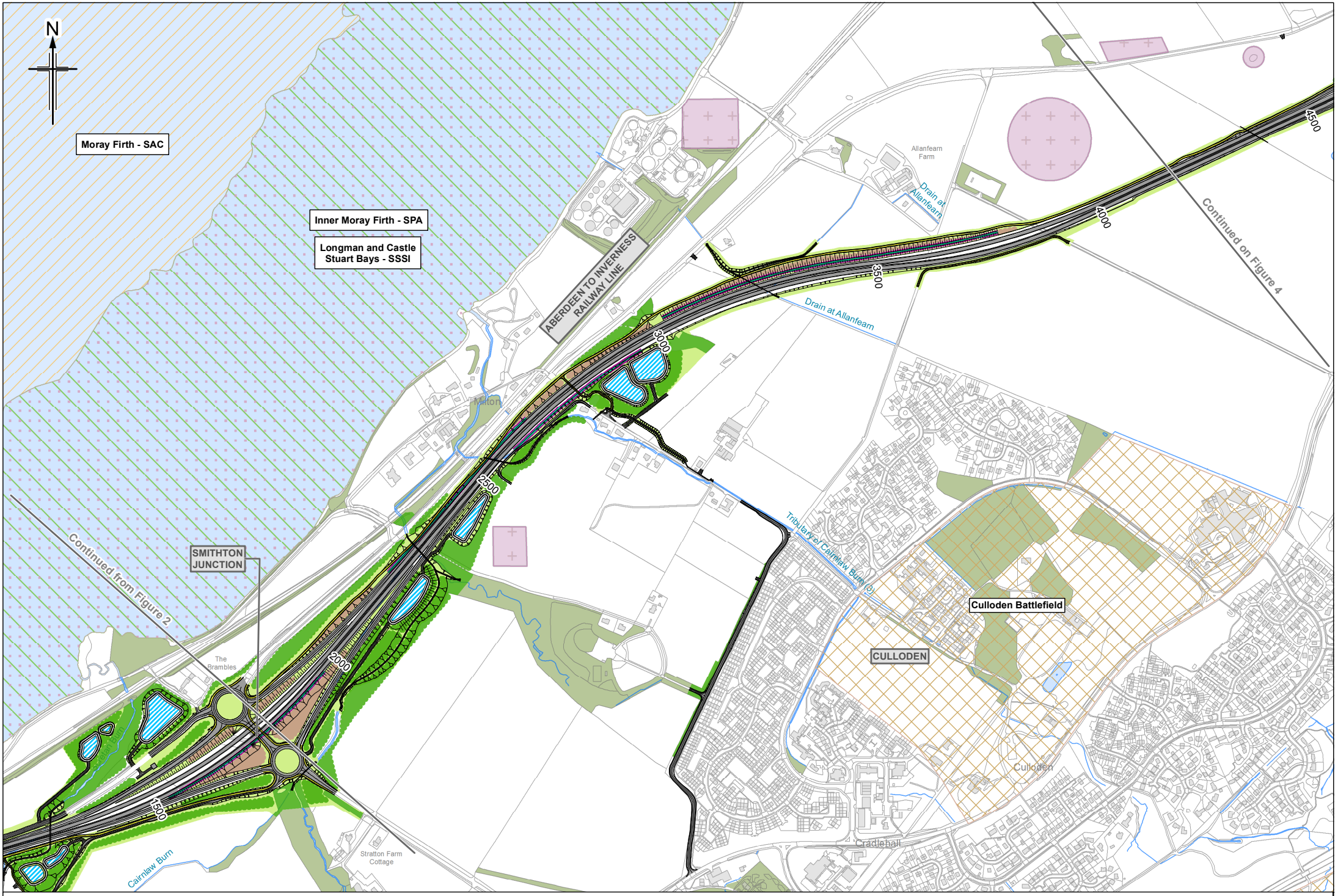


FIGURE 3

0 0.25 0.5 1 Kilometres

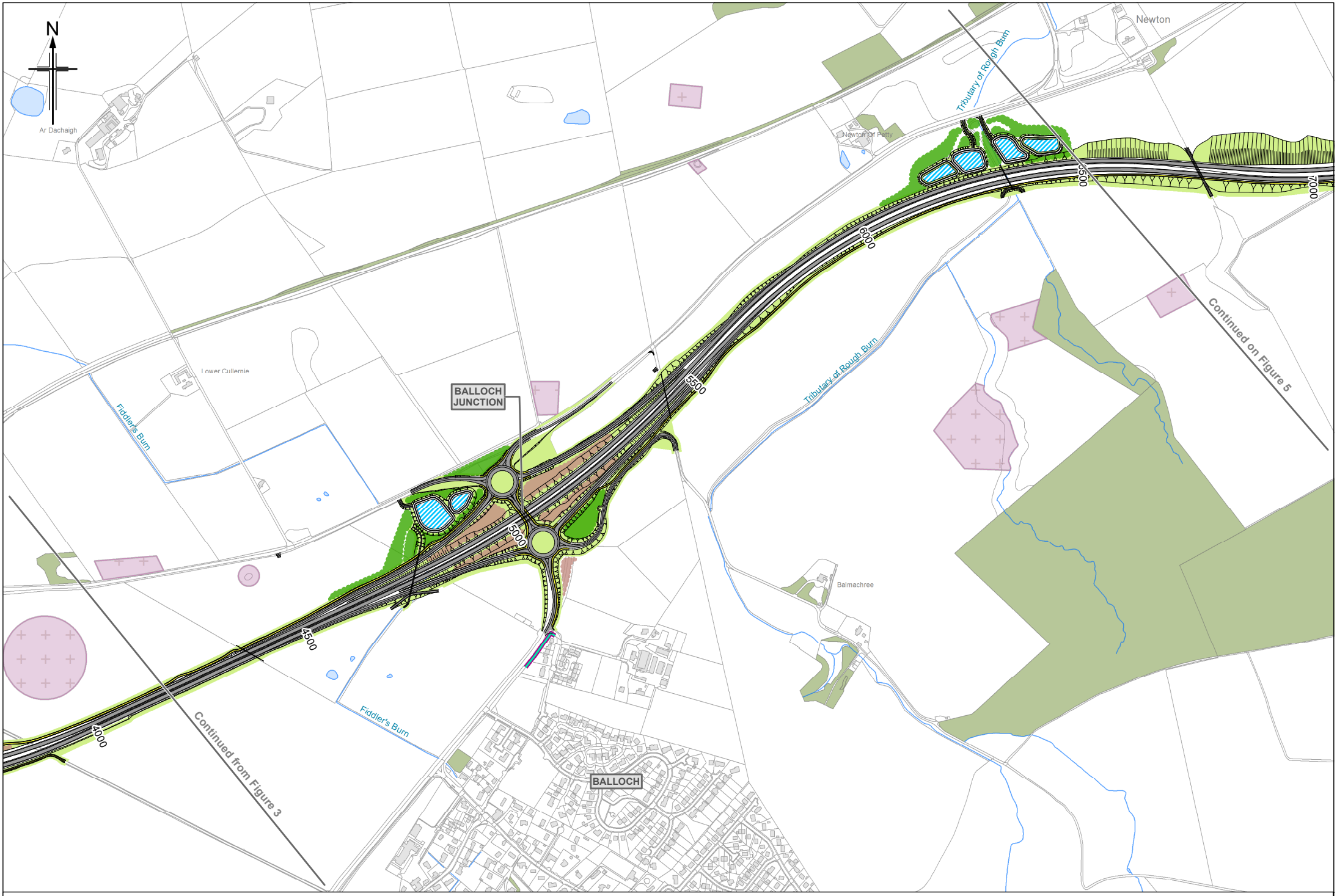


FIGURE 4

