

## Local Place Plan – Torphins

### INTRODUCTION

Section 14 of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 provides an opportunity for communities to develop their own approach to local place-making, empowering them to play an active and collaborative role in defining the future of their places in development planning.

In 2024 Torphins Community Council (TCC) engaged with the community it represents to develop this Local Place Plan (LPP) which is to be taken into account by Aberdeenshire Council in the preparation of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (ALDP) in 2028 and thereafter, as part of the suite of documents forming the Development Plan.

TCC recognises the importance of sustaining Torphins' unique sense of place, of maintaining and improving community facilities and assets, and ensuring the village remains a safe and attractive place to live. This LPP aims to assist Aberdeenshire Council as the planning authority by describing the community's priorities and aspirations for the future.

### SETTLEMENT STATEMENT

**Torphins** has a population of around 1400 and is situated seven miles west of Banchory on the A980. One of the larger villages along the River Dee, Torphins serves as an important centre for this part of Deeside. The name of the village is thought to derive from the Gaelic *Torr Fionn* or *Tor Feithachan*, both of which probably refer to the Hill of Fare, the dominant geographic backdrop to the village. The Hill of Fare is very highly valued by the community for its recreational opportunities and for the attractive setting it gives to Torphins within the wider landscapes of Deeside. It should be protected from development.

While the village itself dates back to the eighteenth century or earlier, its significant development began after the railway arrived in 1853. The growth of the village from this date is reflected in Torphins' valued nineteenth century architectural heritage, its street pattern and history. More modern development is to be found at the eastern end of the village and to the north and south of the centre; this has been successfully located and designed and does not impact on an essentially nineteenth century sense of place. To the west, along the A980 Beltie Road, there is a mix of nineteenth and twentieth century development, south facing and important in defining the established setting of the village. A further extension to the village is found along Craigmyle Road.

The character of Torphins is therefore defined by this mix of Victorian township elements, appropriate twentieth century development and the strong connection with the village's

rural setting. It is a highly sought-after location within commuting distance of Aberdeen but is far enough away and with sufficient history to retain its own identity as a rural village. The principal granite buildings constructed following the arrival of the railway, including the Gatsby (formerly Learney Arms Hotel), the Scotmid (formerly the United Free Church), the Learney Hall and the school present a more formal character in the very centre of the village. The built environment quickly becomes rural in nature, with working farmland directly next to the Learney Hall and along Beltie Road. Vernacular farm buildings are present on Woodside Road and into Learney Estate, while unique and characterful buildings of interest are located throughout the village, concentrated predominantly on Grampian Terrace, William Street and Craigour Road.

Torphins has its primary school with thriving nursery classes, the Learney Hall, the Torphins Medical Practice, Mid Deeside Church, retail and hospitality businesses and recreational and sporting locations, including the Play Park and tennis courts, bowling green, a nine hole Golf Course, a curling pond and a growing path network. The community recognises the importance of all of these and the need to ensure they not only remain vibrant but are further developed and modernised.

The **Learney Estate** is situated to the northwest of the village and extends to some 3,200ha. In recent years the estate donated land for the extension of the Mid Deeside Church and has offered land beside the Learney Hall (R1 in ALDP) currently reserved for an extension. The estate is also a key partner in the development of the community paths network, particularly within woodland settings. In addition the estate provides some private rented homes and employment opportunities.

Any development in Torphins must respect and enhance its existing character and heritage, be of the highest quality design and meet ambitious standards in sustainability, as well as contributing to local employment and to the improvement of community facilities.

## **COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

**Torphins School** has a roll as at 2024/5 of 157 pupils with 20 attending the Nursery. While this is slightly ahead of the 2023 forecast, the roll is predicted to drop to 125 by 2028, placing the school at 68% of capacity.

**Torphins Medical Practice** occupies the Memorial Hospital, built to commemorate those who died in the First World War. The hospital opened in 1925, later becoming almost entirely a maternity facility. It now serves as a highly regarded and locally valued health and resource centre.

**The Learney Hall** was built in 1899 and is a prominent architectural feature of the village. It is an important part of the community, used by a number of groups and by individuals. Plans are being developed (2024) to modernise and enhance the building. The Hall incorporates the former Hall keeper's accommodation and attached garden.

**The Mid-Deeside Church (MDC)**, apart from its religious roles, also provides a meeting place within the village. It has grown since an extension was completed in 2016 into a social hub for the community; the development added four meeting rooms, a modern kitchen and toilets. The church was built in 1875, to a design by J. Russell Mackenzie and is a B Listed building. MDC hosts the local food pantry and is also the designated emergency centre for the community, particularly storm or flood events; the more central Learney Hall was deemed by Aberdeenshire Council not to be capable of supporting this function. Consequently the community's emergency generator, managed by Torphins Community Help (TORCH), has been installed at MDC.

**Torphins Play Park** is maintained by Aberdeenshire Council and has been provided with a good selection of play equipment, a sports pitch and a ramp for skate boarding. The car park also hosts the only glass recycling bins in the village. The open space is the venue for the annual Torphins Gala and is used by the school and groups such as the Scouts for informal sporting activities. Long-standing issues over drainage are a barrier to more sustained use however as the football pitch is unsuitable for clubs to play. The village tennis courts and curling pond are next to the Park and the Bowling Green is nearby on Bridge Crescent.

The **Public Toilets** located close to the Learney Hall are maintained by Aberdeenshire Council and are considered important by the community. To the south and east of the toilets is a small area of land reserved by the Council for community use.

**Torphins Cemetery** is maintained by Aberdeenshire Council. It has been in use since 1903 and holds one Commonwealth War Grave, dating from the First World War.

**Footpaths** have been developed over the past few years by the Torphins Paths Group. There is now a well-established network of paths around the village as well as plans for Active Travel links to Lumphanan and Banchory.

