The Development of the Gardens and Designed Landscape at LARBERT HOUSE, FALKIRK

GLORIOUS GARDENS

Exploring our hidden gardens and forgotten landscapes

Clyde and Avon Valley Landscape Partnership

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Larbert House

NGR: NS 85008 82583

Report on the development of the designed landscape

on behalf of

Scotland's Garden & Landscape Heritage

Registered Charity No SC034618

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1.0 Introduction to Glorious Gardens

Glorious Gardens was a two-year pilot project (2015-17) to research and record historic gardens and designed landscapes in two areas of Scotland. The project focused on properties which are not listed in the Historic Scotland Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes, but which still retain evidence for their development and have some conservation value.

One strand of the pilot project, funded by Historic Environment Scotland (HES), focused on gardens and designed landscapes (GDLs) in the Falkirk local authority area while a separate strand, funded by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and the Heritage Lottery Fund, studied properties in the Clyde & Avon Valley Landscape Partnership (CAVLP) area.

The Glorious Gardens pilot project was initiated and managed by Scotland's Garden and Landscape Heritage, who contracted Northlight Heritage to recruit, train and support groups of volunteers to conduct the research and produce reports on properties in each area during 2015-17.

2.0 Introduction to Larbert House

The Larbert House estate (NGR: NS 85008 82583) had its origins in the late 18th century, with the original house (called Mount Riddell) built on the highest point in the parish of Larbert for the Riddells of Ardnamurchan. The house was remodelled in 1822 for the owner, Sir Gilbert Stirling, by the architect David Hamilton and was renamed Larbert House. It was altered again in the late 19th century. From the early 20th century it had other incarnations, first as part of a mental hospital known as The Colony and later as the site of Forth Valley Royal Hospital. The house was destroyed by a fire on New Year's Day, 2007, and the shell is currently being restored and developed as apartments.

The site is slightly elevated and overlooks a curling pond, the Carron River valley and farmland. It is well wooded with parts of the woodland classified as native, nearly-native, plantation and ancient.

Name	*Designation*	*Grade*	*ID*	*Weblink*
Larbert House	Listed building	B	LB10495 Canmore 221067	http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB10495 https://canmore.org.uk/site/221067/

3.0 Methods

The study followed the project methodology, as detailed in the Glorious Gardens Method Statement (see project archive, held at the National Record of the Historic Landscape maintained by HES).

It involved the consultation of key historic maps, aerial photographs, local and national archives, and databases of heritage assets and statutory designations. The results were entered on a Property Information form, hosted on a secure server, to ensure a consistent level of recording.

The desk-based research was followed by a systematic walkover survey in the autumn and winter of 2016-17 to identify and record surviving components and key elements of the historic designed landscape. The survey employed a recording system designed for the project that combines written field notes, tablet-based data capture and photography. All data gathered during the project are available for consultation as part of the Glorious Gardens archive, held at the National Record of the Historic Landscape maintained by HES. The sources consulted are listed in section 8.

The information gathered has been synthesised to establish a baseline understanding of the development of the designed landscape and its current state, including its overall structure, surviving components and conservation opportunities.

4.0 Desk-based research results

4.1 Historic maps

The settlement of Larbert appears on maps from the late 16th century onward. This section summarises the changes to the designed landscape of Larbert House which are captured on each of the more informative historic maps. Section 6 draws out further evidence from the maps as it relates to specific components of the landscape.

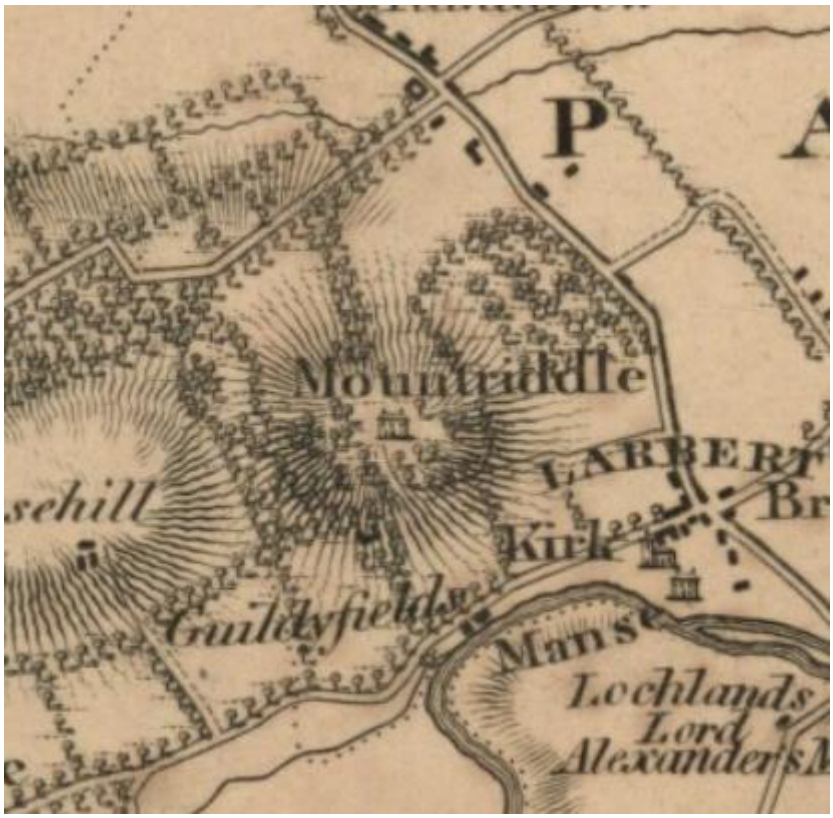
Illus 2: Pont's map of The East Central Lowlands (Stirling, Falkirk & Kilsyth) (Pont 32) (1583-96).