0 0.25 0.5 1 Kilometres

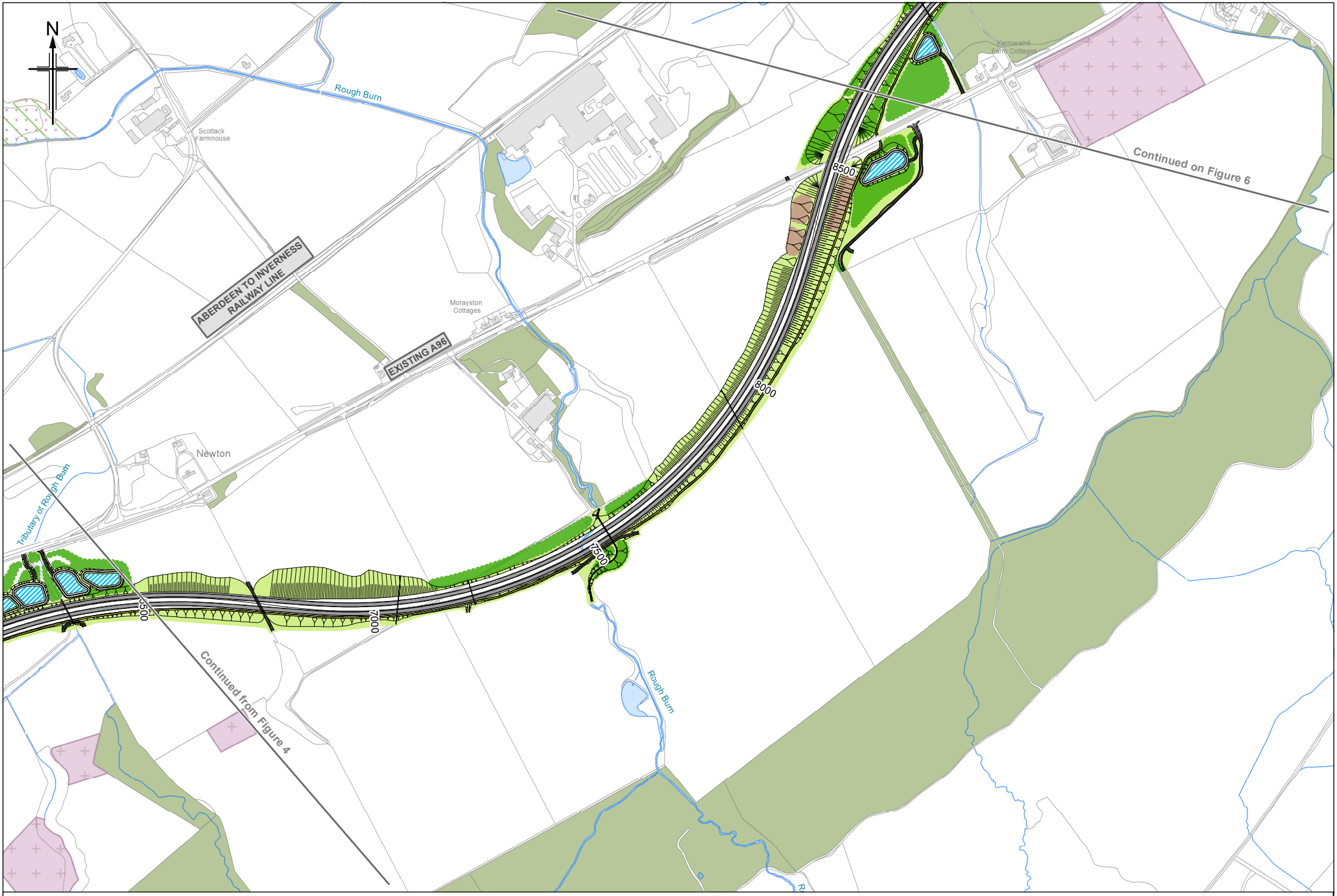


FIGURE 5

0 0.25 0.5 1 Kilometres

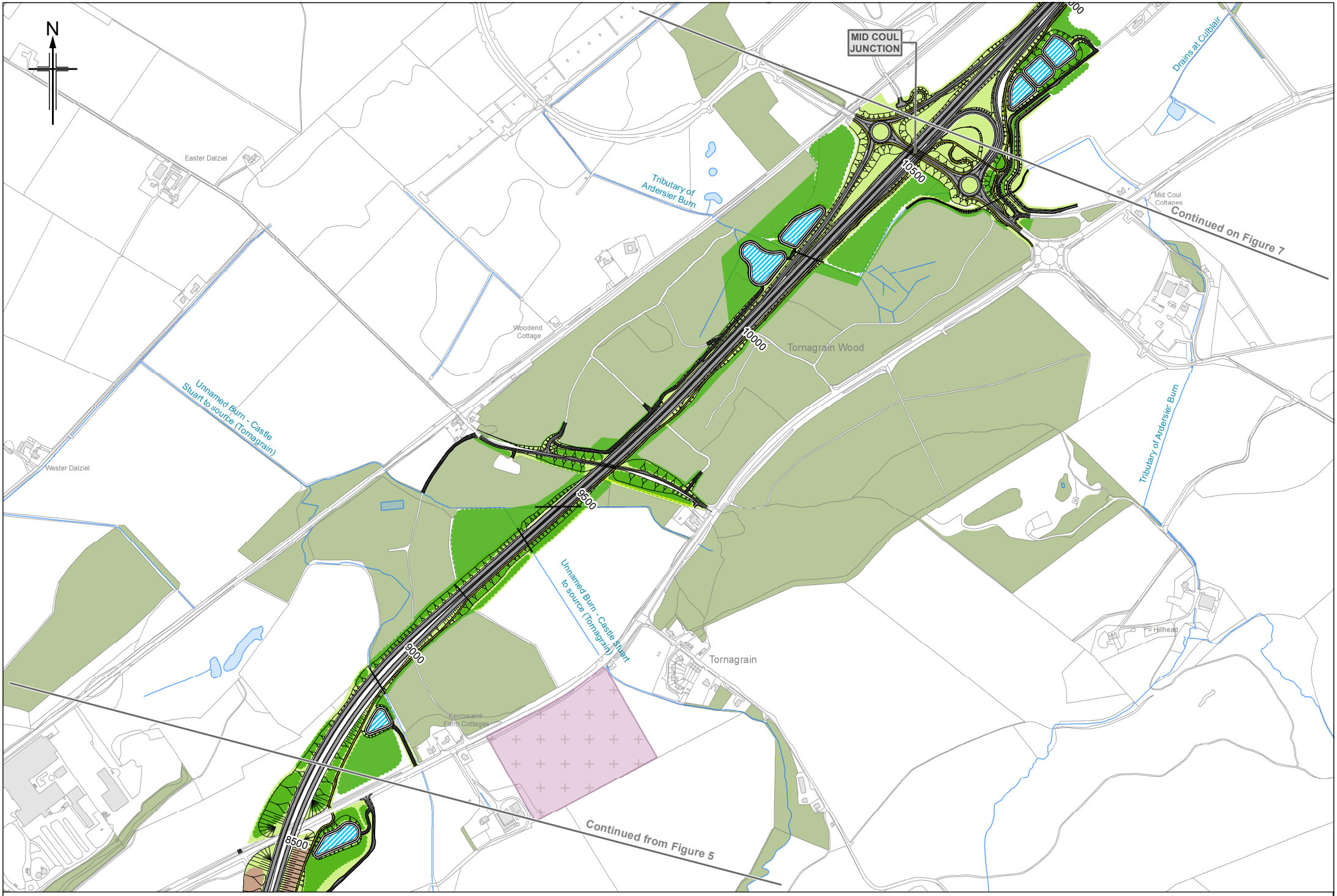