## **DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

The current Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (ALDP) 2023, has an allocation of up to 47 new homes in a mixed use development on the site of the Station Garage and an area of land to the south. This includes the redevelopment and relocation within the site of the existing car sales and garage business. A further site, to the west of the village at Wester Beltie (MR069 in the Draft ALDP) has been identified as having potential for up to six homes

There has been little housing development in the village for a considerable period, almost thirty years, beyond single homes or gap sites. The community recognise there is a need for some additional homes, particularly to allow those already resident to down-size but also to encourage families to settle or remain in the village in order to address the falling roll at the school. There are particular challenges in identifying potential sites in Torphins due to constraints imposed by potential flooding from the Beltie Burn. Ensuring any development is as close to the centre of the village as possible while recognising the community's strong desire to maintain the existing pattern of development, along Beltie Road in particular, and protect Torphins' important built heritage, also restricts opportunities.

The ALDP notes that the Torphins waste water treatment works have limited capacity and no improvements are currently planned by Scottish Water.

As with many smaller communities there is a need for the development of a small number of starter units for small business use; the challenges identified above also apply.

### **ASPIRATIONS, PRIORITIES AND PROJECTS.**

Torphins is a successful place, with a cohesive and established structure benefiting from a good mix of community facilities and retail and other businesses. There is a clear desire within the community to see this vibrancy enhanced, for connectivity to be improved and for the village to become safer. Improvements to open space, to community buildings including the Learney Hall and the protection of the village's setting within the landscape are seen as priorities; action on these areas will ensure that Torphins continues to be successful, with a strong sense of place and with a thriving and active community.

As with all rural villages in Scotland, sustainability and resilience are essential to any planning for the future of Torphins. Supporting local businesses, local producers, cottage industries and path networks will reduce the community's reliance on automotive transport and provide a safer and healthier environment. Continual upgrading of utilities (power, water, drainage, and communication) will be required to support modern development including the commitment to electric vehicles (EV) and holistic building services. Sustainable drainage plans throughout the village should take account of increasing rainfall and the more extreme and more frequent weather events Aberdeenshire is already experiencing and which will continue in the future.

Torphins is gifted with a talented population but can struggle with participation, which is why it is important to protect hospitality offerings including Platform 22 and The Learney Arms, as well as creating new opportunities where possible. The storms of 2021 and 2022, when Torphins was cut off from power, water and the surrounding area for extended periods, demonstrate the need for better social cohesion and community resilience.

Upgrading existing buildings and constructing new highly efficient buildings will help reduce the risk of fuel poverty and limit the village's carbon footprint. Where power generation schemes are proposed, whether supported by the community or not, they will need to provide measurable and generous benefits for the people of Torphins, with proactive engagement at the outset of project design, as part of Scotland's 'Just Transition' policies.

The current ALDP includes one area for future housing, **OP1, Station Garage** for mixed use including up to forty seven homes and for which outline consent has been granted. Other opportunities for housing development are restricted by the risk of flooding or the unacceptable impact they would have on the setting of the village and the amenity of its residents. A small number of brown field opportunities exist within the settlement boundary. Any development would be expected to contribute, through appropriate developer contributions, to community facilities in Torphins, including the Learney Hall, existing recreational provision, the path network and the Torphins Health and Resource Centre.

This section gives details of the areas the community sees as important and the action required to fulfil the vision outlined above.

The **Learney Hall** is the centre of the community but has suffered over the years from a lack of investment and modernisation. A capital receipt accruing to Aberdeenshire Council from the sale of the former School House has been ring-fenced for improvements to the Learney Hall; at the time of drafting proposals are being developed to update the kitchen, toilets and flooring, together with work on electrical systems.

For the Learney Hall to take its proper place in the community there needs to be robust and reliable broadband connectivity and a clear, sustainable plan for future development of facilities. This would include decoration and day-to-day interventions but should also include developing the currently unused space in the former Hall keeper's house. Options could include the creation of bookable office space for community or small business use.

A **Village Square**: the area around the Learney Hall includes the school, the public toilets, the access to the Torphins Cemetery and two areas of open space, the area reserved for community use beside the toilets and the garden ground attached to the Learney Hall. There is also an area to the west of the Learney Hall (R1 in the ALDP). The area immediately around the hall is currently used for car parking. There is an opportunity to build on the

work being undertaken on the Learney Hall to enhance and improve this entire area, creating a 'village square', encompassing the Learney Hall and the school while redesigning car parking to make it less dominant, as well as making a significant contribution to road safety, particularly for the school and the Sunshine Nursery. A well designed square should also include public EV charging points; the lack of any such provision in Torphins should be addressed. Other options could include relocating the **Jubilee Drinking Fountain**, originally located outside the Torphins Station. The station was demolished after the line closed in 1966, leaving the Fountain a little lost in its modern setting. Appendix A gives details of the Village Square proposal.

As with most, if not all settlements in Aberdeenshire, **road safety** within the village is a serious concern for the community. All of the roads approaching the cross roads in the centre of the village are straight, leading to speed limits being ignored, a situation exacerbated by a lack of enforcement. The community would wish to work with Aberdeenshire Council as the Roads Authority on innovative and forward thinking solutions which could be trialled and then potentially used in other communities. It is recognised any such interventions would need to be physical and could include models of traffic calming used successfully in other European countries. For reasons of safety, there is a need for a footpath from the Station Garage westwards to the village. **Car parking** is also an issue, in particular associated with the school and with Scotmid in the village centre; this leads to further adverse impacts on road safety, including the safety of pedestrians.

The **Play Park** is a vitally important part of the community. However, since it was developed on an area of ground that historically was a marsh, drainage has been and remains a major issue preventing the park being used to its fullest extent, for more organised sporting activity for example. The community see resolving this issue as a priority, one which would lead to increased recreational opportunities. These could be further supported by improved pavilion facilities for changing and with toilets; this facility could be shared with the tennis courts. The car park which hosts the glass recycling facility is also in need of surfacing.