Pont's map shows 'Lairbarr K' (kirk) near the River Carron as well as nearby Torwood and Dunipace Castles and Houshill farm, but no house is depicted at Larbert.

Illus 3: Roy's Military Survey of Scotland (1752-55) (©British Library).

The village of 'Larbar' is shown on the north bank of the River Carron. It is arranged along either side of a central street, associated with several enclosures and surrounded by unenclosed cultivation.

Illus 4: Grassom's (1817) To the Noblemen and Gentlemen of the County of Stirling.



Grassom's map is the first to depict the mansion house of 'Mountriddle', later to be re-named 'Larbert House.' It also shows the East Drive. A U-shaped stable block is shown to the south-west of the house, with woodland and parkland with shelter belts around it. In contrast with the open fields shown by Roy, there is evidence here of significant enclosure.

Illus 5: Ordnance Survey six-inch (1st edition), Stirlingshire, Sheet XXIV. Surveyed 1861, published 1865.

Mount Riddel (the pre-1819 name) has become Larbert House by the 1860s. This is now a mature estate centred on a large house with what is probably a service courtyard adjacent to it on the north. An ice house is shown north-west of the house and a boat house at the south-west end of a large pond. The pond does not appear on earlier maps, suggesting it is artificial; there is a small island at its centre. South of the house, a courtyard stables stands immediately east of a large walled garden, in part double-walled, which is divided into four by paths and appears to contain an orchard. The policy wall lies to the west of the walled garden. Two main drives lead to the house, one meandering through parkland from the south-east and another approaching more directly from the north-east, with a third leading to the stables. There are lodges at each of the three entrances. The former approach from the east has disappeared. The core of the estate is surrounded by open, naturalistic parkland with well-defined areas of specimen trees, varying sizes of roundels and shelter belts.

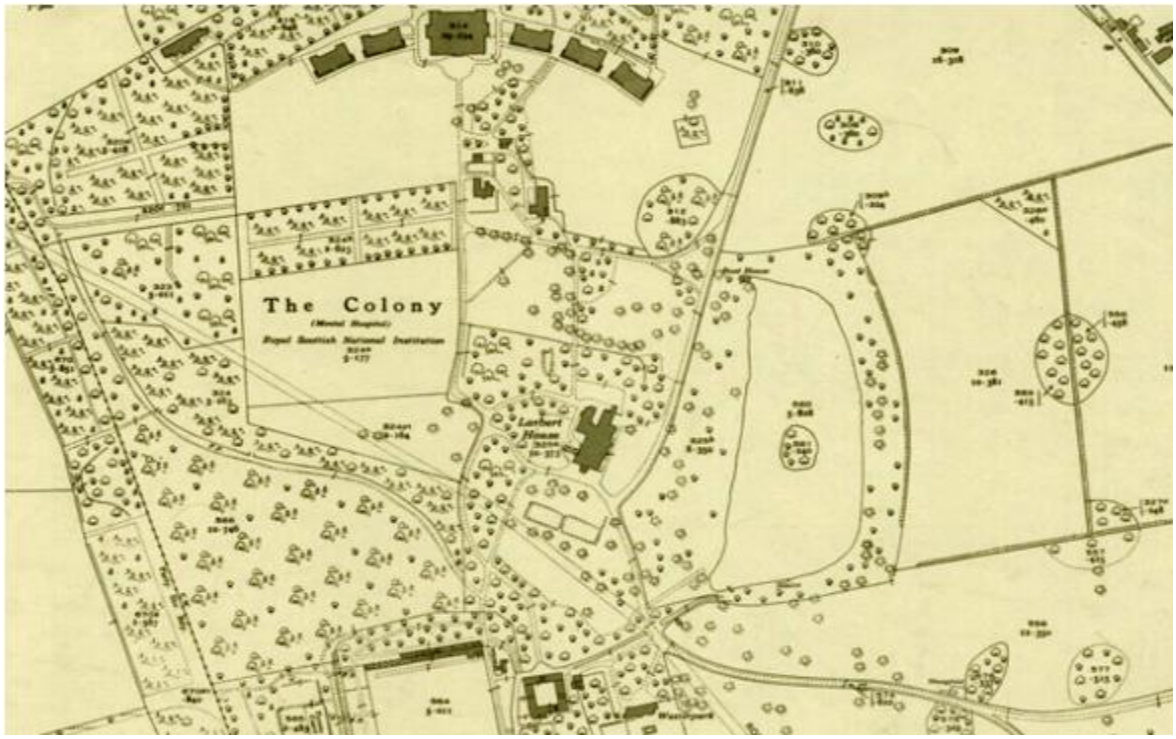
Illus 6: Ordnance Survey six-inch (2nd edition), Stirlingshire Sheet XXIV.SW. Revised 1896, published 1899.

By 1896, