

## Proposed New Regional Park

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### The City of Edinburgh Council

2 June 2005

#### Purpose of report

- 1 To respond to the motion by Councillor Murray under item 20 of the Council meeting of 27 January 2005: "To request a report from the Director of Culture and Leisure into the possibility of introducing Country Park status to the geographical area covered by the Braid Hills wedge from Blackford Hill to the city by-pass including Alnwickhill and Liberton."

#### Main report

- 2 The land under discussion is indicated in Map 1, appended to this report and includes Blackford Hill, the Hermitage of Braid, Craigmillar Park Golf Course, farm land at Liberton, the Braid Hills, Mortonhall Golf Course, Mortonhall Estate, Meadowhead Farm, and the fields lying between Frogston Road and the city by-pass. It is about 663 hectares (1638 acres) in size.
- 3 Land ownership and land use are mixed. The main areas in Council ownership are Blackford Hill and the Hermitage of Braid, the Braid Hills Golf Courses, Seven Acre park at Alnwickhill and some woodlands in the Buckstone area, which total 156 hectares. The remaining 507 hectares is privately owned and mainly consists of a mixture of private golf courses, agricultural land, a commercial camp/caravan site and woodlands.
- 4 The area is already used in a variety of ways for recreational purposes. The public has full access to the Hermitage of Braid and Blackford Hill and the parks within the area. Access over the golf courses is limited by the nature of the activities carried out there, but the Braids Courses have a right of way running across them. Mortonhall Estate includes within it a number of public footpaths.
- 5 All of the area under discussion is within the Edinburgh Green Belt as now defined in the South East Edinburgh Local Plan, approved for adoption on 21 April 2005. Additional non-statutory but recognised designations cover different parts of the area: land north of Frogston Road is shown in the Local Plan as an Area of Great Landscape Value; much of this area is also a designated Wildlife Site; and the Braid Burn valley including the Hermitage of Braid has been declared a Local Nature Reserve. A purpose of Green Belt designation is to provide countryside for recreation. There is a strong presumption against development that does not have an agricultural, forestry or countryside recreation purpose. Planning policies recognise the importance of the active use and good

management of Green Belt land within the range of permissible uses, and promote landscape enhancement. A review of the Edinburgh and Lothians Structure Plan will begin in 2006. This will provide the context for reviewing the city's long-term growth options against its development needs. The review might also extend to the Green Belt and how it might better fulfil its objectives and meet the city's recreation needs, and it is appropriate to give consideration to these issues now and as the work of preparing the review gets under way.

- 6 The remainder of the report will consider the options for the Council in terms of enhancing public access and benefits in the area.

## **Options**

### **Country Park designation**

- 7 "Country Park" is a formal designation which may be made by a planning authority under the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967. The key attribute of a Country Park is that its primary land-use is recreation and in this way it differs from most other areas of countryside. Designation of a Country Park would be carried out in close consultation with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). At present SNH is undertaking a lengthy review of Country Parks, their designation and status, and it is understood that the final report is not imminent.
- 8 The City Council has ownership of one such designated area, Bonaly Country Park, which forms a part of the Pentland Hills Regional Park. The Council owns and manages two other areas known as "country parks", Cammo and Craigmillar Castle Park, which are not formally designated as such. It is a prerequisite of Country Park creation that the managing authority has control of the land in question. This is normally achieved by outright ownership of the land by the local authority, or sometimes by a long-term lease of the land from another party.
- 9 The Council's intention to create a Country Park would normally be set out in the Local Plan. This would make it possible for the Council to gain control of the land by compulsory purchase. It is probable that much of the land under consideration would need to be secured through Compulsory Purchase Orders and the costs would be extremely high where there is any likelihood of 'hope value' (i.e. enhanced value arising from the belief of eventual development) and acquisition in all probability would be contested. It is likely to take a minimum of 5 years to achieve this and there is currently no identified budget provision for expenditure of this nature.
- 10 Privately owned and managed country parks do exist – a nearby example is Dalkeith Country Park, in which all the land is under one private ownership. However, whilst Scottish Natural Heritage provides grant aid for various aspects of this park, it is not a formally designated Country Park.
- 11 The Council could choose to advance Country Park designation on its own parcels of land but this would achieve little in practice. However in the light of the above information the pursuit of Country Park designation is not recommended.