The **Torphins Health and Resource Centre** is of great importance to the community. All partners should work together to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of this facility. The importance of **Annesley House** and the former Abbeyfield, Torphins, now **Blackwood Homes & Care**, to the community is also recognised. The **Sunshine Nursery** is also important to the provision of child-care; it is the only private nursery west of Banchory and consequently has a large catchment area. Provision of childcare is also supported by a number of child-minders in the village, while the **Torphins Play Group** at Ha'berry is a vital part of the community.

The Torphins Paths Group (TPG) has done much good work to develop a network of **recreational paths** around the village and is working towards creating a footpath to Lumphanan, largely following the line of the former railway. These projects will increase the opportunities for Active Travel and present real potential for increased economic activity in

the village. There is also an aspiration to see a footpath developed to Banchory, creating a route from Banchory to Lumphanan which could ultimately extend to Aboyne, linking to the Deeside Way. It is hoped all partners will work with the community in developing, maintaining and enhancing these projects. Details of TPG projects and ambitions form Appendix B.

The **business and retail** offering of the village and its surrounding area is strong but needs to be protected and enhanced, including the hospitality sector. The need for the early delivery of a modern broadband service is vital.

The **village environment** encompasses a number of the issues highlighted above but under this heading could come innovative small developments which would add to the vibrancy of the community, including the provision of **EV charging** points, an **electric bike** rental scheme for local use and a modern **water fountain** with a potable water supply. The **War Memorial** and its setting are also valued and should be enhanced. To the east of the village, the recently re-created wetland/river restoration at Easter Beltie is of growing interest and significance. Attempts have been made to establish **Village Allotments** but identifying an appropriate and available site has been and remains a challenge. Torphins has participated in the **Green Spaces** initiative; there are further opportunities for increasing biodiversity within the village.

**Community Resilience;** recent extreme weather events have clearly demonstrated the importance of Community Resilience. Although parts of Torphins and the surrounding area are designated as Potentially Vulnerable Areas, few properties in the village are at risk from fluvial flooding. However, as with most settlements in Aberdeenshire, the system of street drainage is early twentieth century at best and at times struggles to cope with twenty first century weather events. Strong and gale force winds have caused significant difficulties in recent years and it is likely such events will become more frequent in the future.

Of particular concern are the not infrequent power outages impacting the village, particularly where these are not weather-related. The reliability of the network of small overhead lines connecting the village has proved to be inadequate, leading to disruption of supply. The water supply to Torphins also suffers from interruptions of supply and there is particular concern over the frequency of essential repairs to main water pipes under Beltie and Craigour Roads.

The road network is of vital importance to Torphins, there being no alternative means of access to the village. Routes into the village from the north, west and south cross narrow, mostly nineteenth century bridges, while Torphins relies for access to the south on the major bridges over the River Dee. The importance – and vulnerability - of these key pieces of infrastructure can hardly be overstated.

Torphins has adapted to these threats through the development of TORCH and will continue to seek to improve its responsiveness. Any development within the village must take account of climate change and the real potential for more extreme weather events.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Torphins Village Square**

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Torphins Path Proposals**



# **TORPHINS VILLAGE SQUARE**

Initial Concept

November 2024

V02.01

**Torphins Community Council**

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Aerial photo of Torphins

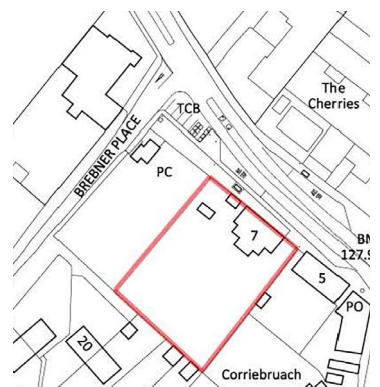
## 1.1 Introduction

The aim of this report is to explore the possibility of creating a village square in Torphins.

Aberdeenshire council has retained a parcel of land adjacent to the Old School House which was recently sold. There is currently no plan for this land.

As a result of the pandemic, more people are working from home and it is expected that this trend will continue. In this situation, local gathering, seating, entertainment and strolling spaces will become ever more important.

- Area 1,100 sqm / 12,000 sqft / 0.11 ha
- Torphins is an expanding village
- Torphins does not currently have a public square
- The space outside P22 is well utilised