FIGURE 6

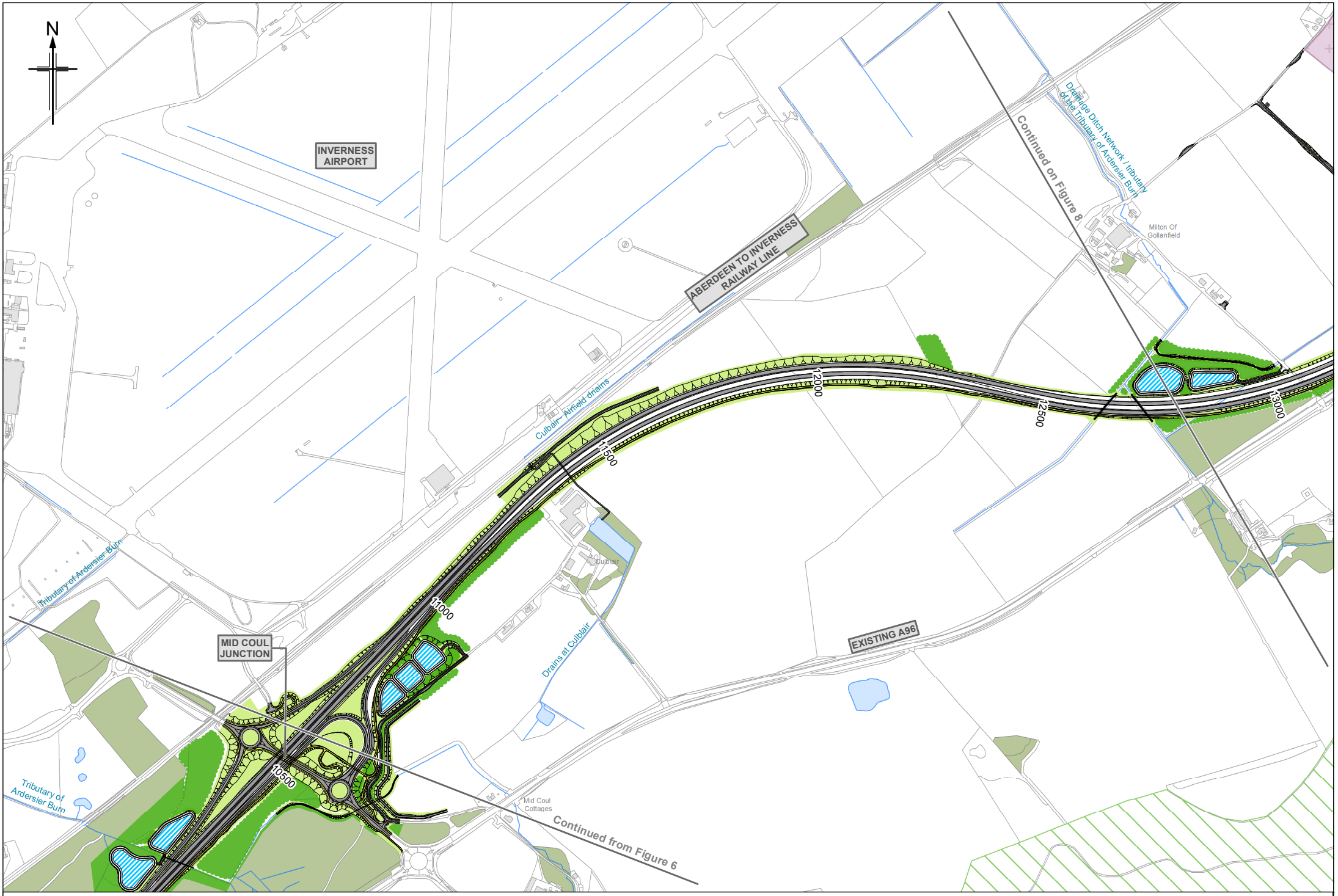


FIGURE 7

0 0.25 0.5 1 Kilometres

FIGURE 8