### **Work within the existing land designations**

- 12 The Land Reform Act 2003 requires the Council to define its Core Path Network. This is currently under development and will be brought forward in due course. There are a number of routes in the area which are likely to be included in the Core Path Network, but access for the public is by no means comprehensive or

clearly defined. In particular, north-south connections and circular routes are not well provided.

- 13 There are a number of steps, which could be taken in the short to medium term to improve the accessibility of the privately owned areas to the general public. An audit of footpaths, cycle routes and bridleways could be carried out, and negotiations with private landowners undertaken with a view to creating an integrated access system for the Braid Hills Wedge area. This would be relatively low cost compared to the costs of land acquisition.

### **Regional Park designation**

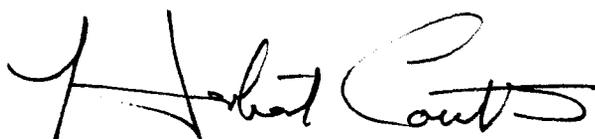
- 14 Regional Parks are created on larger areas of land under the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1981. Previously they have been designated in cases where existing patterns of recreational use are established and where the primary use of the land in question (i.e. its economic function) is something other than recreation. For example in the Pentland Hills Regional Park, the primary land uses are farming, water catchments and military training. The bulk of land remains in private ownership and primary land-uses continue alongside responsible recreational access by the public.
- 15 Four Regional Parks have been created in Scotland. One of these, Loch Lomond, has since been subsumed into a National Park. The others, Clyde-Muirshiel, Fife and the Pentland Hills are all upland areas. However, there is no reason why larger tracts of high-value countryside on the urban fringe (i.e. the Green Belt) should not be considered for Regional Park status.
- 16 The Pentland Hills Regional Park was designated by Lothian Regional Council in 1984, and following this a Public Local Enquiry was held. The Reporter upheld the designation in 1985. Despite the initial difficulties, the Pentland Hills Regional Park is widely regarded as a very successful model for protected area management. It is now operated by the Culture and Leisure Department on behalf of the City of Edinburgh, Midlothian and West Lothian Councils, overseen by a Joint Committee.
- 17 Scottish Natural Heritage has been carrying out a review of the Regional Park designation and this has not yet been published. It seems likely that the published review will be supportive of the general concept, and that powers to designate Regional Parks will remain in place.
- 18 The Braid Hills wedge is probably too small at 663 hectares to be considered in its own right for designation as a Regional Park. By comparison, the Pentland Hills Regional Park is over 9,000 hectares in area. However, it is possible that it could function effectively as part of a larger Regional Park set within the Green Belt. This larger park could take the form of a linked series of strategically important green wedges, and other areas of countryside, perhaps with smaller Country Parks set within them to cater for more intensive recreational activity. This could be considered in the context of a wider area that might include land around Craigmillar, Edmonstone and into Midlothian where there are already proposals to enhance public access and retain green belt areas.
- 19 Should the Council propose to create a new "Green Belt" Regional Park, this would need to be set out in the Local Plan and would require the support of SNH and the Scottish Executive. It is likely that designation would be preceded by a Public Local Enquiry. Collectively, this is necessarily a long process, which could take 5 to 10 years or more to achieve. It is felt that this provides the best long-

term prospect of achieving the Council's objective of further developing public access to, and enjoyment of, the Green Belt.

## Recommendations

### It is recommended that the Council:

- (i) Notes that the pursuit of Country Park status for the Braid Hills wedge is not recommended.
- (ii) Instructs that a joint working party, to be chaired by the Director of Culture and Leisure, be formed to develop the proposal for a wider area Regional Park in the Green Belt, including the Braid Hills wedge. This would comprise representatives of the Culture and Leisure and City Development Departments, chaired by the Director of Culture and Leisure and involve partner organisations such as Scottish Natural Heritage as appropriate.