Aerial photo of Ballater

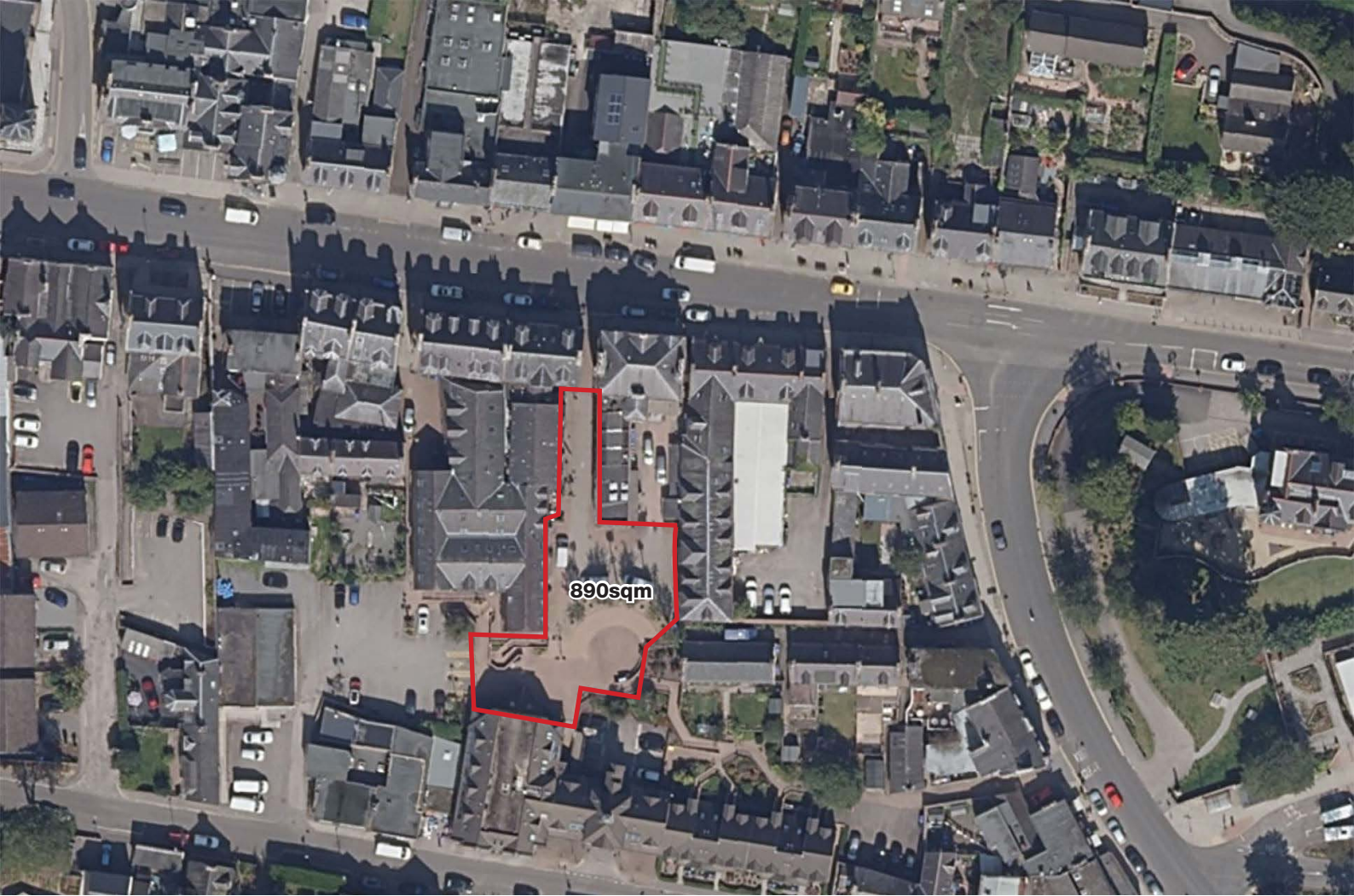
## 2.1 Comparison Ballater

The North Square of Ballater is larger but similarly sited next to the principle village building.

It provides space for markets, fairs, pipe bands, public information and acts a meeting place for the community.







Aerial photo of Banchory

## 2.2 Comparison Banchory

What some consider to be the central square in Banchory is perpendicular to the main road, like the proposed site in Torphins.

It is smaller but still serves as a focal point for shops and for people to meet and congregate.





Aerial photo of Torphins

### 3.1 Expansion

It may also be possible to utilise the land behind the Learney Hall, expanding the proposed plot to 2,460sqm / 26,570sqft.





Examples of public spaces

## 4.1 Programme

Being centrally located with easy access to the shops, the site has the potential to host many activities:

- Village events e.g. Carols Around the Christmas Tree
- Break out space for people working area, somewhere to eat lunch
- A waiting space for parents picking up their children
- Outdoor space for sports and classes
- Meeting space for all ages
- Weekend gathering space, ties in to the paths network
- Possibility to have a pavilion to host mini concerts / festivals





Aerial view of Torphins

## 5.1 Funding and Time-scale

The Scottish Government and Aberdeenshire Council are increasingly recognising the value public spaces play within towns and villages. There has been an increase in funding for projects that increase the resilience of communities and provide a mutual benefit.

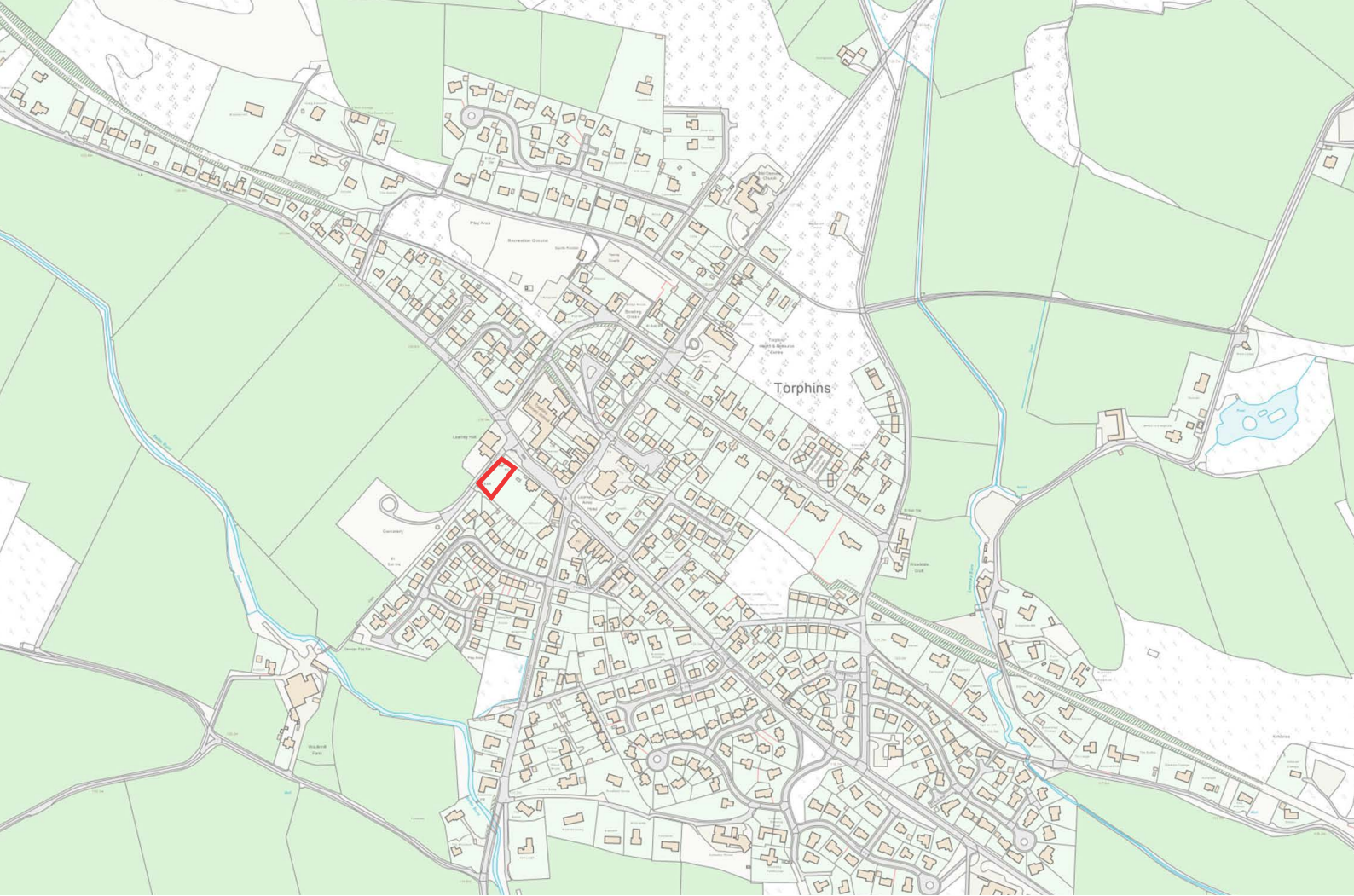
Once the outline of the project can be agreed, budget costs can be sought. It is anticipated that this could cost anywhere between £0.5m and £1m

### Time-scales

It is difficult to anticipate the time required, but a program has been estimated below:

- |                  |                                      |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • Year 1 Q1 - Q2 | Feasibility and research             |
| • Year 1 Q3      | Concept design + costing             |
| • Year 1 Q4      | Consultation, planning + fundraising |
| • Year 2 Q1      | Detailed design                      |
| • Year 2 Q2      | Tendering                            |
| • Year 2 Q3 - Q4 | Construction                         |





Ordnance Survey map of Torphins

## 6.1 Next Steps

- Confirm the availability of the land
- Investigate the possibility of using the land behind Learney Hall
- Seek an initial response from Aberdeenshire Council, the Scottish Government, the local elected members and politicians
- Consult local residents and interest in the project
- Make a list of potential funding opportunities
- Review the design process and what professional assistance would be required



# Torphins Local Place Plan – Torphins Village and Area Path Proposals

## Existing

Within the village area the network of paths currently includes two Core Paths; the old railway line path; and the network of paths developed in and around Torphins Woods. The support of Learney Estate to permit extensive developments within the area of their estate is much appreciated. As the Torphins Woods transition to a natural indigenous woodland the paths enable enjoyment of a sustainable recreational area for the community.

*Map A1* illustrates core paths 616.01 in Torphins Woods and 616.02 from Learney Hall to Waulkmill Farm, the latter being a part of Right of Way GK121. Route 616.03 has been proposed by Aberdeenshire Council as a Core Path, however has not been pursued nor developed. *Map A2* shows 616.01 improved by Torphins Paths Group SCIO (TPG), and other linking trod paths within the woods, which have been developed by TPG to increase accessibility and the recreational path network. Linking to this network is the very popular established path from Woodside Road to Craigmyle West Lodge near Milltown of Craigmyle on *Map A2*, enabling circular routes by Craigmyle Mills or Mains of Craigmyle. TPG has installed significant drainage here in recent times to overcome periodic flood damage.

## Proposed Developments

### 1. School Access Path

Torphins School teachers have recently initiated a project with pupil participation to develop a new path at Bridge Crescent. The path will enhance safety by providing a safe off road route avoiding the volume of moving and parked vehicles on Bridge Crescent at school times. This is a quality and highly achievable and cooperative project, which should be pursued with vigour and support of all partners. The route is illustrated on *Map B*.

### 2. Village Circulars Network – Blacksmiths Path

Torphins Paths Group has recently proposed a cut grass path from the junction of Woodside Road and B993 running north to Pitmedden Smithy *Map C*. The “blacksmith’s path” would be within the former field recently planted with trees, and a short area of woodland to the east of B993, enabling a connection to the village from quiet minor roads, avoiding exposure to fast moving traffic on B993. TPG is in discussions with owners to permit access.

### 3. Torphins – Lumphanan

The green route PNMR635 on *Map A* along the dismantled railway, designated essential maintenance (in recent years performed by TPG), extends to Wester Beltie where the existing route terminates. This will become part of the proposed path to Lumphanan, which received planning approval in September 2024 (APP/2024/0339).

The Torphins – Lumphanan multi user path is strongly supported by both communities, demonstrated in a public survey conducted in 2017. The route will support and encourage active travel, health and recreation, visits to the area, and

tourism. A range of services is available in Torphins to the Lumphanan community including the medical practice, the pharmacy, supermarket, post office and Wednesday market. The path will be an important link in “The Big Vision” of Torphins Paths Group and Marr Paths Forum; an extended circular network connecting the northern Deeside villages of Torphins, Lumphanan, Tarland, with the Tarland Way and the Deeside Way at Banchory, Kincardine O’Neil and Aboyne.

The multi user path route project as illustrated on *Map D* is expected to go to tender in early 2025, by which time the project will be “shovel ready” for an ambitious funding effort by Torphins Paths Group and Lumphanan Paths Group, hopefully with the support of all partners.

#### 4. Torphins – Banchory

A feasibility study initiated by TPG with Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland reported in 2018 with recommendations for the multi user path to Lumphanan and also for a multi user path to Banchory as illustrated in *Map E1*. The route to Banchory follows long sections of dismantled railway track, and nearer Banchory, tracks within Forestry and Land Scotland property. Connecting Torphins and Banchory with a multi user path provides clear benefits for active travel along the route, health and recreation, and visitor tourism. Drawing people from Banchory towards the more northerly Deeside area has the potential as described earlier to connect with other communities to the west and circularly with the Deeside Way and Tarland Way, potentially benefitting Torphins, Lumphanan and Tarland through the “The Big Vision”.

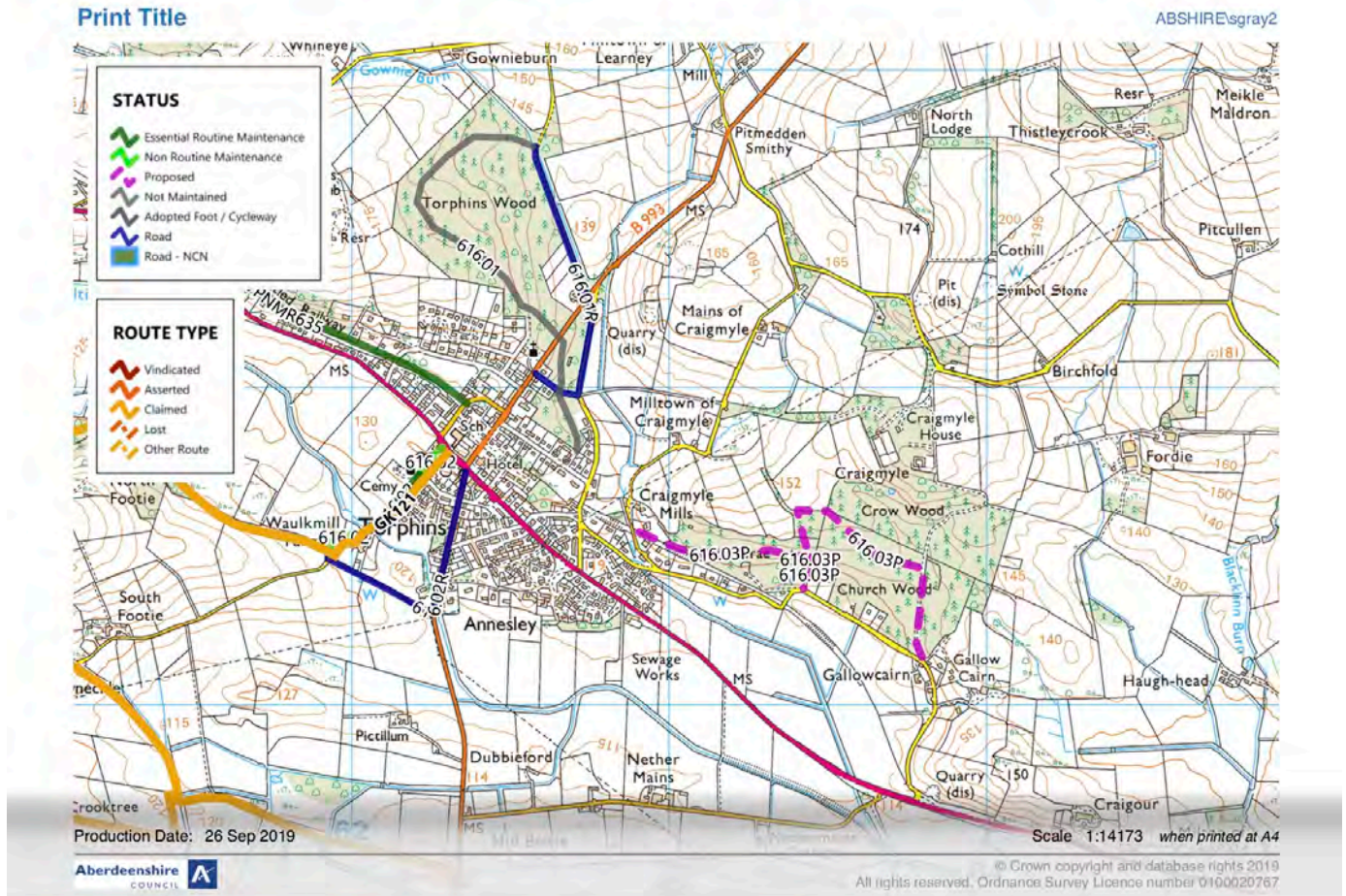
*Map E2* shows the first 1.9km of the 10km route which has been completed between Easter Beltie, where a new car park was constructed, and via a modified Dam Wood route to the Glassel road where a new lay-by is provided. The route provides access to the highly successful Easter Beltie River Restoration site, which draws both environmental interests and recreational users to the wetland area, and a safe link to near Glassel avoiding A980. Efforts continue to find routes acceptable to landowners from Torphins to Easter Beltie and around Glassel, and supportive discussions are maintained with Inchmarlo, Brathens and Glassel Community Council, Banchory Paths and Forestry and Land Scotland.

#### **Summary**

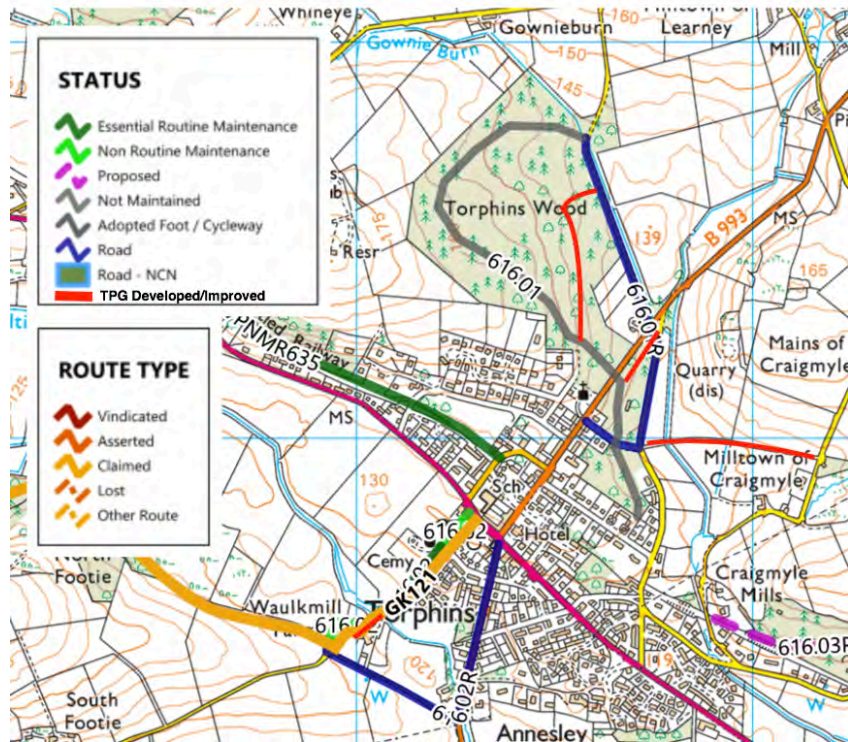
The Torphins community will benefit from not only the development of multi user paths within the village boundaries but also from the developing network of multi user active travel enabling paths connecting to neighbouring communities. This is a concept aligned with the NESTRANS Regional Active Travel Network proposals and the LDP Evidence Report: Local Living and 20-minute Neighbourhoods. The Evidence Report at section 3.5 Mapping Local Living and 20-minute Neighbourhoods in Aberdeenshire, Figure 18, shows the Torphins, Lumphanan and Kincardine O’Neil communities specifically mapped and listed as one of the areas with potential to function as “20 minute neighbourhoods”.