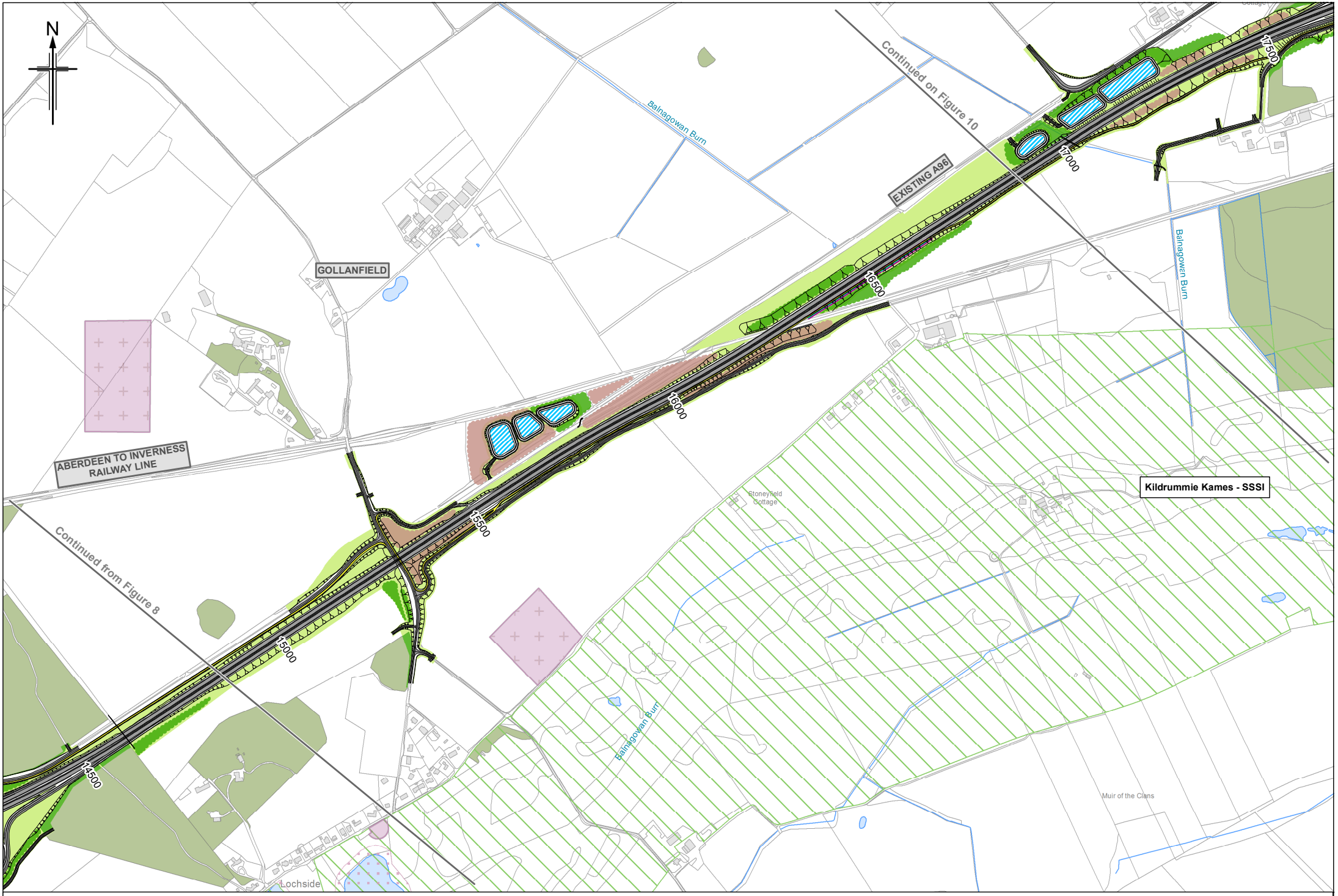


FIGURE 9

0 0.25 0.5 1 Kilometres

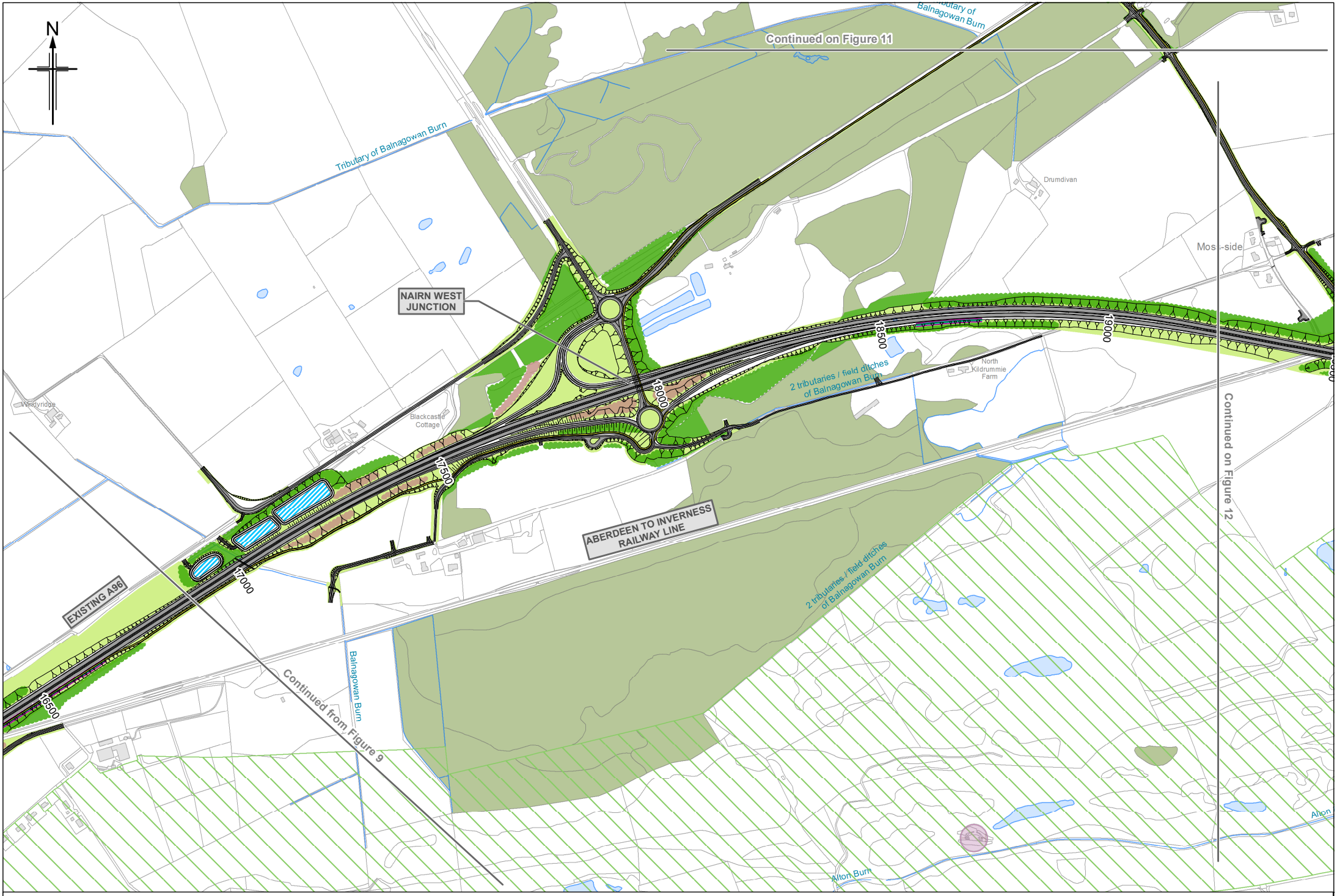


FIGURE 10

0 0.25 0.5 1 Kilometres

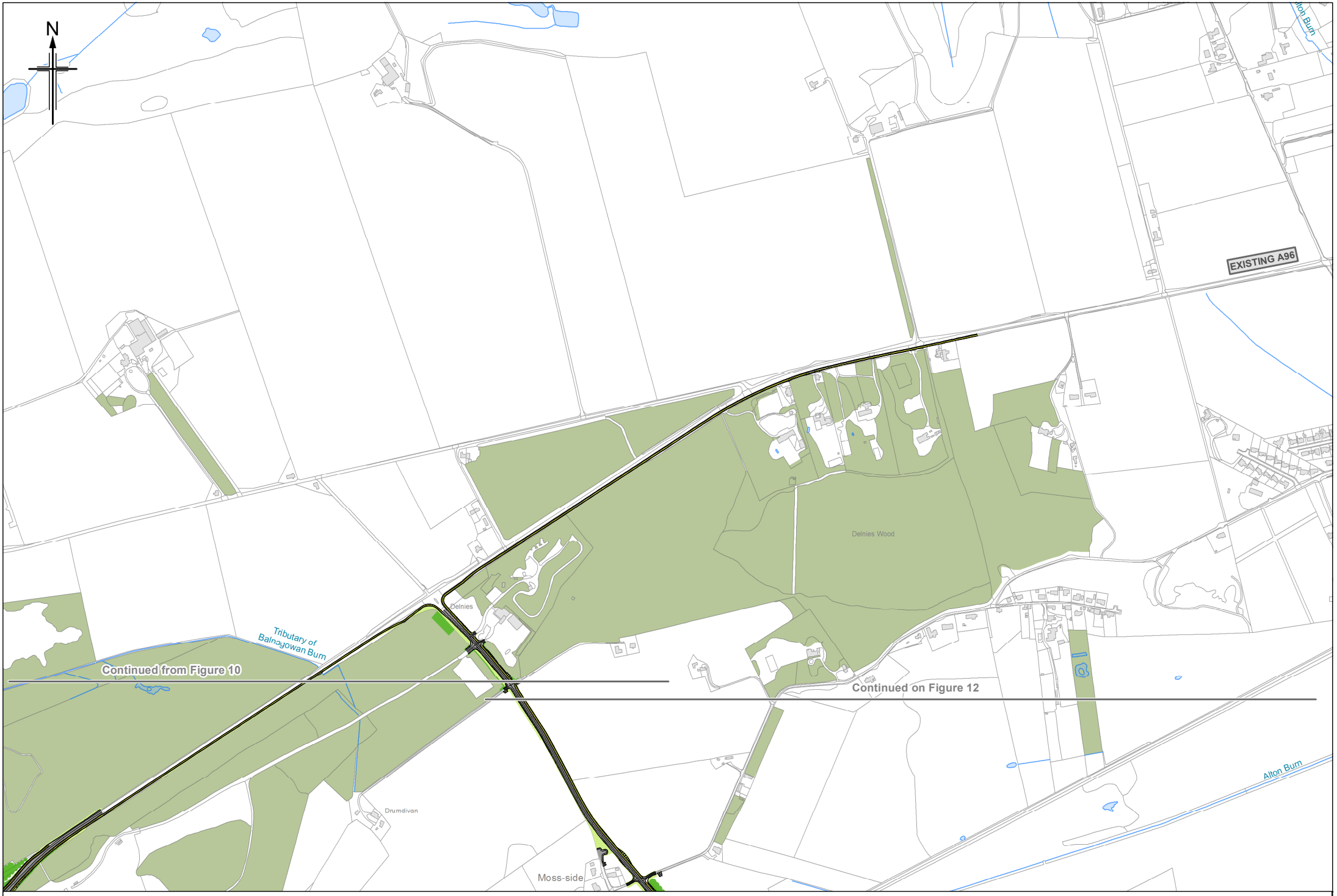


FIGURE 11

0 0.25 0.5 1 Kilometres

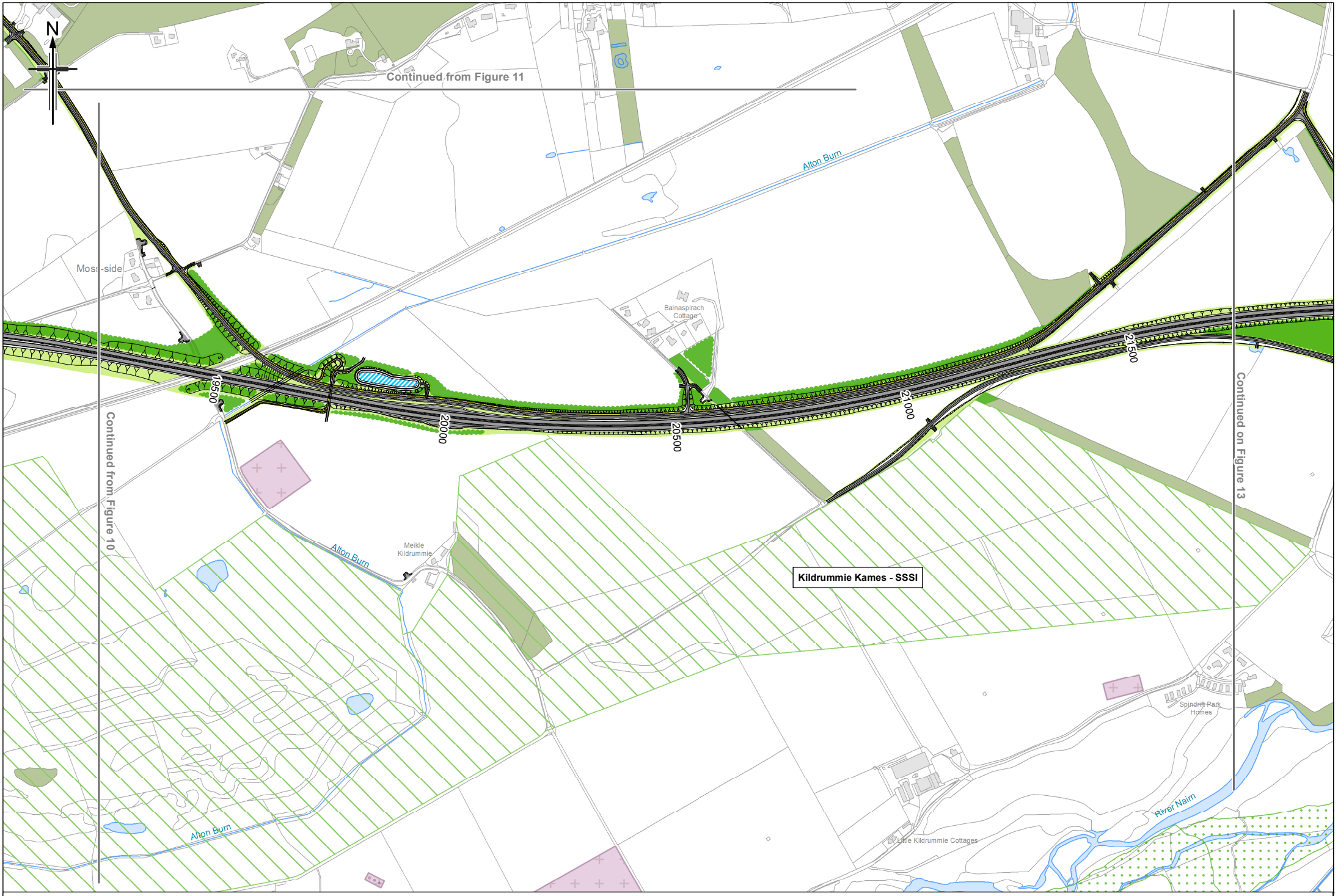


FIGURE 12

0 0.25 0.5 1 Kilometres

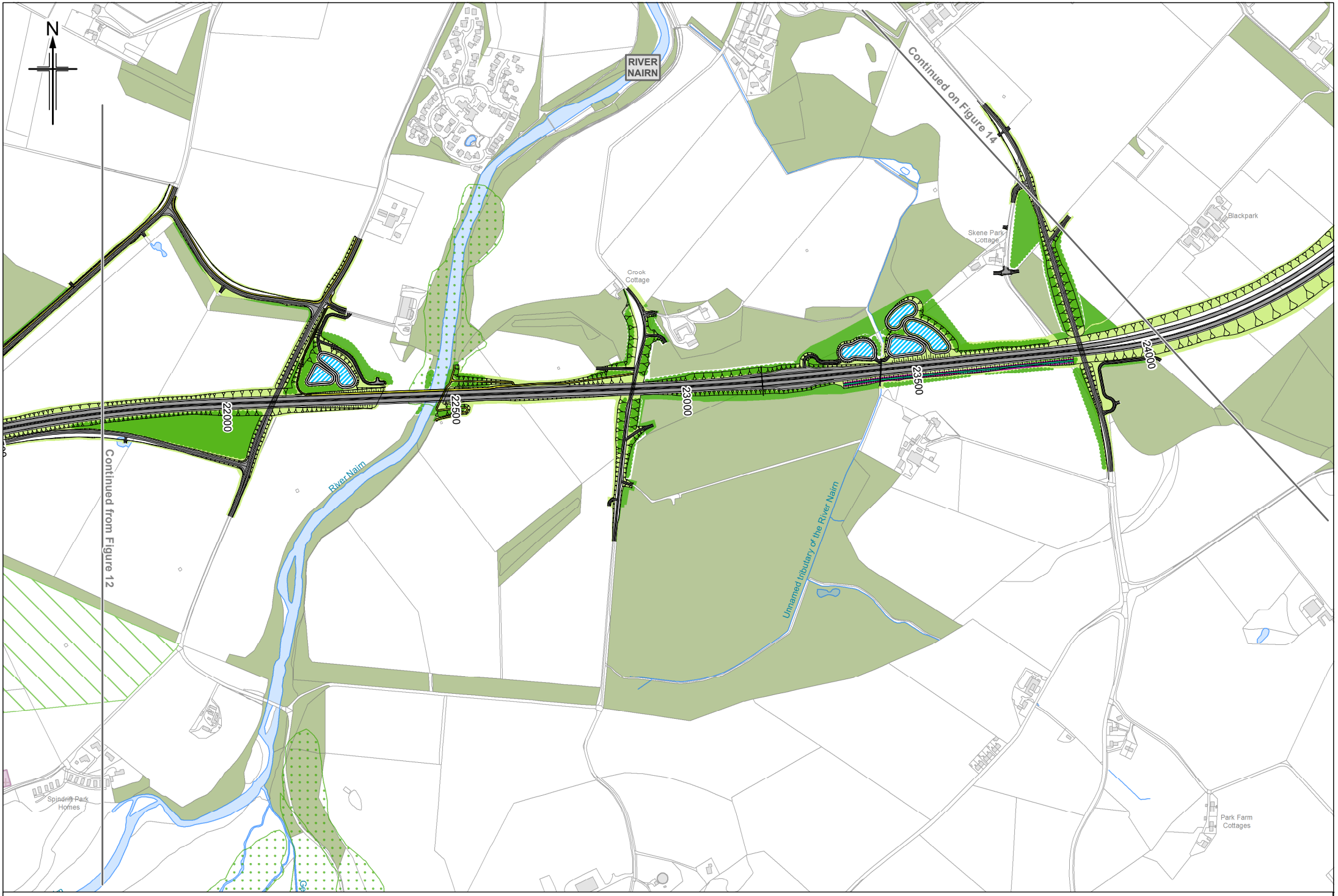


FIGURE 13

0 0.25 0.5 1 Kilometres

FIGURE 14