**Herbert Coutts**  
Director of Culture & Leisure

25.5.05

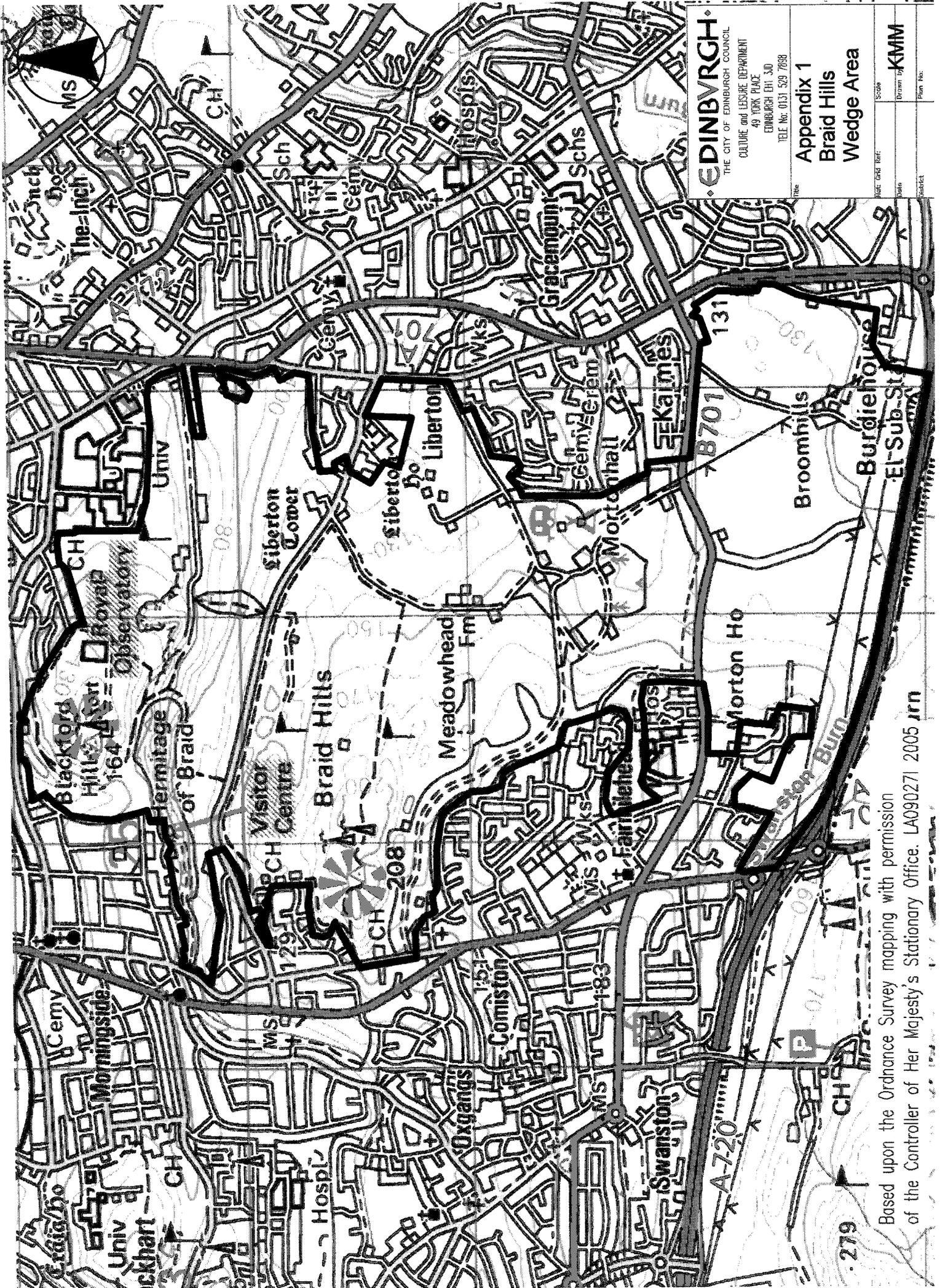


**Andrew Holmes**  
Director of City Development

25.5.05

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<b>Appendices</b>	Map 1 showing the area under discussion
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<b>Wards affected</b>	49 Newington, 51 Morningside South, 52 Fairmilehead, 53 Alnwickhill, 54 Kaimes
<b>Background Papers</b>	None



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File: **Appendix 1**  
**Braid Hills**  
**Wedge Area**

Scale: **KMM**  
 Drawn by: **KMM**  
 Plan No:

Based upon the Ordnance Survey mapping with permission  
 of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office. LA090271 2005 jrn