



The Birks of Aberfeldy Management Plan

2022 – 2027

DRAFT



(March 2022)

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has something to offer



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1.0 Introduction – the Plan and Partnership

The Birks of Aberfeldy Management Plan (BAMP) is aimed for use by Perth and Kinross Council (PKC), stakeholders, volunteers and members of the public alike. BAMP covers the land owned and managed by Perth and Kinross Council (PKC); this encompasses the land acquired by the old Burgh Council of Aberfeldy in 1968 the successors of whom are Perth & Kinross Council. (Appendix I)

The BAMP fully acknowledges those parcels of the Birks managed by landowners. Consultation and cooperation with all landowners are important for the future of this special landscape. The Plan covers landscape character and site condition, visitors and use, conservation and ecology.

Community partnership working is at the core of the Perth & Kinross Offer and is essential for ensuring countryside sites meet the needs, and are fit for the purposes of those who use and enjoy them. By working together within the context of site designations, enhancing special habitats and their biodiversity builds in resilience for future generations. As such, we are joint custodians of special natural places.

The BAMP is based on data gathered from 2018 onwards, historical data, previous management plans, and research both new and old; it is to be regarded as a working document that may be amended as appropriate. It is aimed to review and update the BAMP regularly.

A full survey of the site was carried out in terms of its infrastructure to ascertain its current condition and whether fit for purpose. Paths, benches, picnic benches, steps, sculptures, features, bins, drainage structures, and signage have all been mapped; and proposals to either retain/remove, refurbish/replace are described in the actions list within this plan, and illustrated on the Masterplan.

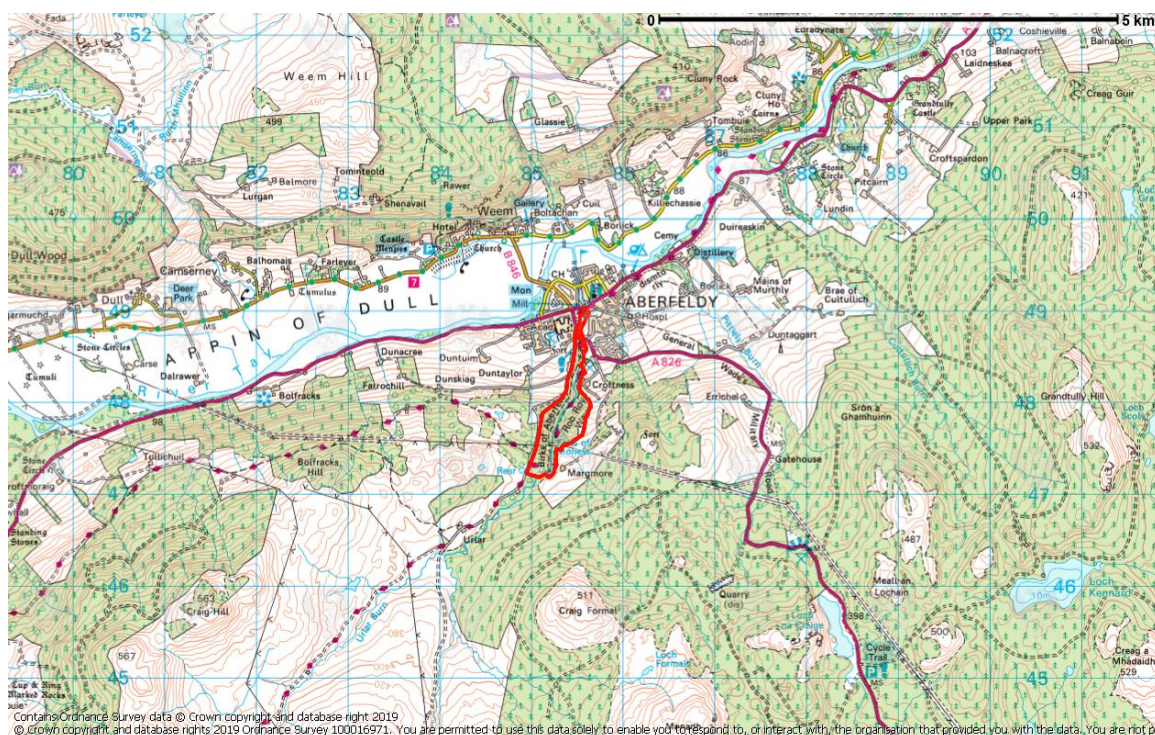
It is intended to be a concise user-friendly document and should be read with reference to the appendices for more detail as required.

Site Description

The Birks of Aberfeldy is a woodland, burn and waterfall landscape in Highland Perthshire located within, and stretching south of, the attractive town of Aberfeldy. It is a special place loved far and wide, and therefore highly valued by both the

public and Perth & Kinross Council alike. The steeply wooded gorge on the Moness Burn has several spectacular waterfalls flanked by a variety of trees hosting a wealth of wildlife, and plant species. The Birks is nationally and internationally recognised as a special landscape for its ecosystems and has two landscape designations: NatureScot have designated it a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Its contribution to the health and wellbeing of the local population, and the recreational opportunities which it provides are manifold; furthermore, it forms a key part to an area that attracts tourists from far and wide contributing substantially to the local economy.

The site is divided into two parts, known as the Lower Birks and Upper Birks. From the memorial arch in the centre of town to the bridge, the Lower Birks features a landscaped park which was implemented and is maintained by local environmental group Feldy in Flower. The remainder of the Lower Birks is semi natural woodland. The majority of the site, known as the Upper Birks, is separated from the Lower Birks by the Crieff Road and contains two visitor car parks, an extensive path network, information/interpretation boards and picnic facilities.



Location Plan

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Landownership and Interested Parties

- There are several landowners within the SSSI of the Upper Birks, and a parcel of land within the Lower Birks is leased out to Feldy in Flower. PKC ownership is generally clearly marked by natural boundaries or roads with some fencing in places and is accessible to the public (see Figure 1). Several informal paths feature both east and west of the Burn and are known intimately by local users.
- The Birks of Aberfeldy were gifted to the town by JA Simpson & Another, the Executives of late Mrs MF Haggart and acquired by the Provost, Magistrates & Councillors of the Burgh of Aberfeldy (the former Burgh Council) in 1968. Ownership has come down to Perth & Kinross Council through subsequent local authority reorganisation. It forms part of the Common Good of Aberfeldy and is managed for the benefit of the citizens of the (former) Burgh. PKC ownership extends to 1.7ha over the Lower Birks and manages 1.5ha; while in the Upper Birks PKC owns and manages 40.3ha over the Upper Birks including responsibility for the car parks, paths, signage, steps, drainage, picnic tables, bins, benches, and sculptures.

In addition to PKC, and local residents and users, there are a number of other parties interested as key stakeholders in the management of the Birks of Aberfeldy including:

- Perth and Kinross Countryside Trust (PKCT) – The Birks of Aberfeldy is part of Big Tree Country (see link <https://www.pkct.org/pages/category/perthshire-big-tree-country>) and has a Tree Trail (managed by PKC) of heritage value to which they have contributed trees.
- NatureScot (NS - previously Scottish Natural Heritage)
- The Birks of Aberfeldy Community Group (BACG) - established in 2018, represent the interests of the wide range of recreational users of the park and have a particular interest in the safeguarding of beech trees, and fundraising for projects
- Aberfeldy Community Council and councillors.
- Upper Tay Path Group.
- The wider community of Aberfeldy, including Primary Schools and Breadalbane Academy.

Each of these parties have been involved in the consultation and development of the BAMP. Additionally, there has been extensive consultation within PKC as land caretakers and managers. Illustration of feedback, concerns, and comments:

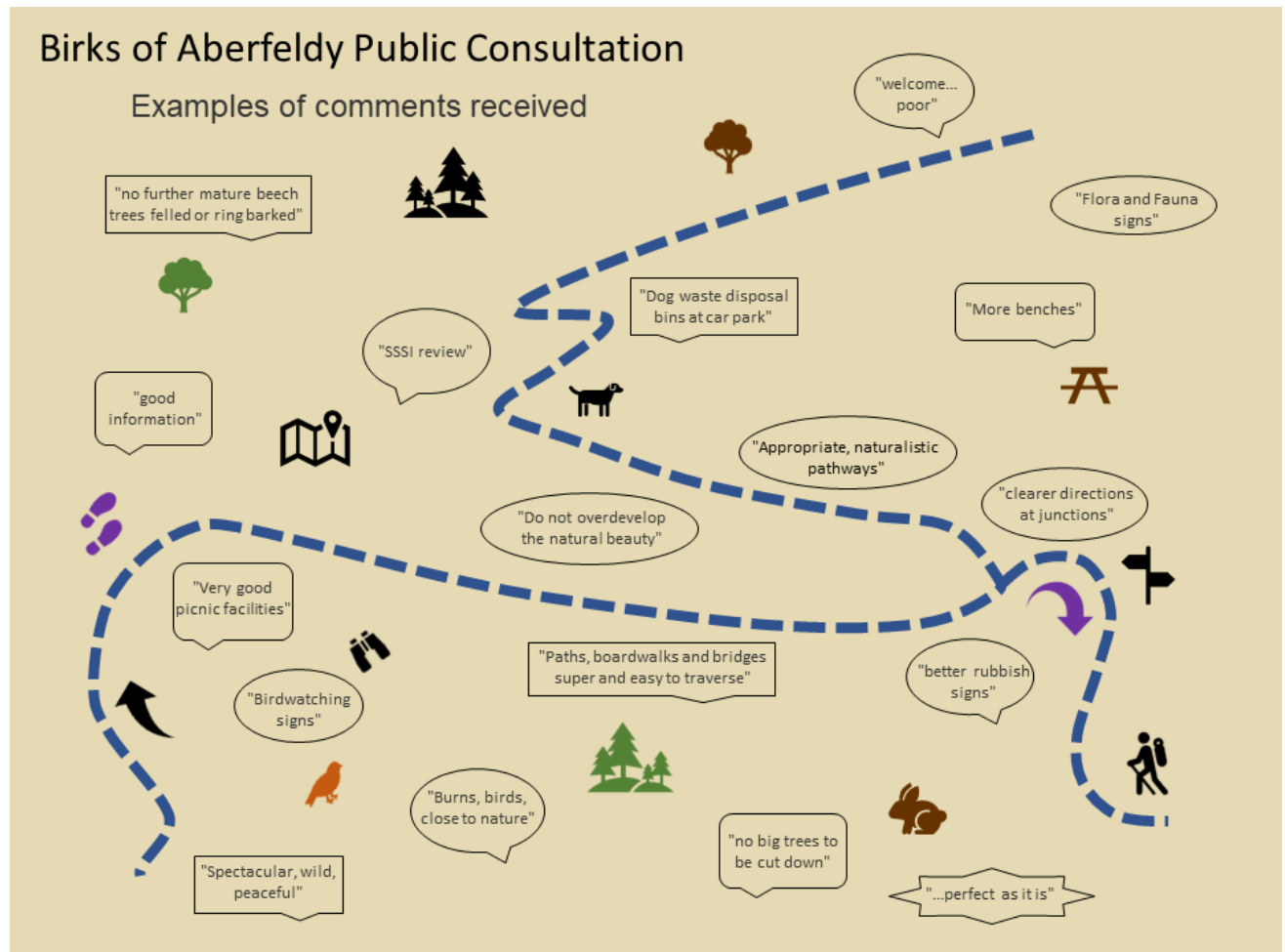
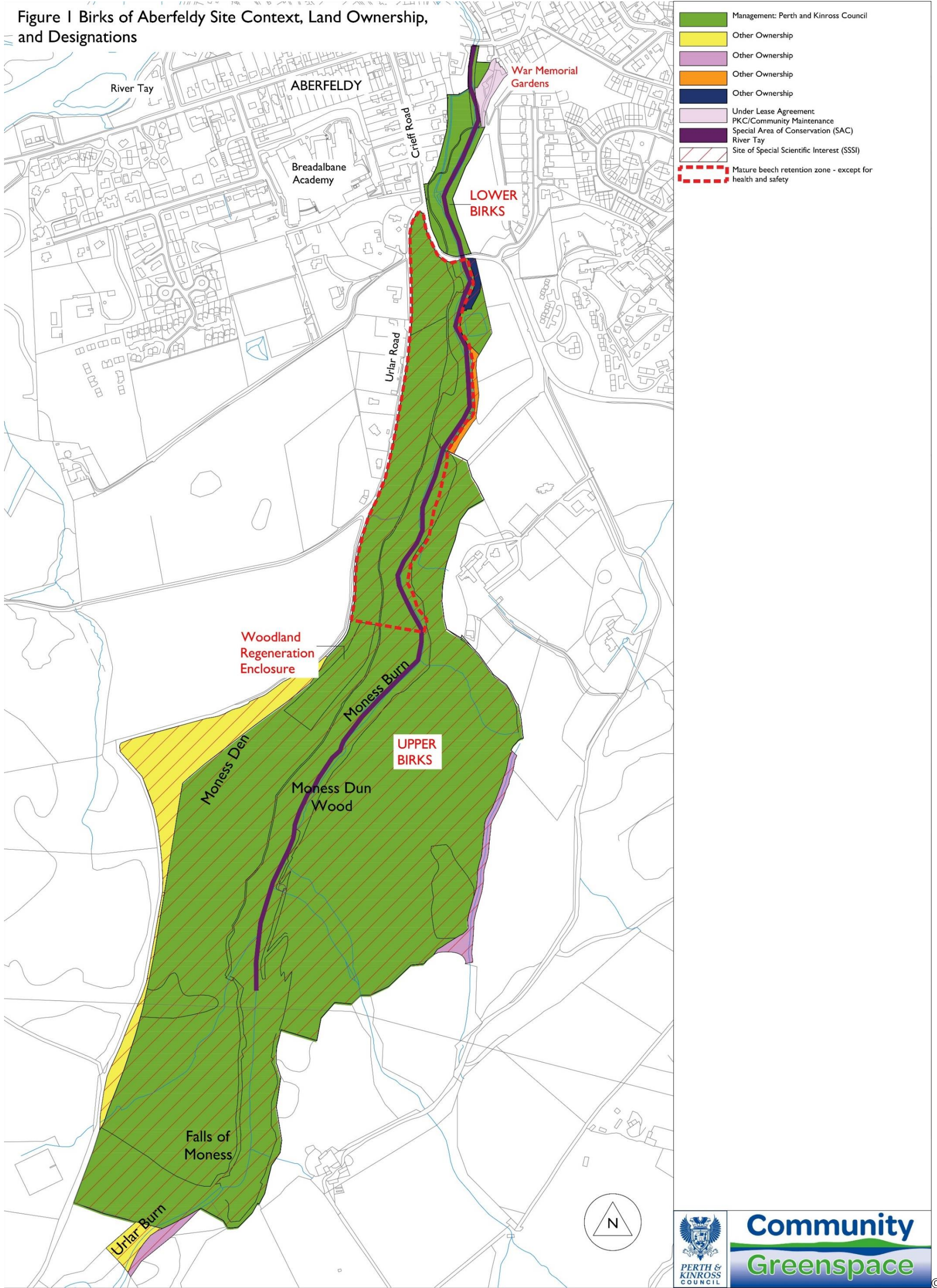


Figure 1 Birks of Aberfeldy Site Context, Land Ownership, and Designations



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Designations and Planning

The Birks of Aberfeldy is a highly valued landscape as demonstrated by its designations (Figure 1) and listed below:

- The section known as the Upper Birks is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). See Ecology section.
- The entirety of the Moness Burn within the whole of the site is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). See Ecology section.
- The Birks of Aberfeldy forms a part of the 'Strath Tay' Special Landscape Area (SLA)

Archaeology, History, and Culture

There is a cup-marked rock, one of many of these mysterious objects that are found in the area, near the A826 road. Rocks marked like this are thought to date from Neolithic times (around 5,000 years ago). The Birks is also of strong cultural interest with its connection to the poet Robert Burns who wrote a song lyric in 1787 while on a tour of the Highlands with a friend, where it is said he was inspired to write the lyric while seated by the Falls of Moness. There is also a 'Tree Trail' planted by local horticulturist Mr R Masterson (who also established the local gardens at Cluny House), featuring a number of specimen exotic trees.