0 0.25 0.5 1 Kilometres

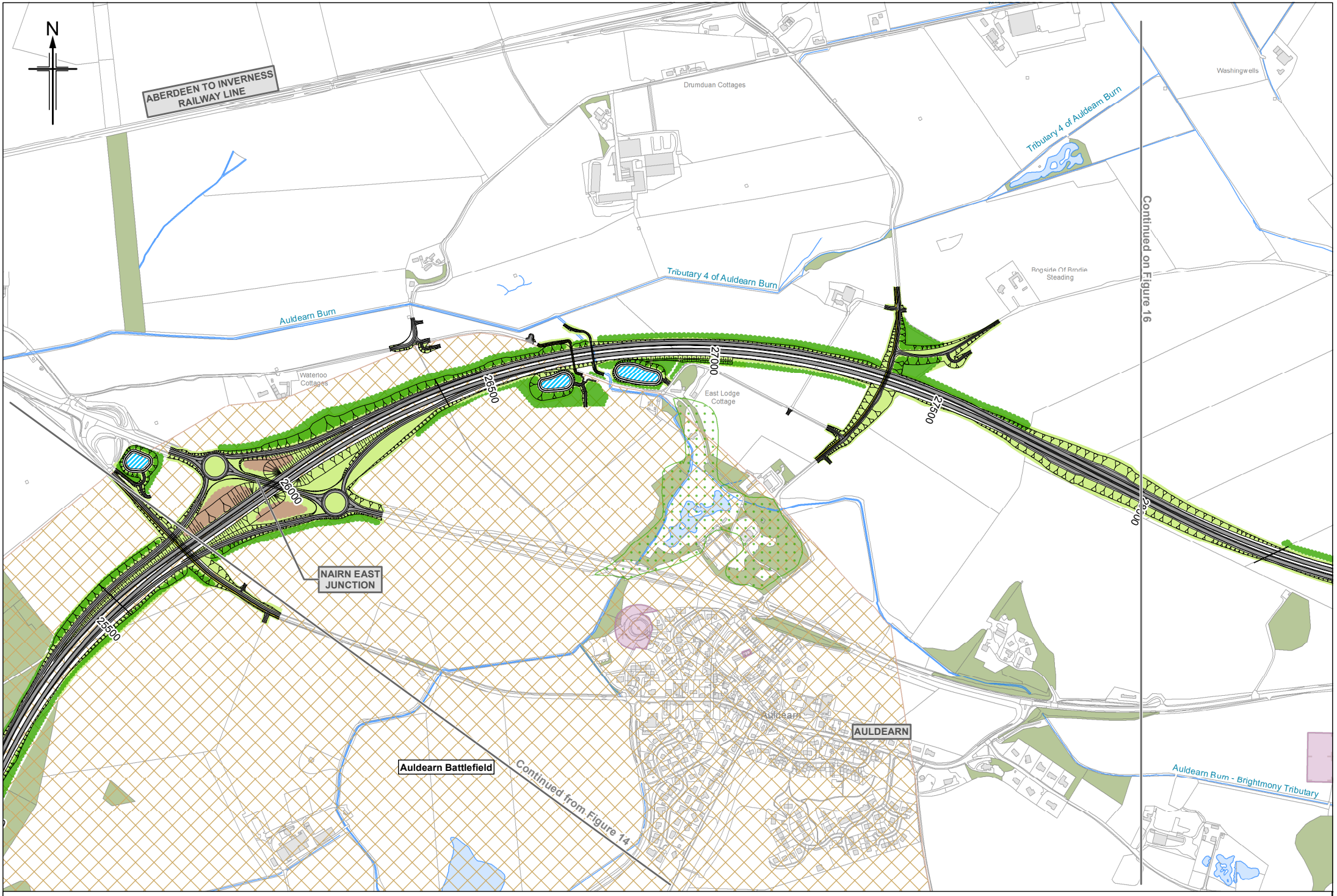


FIGURE 15

0 0.25 0.5 1 Kilometres

FIGURE 16

0 0.25 0.5 1 Kilometres

FIGURE 17

0 0.25 0.5 1 Kilometres

A96 DUALLING
INVERNESS TO NAIRN
(incl. Nairn Bypass)

TRANSPORT SCOTLAND
CÒMHDHAIL ALBA