The enhancement of Torphins place lies not only within the village boundaries but also through the connections of the village with its surrounding environment.

Map A1 – Aberdeenshire Council Core Paths and Rights of Way Map



Map A2 - Extract Showing TPG Village Path Developments/Improvements in Red





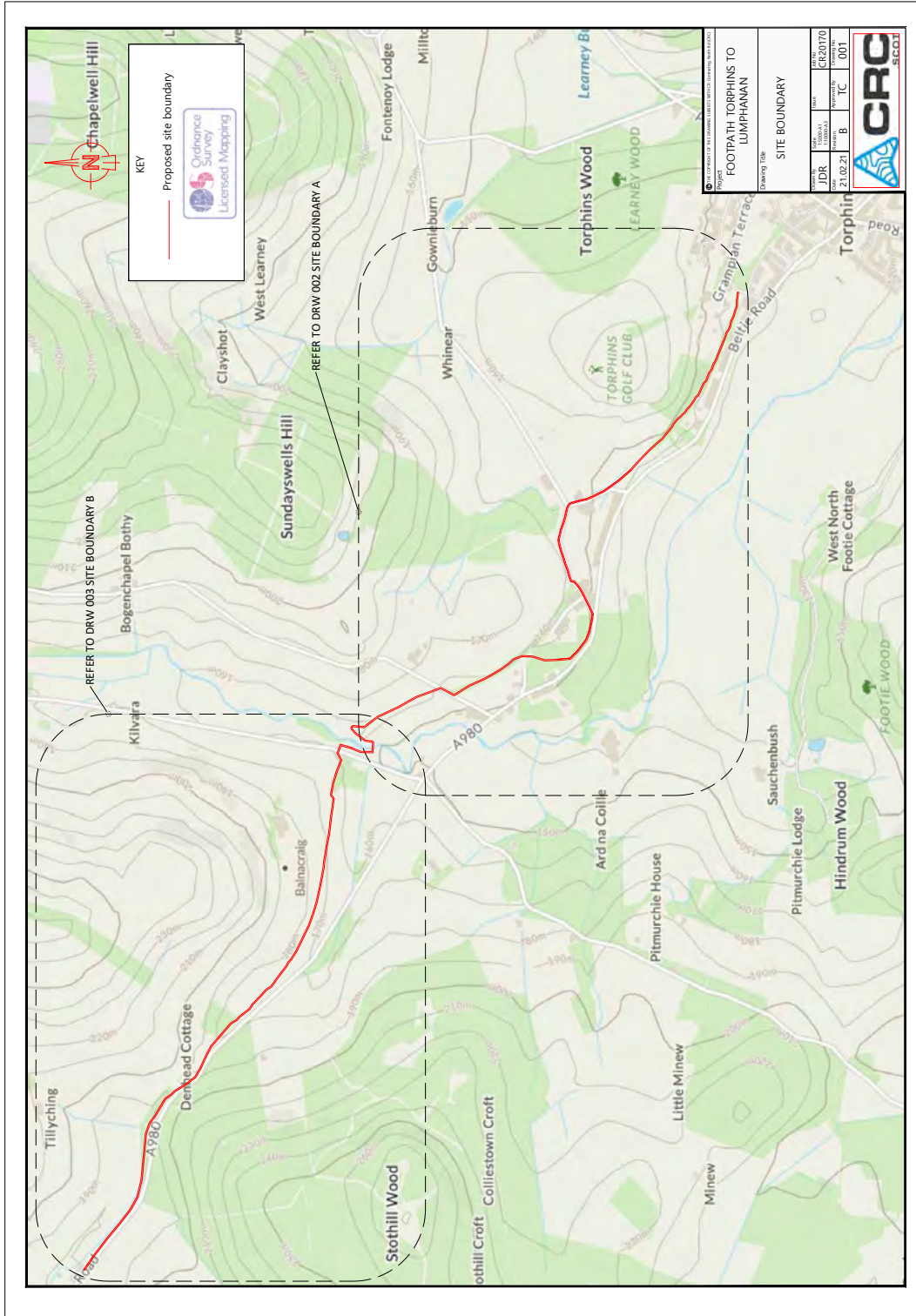
Map B – Proposed Blacksmiths' Path



Map C – Proposed school access path at Bridge Crescent on green space between roadside fence and school wall shown in red on map