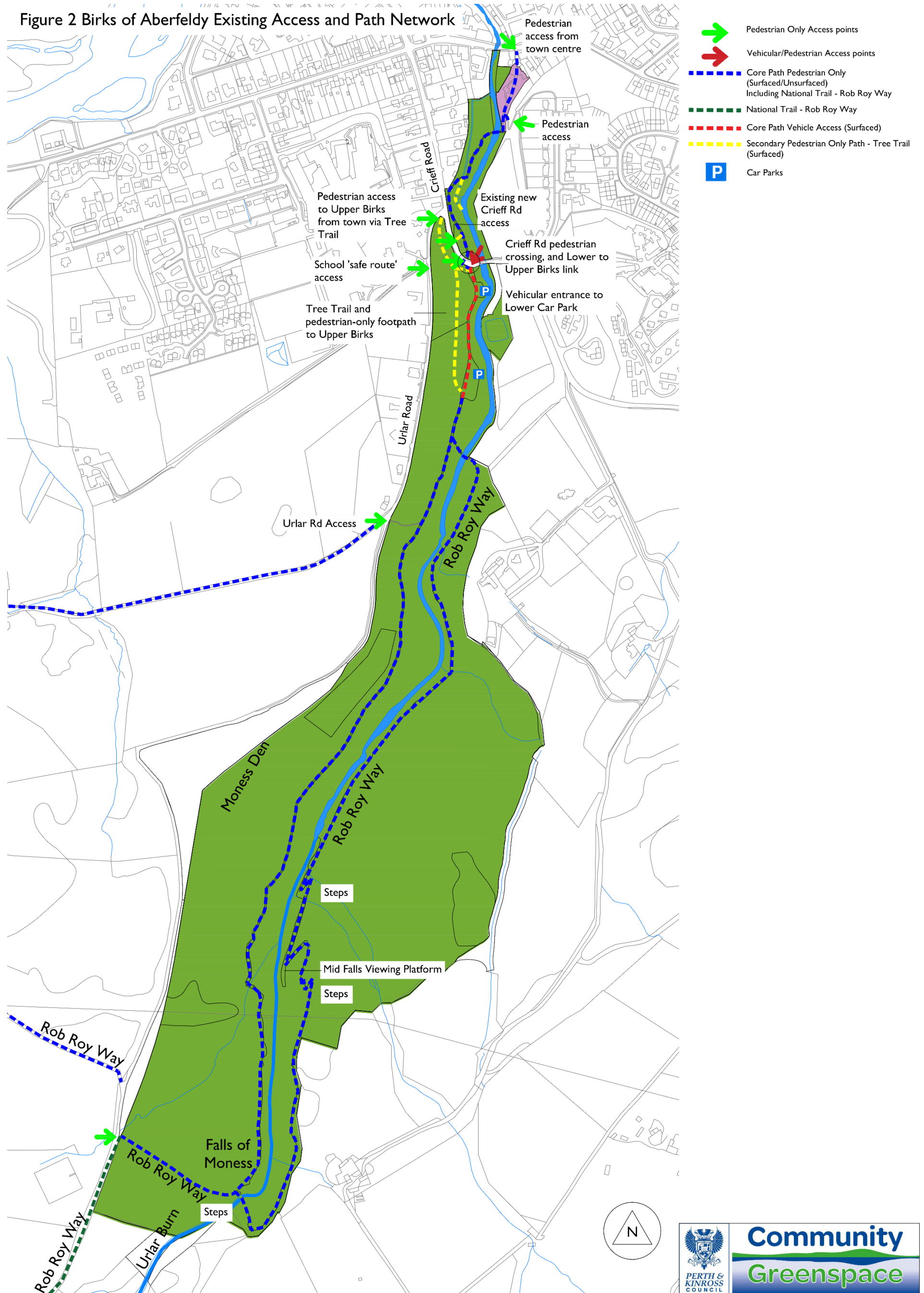


Cup-marked rock



Statue of the poet Robert Burns

Figure 2 Birks of Aberfeldy Existing Access and Path Network



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Ecology

The site is an area of ancient mixed woodland in the gorge of the Moness Burn and was cited by NatureScot (NS) as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its upland mixed ash woodland and its lichen flora; every SSSI is monitored to assess its condition as per a ratings system.

1. Favourable maintained – An interest feature should be recorded as maintained when its conservation objectives were being met at the previous assessment, and are still being met.
2. Favourable recovered – A feature of interest can be recorded as having recovered if it has regained favourable condition, having been recorded as unfavourable at the previous assessment.
3. Favourable declining – The attribute targets set for the natural feature have been met, but evidence suggests that its condition will worsen unless remedial action is taken.
4. Unfavourable recovering – A feature of interest can be recorded as recovering after damage if it has begun to show, or is continuing to show, a trend towards favourable condition.
5. Unfavourable no change – An interest feature may be retained in a more-or-less steady state by repeated or continuing damage – it is unfavourable but neither declining or recovering. In rare cases, an interest feature may be unable to regain its original condition following a damaging activity, but a new stable state might be achieved.
6. Unfavourable declining – Decline is another possible consequence of a damaging activity. In this case, recovery is possible and may occur either spontaneously or if suitable management input is made.
7. Partially destroyed – It is possible to destroy sections or areas of certain features or to destroy parts of sites with no hope of reinstatement because part of the feature itself, or the habitat or processes essential to support it, has been removed or irretrievably altered. In these cases, the remainder of the feature is given an assessed condition.
8. Totally destroyed – The recording of a feature as destroyed will indicate the entire interest feature has been affected to such an extent that there is no hope of recovery, perhaps because its supporting habitat or processes have been removed or irretrievably altered.

NatureScot SSSI Conditions Ratings, extract from website (ref <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/protected-areas-and-species/protected-areas/site-condition-monitoring/assessment-condition>)

It has also been identified within the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) relating to the Moness Burn (all designations are shown on Fig 1). Its diversity of flora and fauna are of high ecological value therefore and must be considered within all management, maintenance, and user actions and activities. NS issue guidelines on management, what actions are permitted on the site, what operations are given consent in principle, and what actions are not permitted (Appendices A, B and C). The condition of the woodland in the Upper Birks is 'favourable declining', while the lichen is in 'unfavourable no change' condition, and it is through considered and cooperative management of the site that an improvement in these conditions may be achieved; according to existing management aims, and two reports commissioned and published by NS in

February 2020, both woodland and lichen require similar woodland management tasks to assist with improvement.

The woodland is composed of birch, oak, ash, beech, and willow, with hazel, rowan and alder; it is thought that there has been a continuity of woodland cover here for up to 8000 years. Diversity is provided by pockets of alder and ash woodland in wet hollows and burn-sides.

The ground flora is species rich and contains a large number of plants of restricted distribution in Perth and Kinross; furthermore a species of lichen previously thought to be extinct in the UK (*Nephroma resupinatum*) has been recorded at the Birks of Aberfeldy.

The site is an important habitat for birds including Pied Flycatcher and Green Woodpecker, as well as an important over-wintering site for Brambling, Redwing, and Fieldfare. Red squirrels are present on site; and the SAC designation that encompasses the Moness Burn identifies the potential for species such as Otter, Brook Lamprey, and River Lamprey.

Beech Trees

Beech is a major component of the non-native tree species composition, especially in the Upper Birks where its impact is most critical to the local ecology. Beech regeneration is considered the main cause of the declining condition of the SSSI, along with herbivore impact (such as deer and rabbits, see Appendix E). However, it is also recognised by all stakeholders including NatureScot that mature beech are highly valued for their beauty and majestic contribution to the experience of the Birks, particularly in the surrounding area of the upper car park (see Appendix I for correspondence on this topic). It has been agreed in principle that mature beech within and around the car park areas are not to be felled unless they represent a risk to the safety of members of the public. Figure 1 marks out a retention zone for mature beech unless removal is required for health and safety purposes. If a beech tree needs to be removed for these reasons the group/community will be consulted where time allows or notified as soon as practicable afterwards in the case of emergencies.

The priority for any beech control is within the gorge, and in particular where it is actively invading native semi-natural woodland. Furthermore, the existing enclosure for regeneration-monitoring is part of proposals for beech control. The general activity of beech-popping and bracken-bashing are conservation tasks welcomed by all and carried out regularly by our PKC Greenspace Rangers and volunteers.

2.0 Use and User Groups

The Birks of Aberfeldy is a well-loved local public greenspace by the residents of Aberfeldy and visitors from the wider community; and a popular attraction for visitors both nationally and internationally when touring Scotland. There are numerous and varied activities that take place there, from recreation, to sports, educational activities, and volunteering; all major contributions to health and wellbeing, the local economy, and also to the maintenance of the site. Some activities require notification, and some require careful monitoring due to the sensitive nature of the site and its designations.

- Walkers and runners: all ages and varied abilities where possible, from seasoned walkers to casual/'Sunday'/family walkers and those new to the outdoors. There is also a high number of regular dog walkers.
- Education: Scouts, schools, and college students participate in a range of activities such as nature identification walks, conservation activities, and den building.
- Mountain biking
- Volunteering: PKC Greenspace Rangers lead numerous maintenance activities that include beech-popping, bracken-bashing, ditch and step clearing; an enclosure established some years ago to exclude deer was intended as a useful monitoring tool for the effectiveness of these tasks in contributing to habitat regeneration.
- Sports groups such as canoe/kayak, gorge-walking (not permitted), canyoning (not permitted), and Tayside Mountain Rescue activities
- Horse riders

The wide range and number of user groups and abilities creates a high demand within a limited area and sometimes conflicts can occur between user groups e.g. mountain bikers and walkers, and between users and the SSSI designation.

Some examples of conflict:

- Dog walking: dog fouling, and dogs not kept under close control, represent a risk to the SSSI flora and fauna as well as the overall detrimental effect for the site and its users.
- Mountain biking: recognised as an important sport locally, bikers use both informal and formal paths. Several conflicts or risks occur e.g.
 - the speed of travel on paths used by pedestrians;
 - the construction of jumps;
 - the creation of new informal paths (combined with ensuing erosion) has a cumulative and detrimental impact on slope stability and flora and fauna within the SSSI.
- Overnight campers: frequently generates waste that is not disposed of properly, polluting the site, impacts parking, a risk to the SSSI and SAC
- Over-foraging
- Gorge-walking and canyoning are not permitted due to the damage to the SSSI flora and fauna
- Illegal activities (such as gold-panning)

The formation of the Birks of Aberfeldy Community Group has been very welcome and is key in increasing dialogue between users, PKC, and landowners, to foster a better understanding of the issues that are present at The Birks and how they might be cooperatively and constructively managed for future generations to enjoy. Detailed in the next sections are the key issues, and proposals to remedy them as far as possible over the coming years.

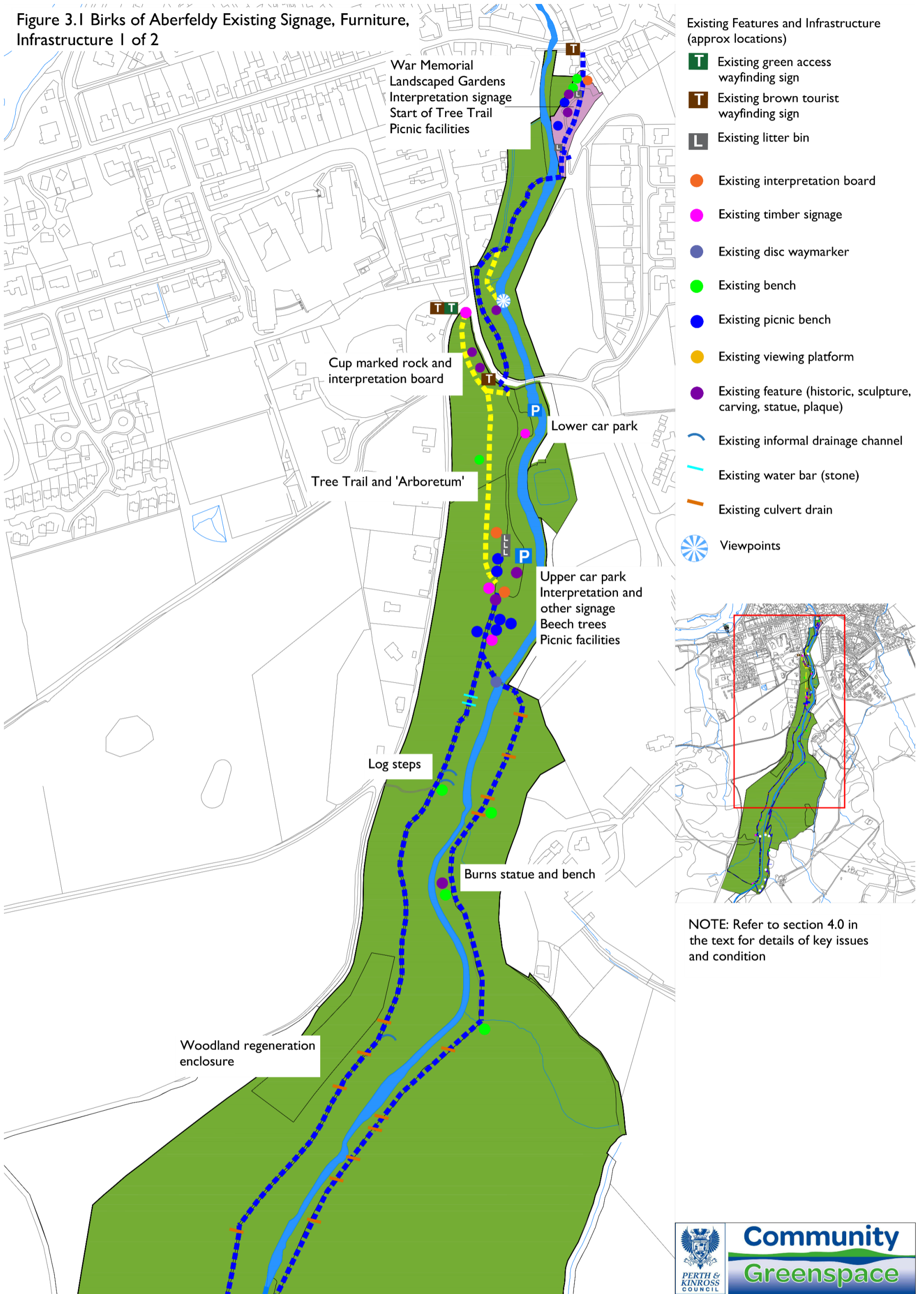
3.0 Key Issues and Existing Condition

The aim of this section is to identify the key issues within and existing condition of The Birks of Aberfeldy. Proposals shall be described in section 4.0.

It has been illustrated in previous sections that while The Birks are enjoyed by many user groups in multiple ways, this also can lead to conflicts and impact on the landscape quality of the area.

The current infrastructure on site is shown on Figs 3.1 and 3.2.

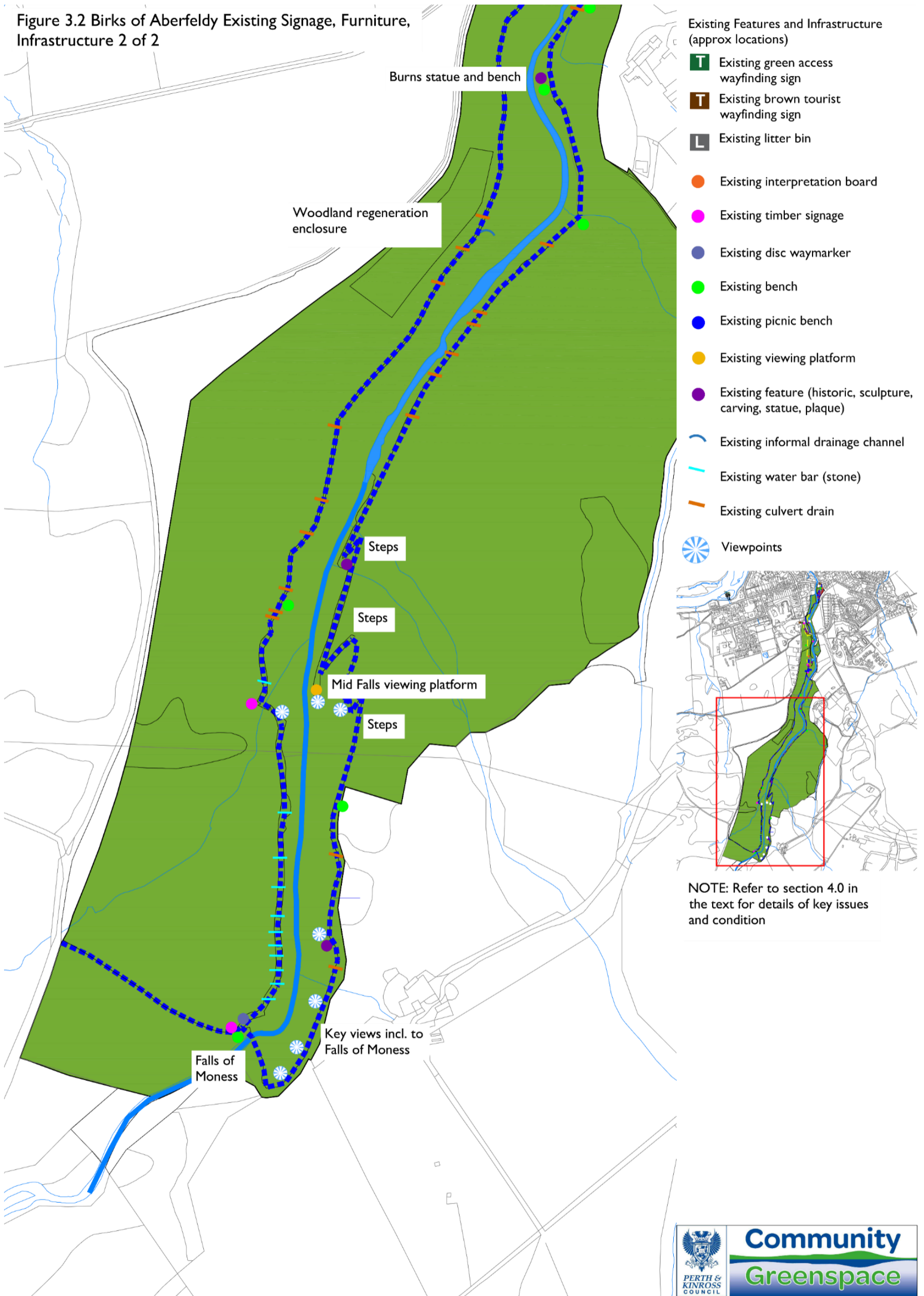
Figure 3.1 Birks of Aberfeldy Existing Signage, Furniture, Infrastructure 1 of 2



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Figure 3.2 Birks of Aberfeldy Existing Signage, Furniture, Infrastructure 2 of 2



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Through extensive consultation and site analysis, key issues were identified:

- Signage – Orientation and Interpretation:
 - Welcome outdated and low quality at all access points
 - Site orientation confusing and out of date with how the site is used and accessed
 - Signage:
 - haphazard,
 - mismatching,
 - past its end of life,
 - excessive and repetitive
 - lacking up-to-date information



- Access – Vehicular and Non-Vehicular:
 - Lower and Upper Car Parks:
 - Frequent overflow, and increasing popularity of site and car parks
 - Overnight camping and associated waste and littering
 - Lower Car Park:
 - Confusion regarding access routes and mixing of vehicular and non-vehicular access
 - Lack of quality welcome with relevant information
 - Lack of orientation to indicate route options and travel to and from town

- Upper Car Park:
 - Drainage issues causing deterioration of surfacing
 - Damage to beech trees within parking area
 - Free-for-all parking means inefficient use of parking space
 - New Lower Birks-Crieff Road access point in poor condition at Lower Birks side.
 - Crieff Road crossing from Lower Birks to Upper Birks, draws pedestrians and cyclists to access via vehicular access
 - Log steps in Upper Birks from Urlar Road in poor condition
 - School route from Urlar Road to junction of Lower and Upper Birks well-used, but unsurfaced
 - Mid-Falls Viewing Platform inaccessible and closed due to concerns over safety of structure as found in historical survey; see proposals section for more detail and see Appendix H for details of survey information.
- Woodland management:

PKC is currently working to the PKC Forest Plan (Appendix F) which was adopted in 2015 and consulted upon with NS.