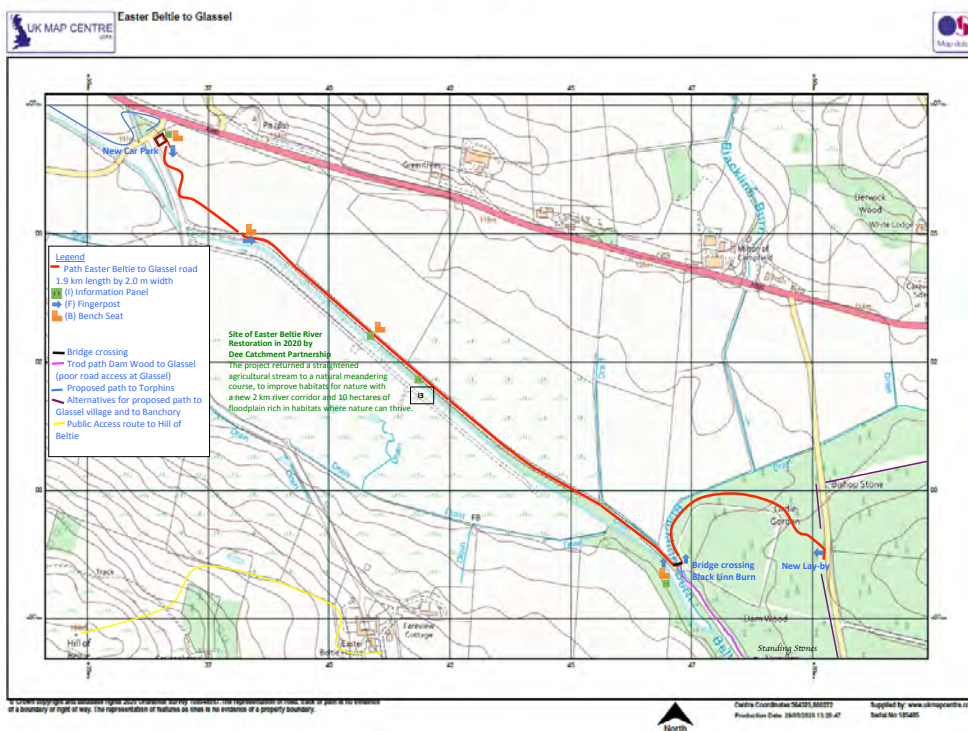
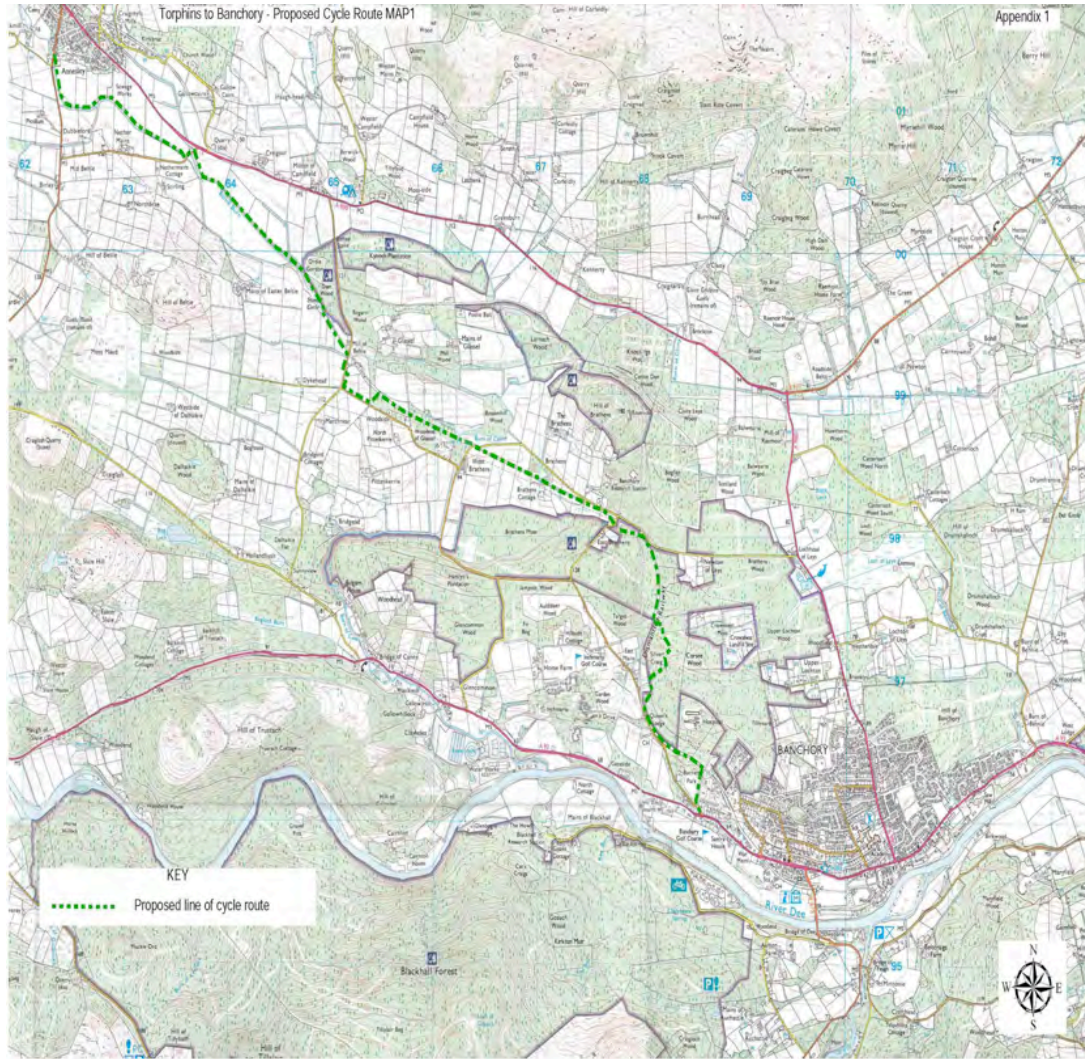


Map D – Overview of Torphins – Lumphanan Path Route





# Map E1 – Torphins – Banchory Route as per OATS Feasibility Study



## Map E2 - 1.9 km Section Completed Easter Beltie to Glassel Road

To meet FLS requirements the proposed route to south of Dam Wood was modified to traverse north west through Dam Wood to Glassel road opposite Kynoch Plantation. A route from Glassel road to West Brathens has not to date achieved agreement with landowners.