 - SSSI in 'Favourable Declining' (NatureScot: *The attribute targets set for the natural feature have been met, but evidence suggests that its condition will worsen unless remedial action is taken*)
 - Deer and other herbivore impact is ongoing
 - Mature beech in Upper Car Park under pressure due to parking
 - Key views are lost to encroaching tree cover – tree management potentially conflicts with NS objectives
 - Enclosure for SSSI habitat regeneration monitoring is no longer deer-proof
 - Mature beech trees within enclosure are significant seed-spreaders
 - Historic Tree Trail has deteriorated

- Paths, Steps and Furniture:
 - Majority of path network eroded and in need of improvement
 - Drainage issues contributing to erosion of paths
 - Sections of existing steps require refurbishment or removal
 - Two existing benches heavily graffitied
 - Water collection at some benches and Burns statue
 - Bins mismatching and ad hoc in placement
 - People-counter no longer working
 - Burns statue subject to vandalism at least once a year

- The Mid-Falls Viewing Platform is regarded as a key attraction to the Upper Birks due to its views to spectacular waterfalls. It was closed back in 2008 for safety concerns. A geotechnical survey was carried out in the area for landslip reasons in the surrounding area, and within that report it was recommended that a further survey be undertaken for the platform feature and ascertain the feasibility of reopening it. The Birks of Aberfeldy Community Group are keen to carry this specialist survey out, with assistance in funding and procurement from PKCT:
 - A roped-access survey to be carried out by specialist contractor via the Birks of Aberfeldy Community Group and PKCT fundraiser, to establish feasibility of reopening the platform to the public

- PKC Maintenance:
 - The existing maintenance resources are fully committed and cannot accommodate any additional work on site.

4.0 Proposals

In order to maximise the benefits of the site to all users, the following proposals have been developed. The aim will be to implement these within a 5 year timeframe (refer to action plan in section 7.0):

- Signage – Orientation and Interpretation:

It is proposed that all existing signs be removed and replaced with a new suite of signs as per the following categories (Refer to Figures 4 – 5):

- Welcome signs at key site entrances
- Main Interpretation boards at key locations to incorporate site map, site information and important safety messages
- Tree Trail Interpretation board in the vicinity of the ‘Arboretum’

- Waymarking and Trailhead posts to indicate: circular walks within the Upper Birks, directions from Lower through to Upper Birks, and for access takers coming from town via Crieff Road via Tree Trail



Important junction arriving at Upper Birks or transitioning between Lower and Upper. Key location for signage and waymarking

- Access:
 - Improve access safety with clear segregation between access takers and vehicles – see signage proposals (Figures 4&5)
 - Emphasise route through Tree Trail at key junction location (see image above)
- Lower Car Park (Figure 4):
 - Rationalise parking spaces through design for greater efficiency
 - Introduce quality welcome signs with relevant information
 - Introduce clear orientation posts to indicate route options and travel to and from town
 - Introduce height restrictor to motorhome access to car parks and reduce overnight stays, while retaining emergency services access
 - Opportunity to improve aesthetics of new height restrictor in future with a bespoke barrier to create a ‘welcome gateway’ – for example refer to image below



Example of aesthetically designed height restriction barrier: Winnall Moor, Winchester, Hampshire

- Upper Car Park (Figures 5/6):
 - Rationalise parking spaces through design for greater efficiency
 - It is proposed to design an attractive and welcoming entrance to the Upper Birks; creating a sense of place
 - Through re-design a drainage solution will be implemented to reduce existing erosion, and the design will also aim to reduce impact to the beech trees with creation of a new picnic area
 - New welcome to introduce better waymarking and indicate non-vehicular route to and from town via the 'Arboretum'
- Introduce a new ramped and/or stepped access adjacent to pedestrian crossing from the Lower Birks to draw access takers to 'Arboretum' Tree Trail path; to be discussed with stakeholders/interested parties
- 'Safer Route to School' from Urlar Road to be established and surfaced as a formal path
- Make good recently added Crieff Road access near to Breadalbane Academy on the Lower Birks side
- Maintained replacements for log steps in Upper Birks from Urlar Road.
- Woodland management (refer to Section 7):
 - Bring SSSI into 'Favourable Recovered' condition through the following actions (NatureScot: *A feature of interest can be recorded as having recovered if it has regained favourable condition, having been recorded as unfavourable at the previous assessment*):
 - Repair and/or relocate enclosure for SSSI habitat regeneration monitoring
 - Ring-bark mature beech that seed within enclosure

- Beech-popping/removal of less than 10cm DBH (Diameter at Breast Height) 1.5m, bracken-bashing and herbivore activities to continue as existing
 - Improve key views through scrub clearance required, within SSSI designation parameters
 - Survey health and safety of Tree Trail trees
 - Re-invigorate Tree Trail and 'Arboretum' with improved signs and maintenance (path works to be included as part of works described below in 'Paths...' section)
 - Survey extent of Ash Dieback during Spring and Summer months to assess level of action required
 - Identify sensitive areas of broadleaf regeneration for protection
 - Identify areas of protected Lichen growth for protective management
 - Create Ash Management Plan
- Paths, Steps and Furniture:
 - Re-lay and re-grade approximately 70% of path network with appropriate materials and methods
 - Create cambers, channels and cross-channels on/adjacent to paths where needed, in tandem with aforementioned path works
 - Remove redundant timber steps and upgrade steps at key locations along the main circular path route.
 - Refurbish two graffitied benches with sanding and treating; infill and grade appropriate material where there is water collection at bench bases and Burns statue
 - Replace existing bins with improved design and introduce waste/recycling information
 - Replace people counter for monitoring, maintenance and ongoing management by the Birks of Aberfeldy Community Group

- PKC Maintenance

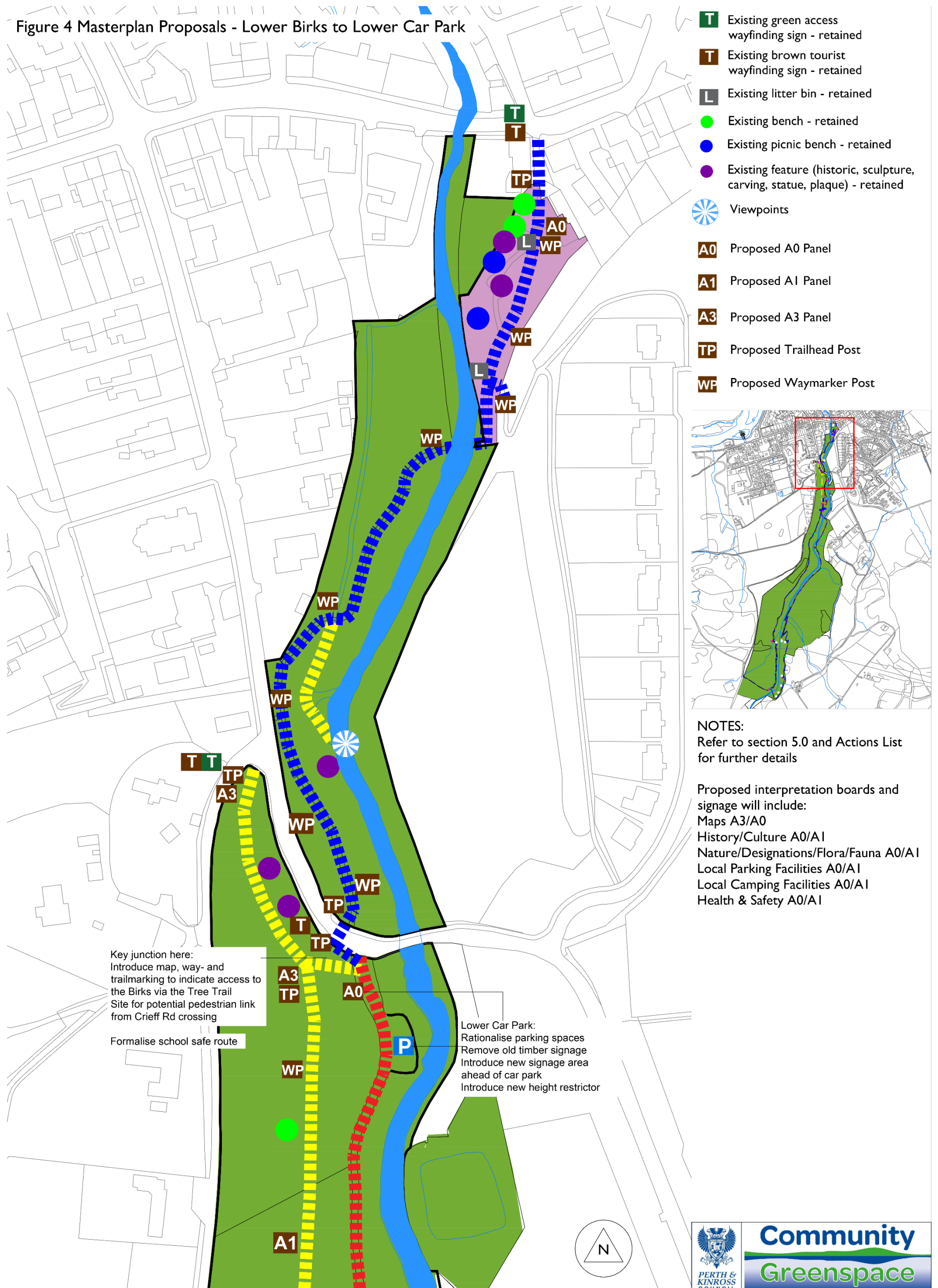
At present the Upper and Lower car parks and associated roads and entrances are maintained on a regular basis by PKC. This includes bin emptying, litter picking, cutting of grass verges and maintenance of furniture.

Litter picks, spraying of herbicides over the surfaced paths and limited grass cutting has occurred across the site at key locations such as picnic areas and next to Urlar and Crieff roads.

- Permission from NatureScot required to use any herbicide within SSSI with NatureScot in future (consent under Section 13 of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004)
- Maintenance procedures to be reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose
- Rationalising site furniture whilst not increasing the amount of site furniture is essential to minimise any additional burden
- Replacement of existing and outdated furniture should reduce maintenance in the short term
- Site entrance improvements should aid site maintenance e.g. placing furniture in surfaced areas rather than in grass.
- Review the potential for volunteers to carry out maintenance tasks such as litter picking on a regular basis.

All projects relating to earthworks, re-grading paths especially are regarded as high-risk operations by NatureScot for native woodland habitats and flora - sensitive plants have been recorded in places adjacent to the path for example, the nationally scarce small cow-wheat. An agreed method statement will be required for these types of works therefore, with an emphasis on avoiding the need to dump spoil and soil or disturb native woodland habitat directly adjacent to the path.

Figure 4 Masterplan Proposals - Lower Birks to Lower Car Park



NOTES:
 Refer to section 5.0 and Actions List for further details

Proposed interpretation boards and signage will include:
 Maps A3/A0
 History/Culture A0/A1
 Nature/Designations/Flora/Fauna A0/A1
 Local Parking Facilities A0/A1
 Local Camping Facilities A0/A1
 Health & Safety A0/A1

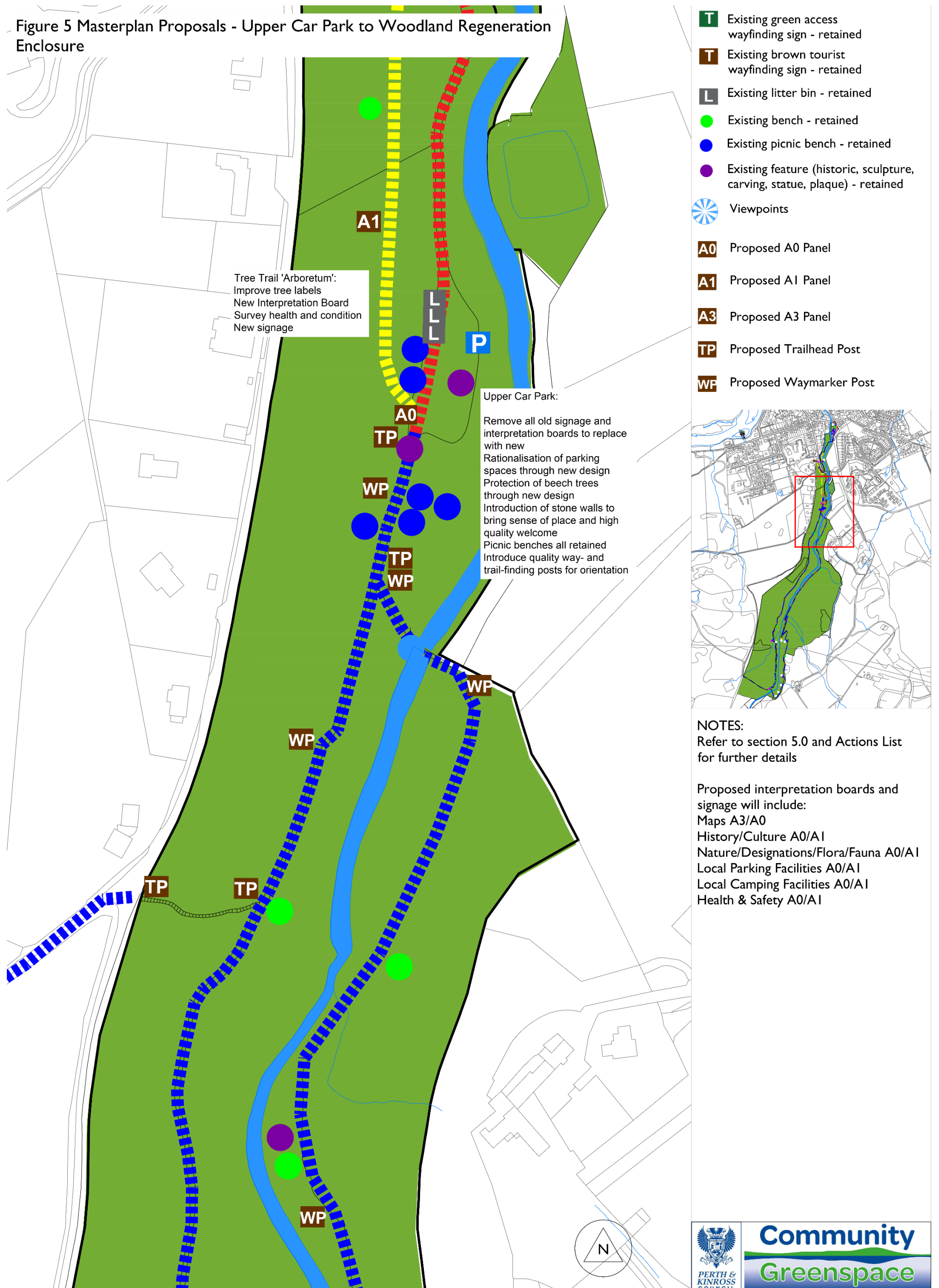
Key junction here:
 Introduce map, way- and trailmarking to indicate access to the Birks via the Tree Trail Site for potential pedestrian link from Crieff Rd crossing

Formalise school safe route

Lower Car Park:
 Rationalise parking spaces
 Remove old timber signage
 Introduce new signage area ahead of car park
 Introduce new height restrictor

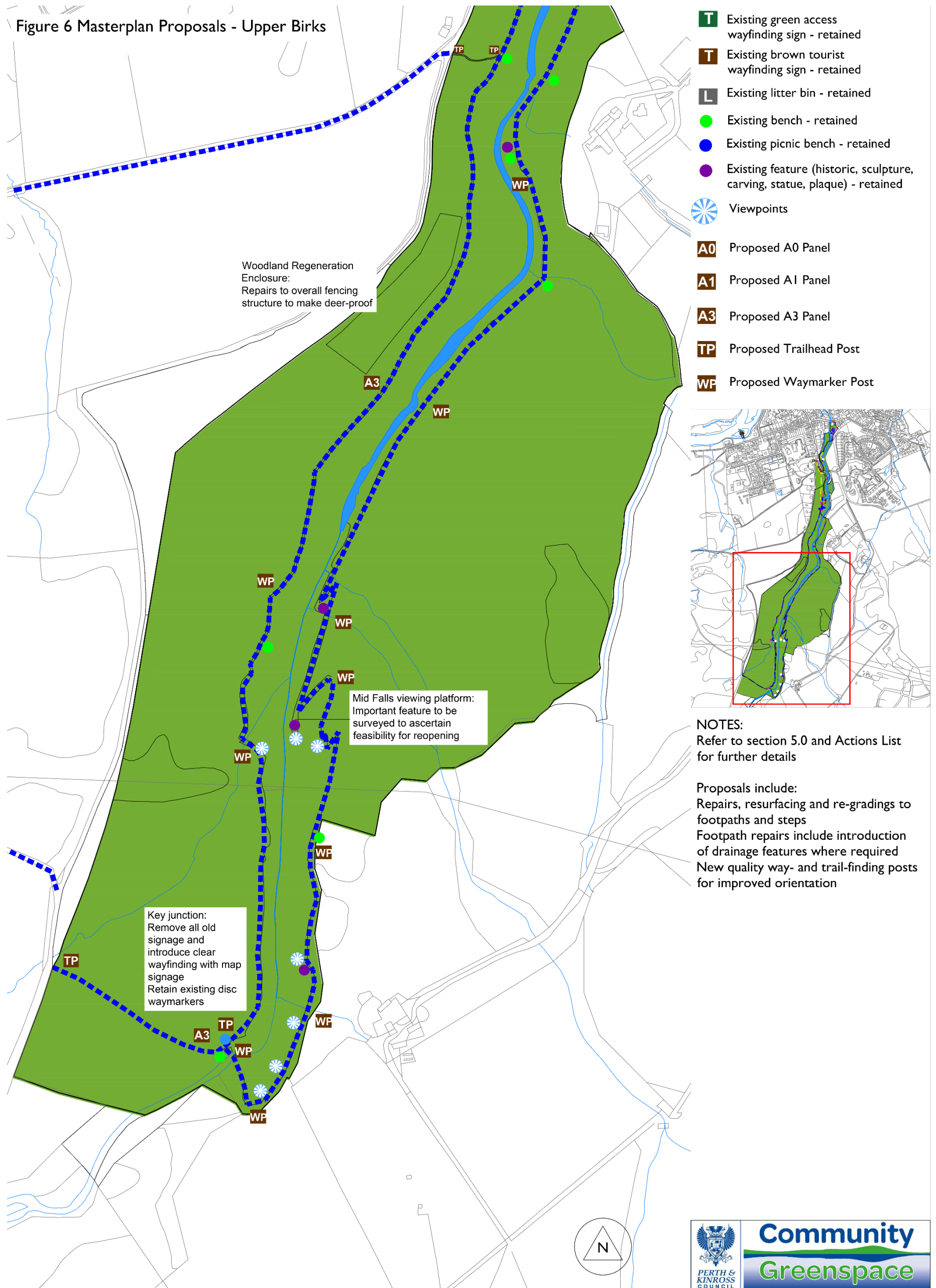


Figure 5 Masterplan Proposals - Upper Car Park to Woodland Regeneration Enclosure



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Figure 6 Masterplan Proposals - Upper Birks



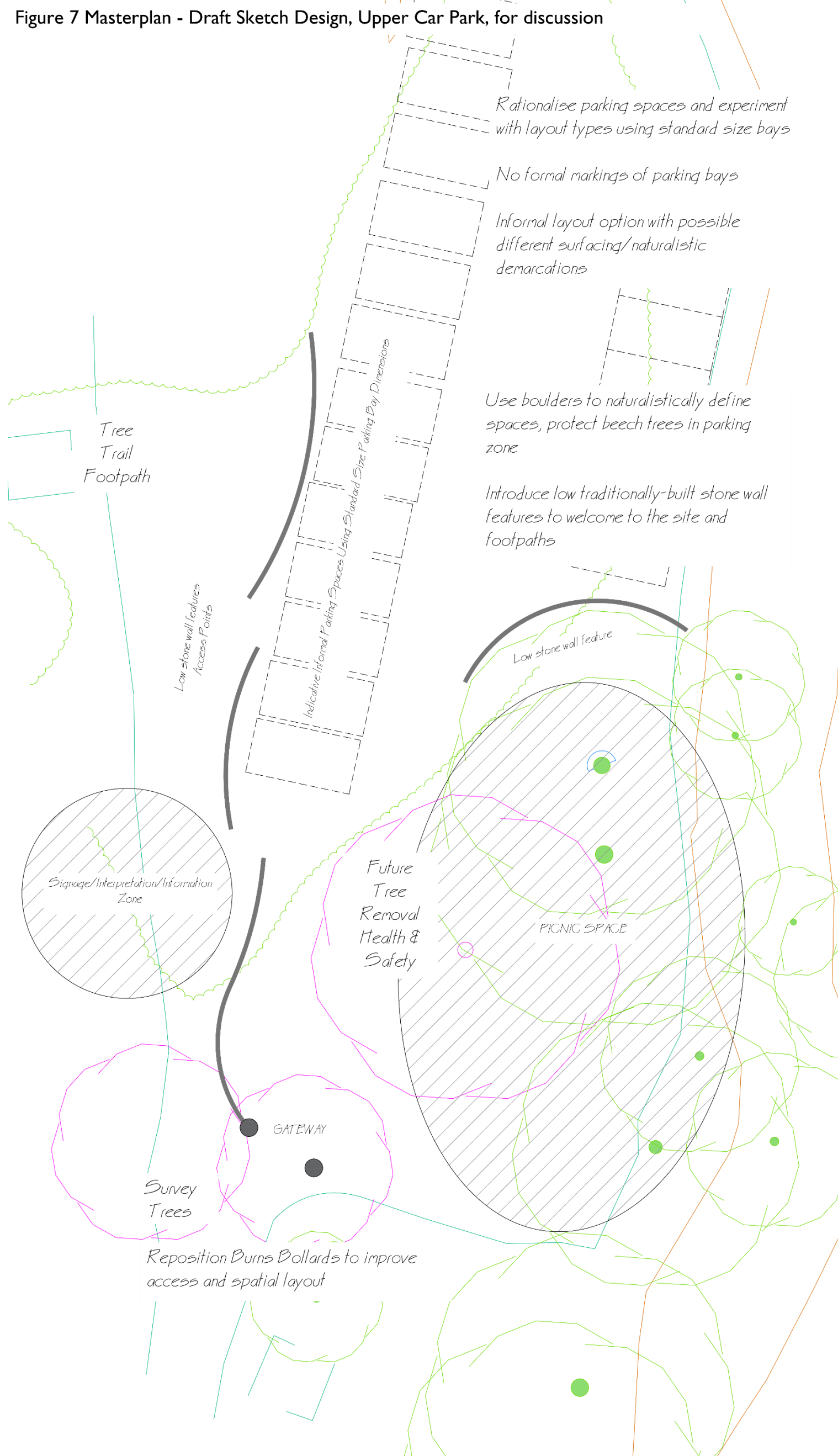
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Figure 7 Masterplan - Draft Sketch Design, Upper Car Park, for discussion



Please note: this is a draft sketch design, for the purpose of discussion



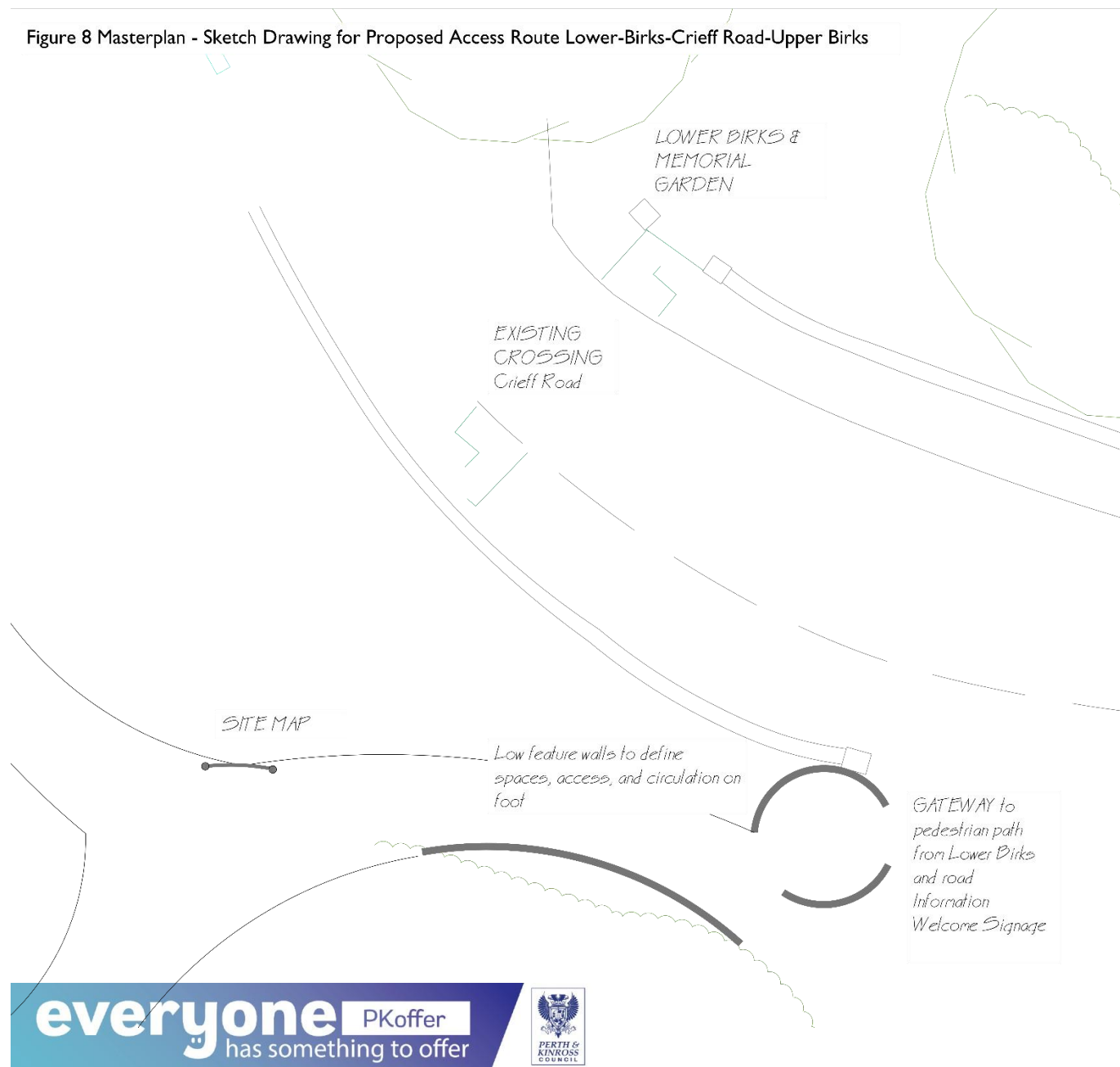
Not to scale



Figure 8 Masterplan - Sketch Drawing for Proposed Access Route Lower-Birks-Crieff Road-Upper Birks



- Notes:
1. New access to clearly lead to visible welcome signage and directions
 2. New access to encourage pedestrian access via pedestrian only footpath and steer away from lower car park
 3. New signage to give overview of various routes to and from town centre



5.0 Funding

There is an opportunity for Community Partnership working with PKC to raise funds and identify priority works for the Birks of Aberfeldy. The following are potential funding options available:

- PKC Capital
- WIAT (Woods In and Around Towns) – woodland improvement grant) funding application for path, drainage and furniture improvements could provide funding for a large part of the cost. Although WIAT funds 100%, it is understood that the rates provided will not cover the full actual cost of furniture and improvements.
- Griffin Fund (Griffin and Callacher Community Fund)
- CECF (PKC Community Environment Challenge Fund)
- Habitat and Species Grant for SSSI site
- PKCT (Perth and Kinross Countryside Trust) funds and aid fundraising (TBC)
- Sustrans

6.0 Timescale Strategies

The timescale for the works is dependent on the availability of resources such as; PKC budget, External funding, PKC staff and Contractors. Refer to Section 5 for potential external funding.

External funding is a valuable source of financial support for The Birks of Aberfeldy, however it can often be variable and unpredictable. This requires a higher degree of management as there is no guarantee on the amount of funding available and timescales may not match other funding bodies etc. With this in mind, the timescale is flexible and will evolve as the funding strategy is developed.

It is estimated that the majority of the main proposals could be carried out during the 2022/23 financial year pending available budgets. Within this timeframe the design, external funding applications would be undertaken and the works could be carried out in a favourable time of year/season for construction. The following timescale shows tendering and construction split between walls, paths, furniture and signage – this allows flexibility to be built into the project as the timescale for each element may be variable due to weather, agreements (e.g. signage wording), funding and supply.

Indicative Timescale :

- Public Consultation via website/social media: winter 2021/22
- Finalise outline proposals/ Management Plan: spring 2022
- Detail Design work: summer/autumn 2022/2023
- Design of interpretation signage: winter 2022 – Spring 2023
- Funding applications: e.g. WIAT, SSE: Summer 2022 onwards
- Funding applications with community involvement (others): Summer 2022 onwards
- Review available funding Autumn/Winter 2022
- Woodland management: autumn/winter 2022/23 (after bird nesting season)
- Tender for hard works (paths/walls/signage/ furniture): winter 2022
- On site and Supply/installation: spring 2023 onwards

7.0 Action Plan

The following Action Plan outlines the existing condition of The Birks of Aberfeldy and identifies

- a) how the site could be made more welcoming through improved access and orientation (e.g. signage/ waymarking, path and entrance improvements);
- b) how to make progress on NS management objectives and SSSI status
- c) the key forest plan actions over the next five years
- d) the key actions to improve infrastructure with a view to reducing the longer-term maintenance burden.

The recommendations are prioritised into High, Medium, Medium/ Low and Low, on the basis of consultation and consensus. The total estimated costs are approximately £180k and are indicative as items and prices may change.

Item No.	Location	Existing condition	Priority	Outline Proposal	Key Actions/ Next steps	Who could do the work	Approximate cost
Signage: Orientation and Interpretation							
1	Orientation and Interpretation	Poor condition and/or out of date, haphazard signs of varying conditions and styles dotted everywhere	High	Remove all existing signage, review signage requirements, and design and install new signage as per strategy	Agree requirements, contents and locations as set out in the Plan	Use of contractor and in conjunction with other countryside sites	Approx costs: £12k Eligible WIAT funding: £TBC approx.
2	Path routes/Orientations	The path network requires new and additional directional posts along with maps at key locations	High	Remove all existing signage except existing 'Rob Roy Way' plastic disc markers and develop new strategy as outlined in the Plan	Agree requirements, and locations as set out in the Plan	Use of contractor and in conjunction with other countryside sites	Approx costs: £10k Eligible WIAT funding: £TBC approx.
Car Parks at Upper Birks							

Item No.	Location	Existing condition	Priority	Outline Proposal	Key Actions/ Next steps	Who could do the work	Approximate cost
3	Lower Car Park	Increase in overnight camping	High	Install height restriction barrier at narrowest point of access road	Agree height definition, location	Use of contractor	Approx costs: £4k
4	Lower Car Park	Standard height restriction aesthetically out of place	Low	Create bespoke naturalistic welcome/height restriction to enhance arrival and sense of place	Agree project, sketch designs, source appropriate craftspersons/artist to work with	Artist and contractor	Approx costs: £6k
5	Upper Car Park	Poor welcome Damage to beech trees Drainage	High	Create welcoming entrance/sense of place at car park with introduction of stone walls to define entranceway, improve interpretation and provide visitor facilities while protecting the beech trees as an important feature	Agree design detail and consult	Use of contractor	Approx costs £35k
Woodland Management							
6	Tree Trail, Lower Car Park, Upper Car Park	Degraded Tree Trail, arrival to the Birks	High	Selective maintenance of Tree Trail removing low-quality shrubs, felling of one beech (TBC) in car park due to health & safety	Agree and check permissions required by NS	PKC Tree Officer/Ranger/Use of contractor	Approx costs: £3k Eligible WIAT funding: £TBC approx. Habitat and Species Grant
7	Tree Trail	Survey required	High	Survey health and condition of Trail Trees	Agree trees of value	PKC Tree Officer/Ranger /Contractor	Approx Costs: £2k Eligible WIAT funding: £TBC approx.
	Tree Trail	Interpretation	Medium	Installation of new interpretation/ tree labelling	Signage pending tree survey	PKC Tree Officer/Ranger /Contractor	Approx Costs: £2k

Item No.	Location	Existing condition	Priority	Outline Proposal	Key Actions/ Next steps	Who could do the work	Approximate cost
					Procure works		Eligible WIAT funding
8	Upper Birks	SSSI is Favourable Declining	High	Selective ring barking and/or felling of beech within gorge areas and where actively invading native semi-natural woodland (outwith beech exclusion zone)	Procure works	PKC Ranger/Tree Officer/Use of contractor	Approx costs: £4k Eligible WIAT funding: £TBC approx
9	Lower and Upper Birks	Survey extent of Ash dieback	High	Survey during spring and summer periods Create Ash management plan in line with National Guidance	Commission survey	PKC Tree Officer/Ranger /contractor	Approx cost: £2k Eligible WIAT funding: £TBC approx
10	Upper Birks	Substantial beech regeneration	High	Remove all beech <10cm DBH, concentrating on areas where diverse ground flora apparent Remove all beech <10cm DBH in steeply sloped areas (outwith beech exclusion zone)	Ongoing Identify zones and compartments and with ref to NS recommendations	Volunteers/PKC Greenspace Ranger/Specialist contractor	Approx costs: £3k Eligible WIAT funding: £TBC approx
Infrastructure/Furniture							
11	Paths	Paths in poor condition due to run-off/surface water erosion and general wear and tear	High	Approx 70% of total surface area to be resurfaced and re-graded where necessary Including installation of cross falls and drainage features where necessary	Funding and tender package	Use of contractor/Ranger/Volunteers	Approx Costs: £70k Eligible WIAT funding: £TBC approx
12	Vehicular access road	Prone to potholes	High	Complete scraping back and resurfacing of access road and both car parks	Funding and tender package	Use of contractor	Approx Costs: £20k Eligible WIAT funding: £TBC approx

Item No.	Location	Existing condition	Priority	Outline Proposal	Key Actions/ Next steps	Who could do the work	Approximate cost
13	Fence repairs to Enclosure	Sections of fence in disrepair	Medium	Repair fence where required in order to regain herbivore-free zone and observe regeneration of habitat so bracken-bashing and beech-popping in the enclosure can resume effectively	Funding and tender	Use of contractor	Approx Costs: £5k Eligible WIAT funding: £TBC approx
14	Burns Statue	Minor damage	High	Repair or remove area of damage	Infrastructure to assist with repairs	PKC CG	Approx Costs: £TBC
Access							
15	Existing ramped access to Lower Birks from Crieff Road	Earthworks require retention	Medium/Low	Groundworks, and railings require some making good to upgrade quality of this access to acceptable level	Re-design of area pending agreement of project	Use of contractor	Costs: £1k
16	Create enhanced path link and welcome from Lower to Upper Birks over the Crieff Road	Current layout encourages pedestrians to access via the lower car park	Medium	Design new welcome hub at Crieff Road to draw pedestrians to improved path to Upper Birks	Agree project with wider CG and Community	Use of Contractor	Costs: £8k
Birks of Aberfeldy Community Group							
17	Mid-Falls Viewing Platform –	Closed to public as unsafe	High	Initial roped survey of existing, determine feasibility of restoration project	Community Group/PKCT to commission specialist survey	Specialist contractor	PKCT/Community Funds £TBC
Mountain Biking							
18	Upper and Lower Birks	Increase in popularity in use by bikers with additional increase in associated trails, and jump building	High	Dismantling of unsafe jumps, consider measures to reduce biking in sensitive areas		Community Greenspace/Local Community	

Note on OS Maps:

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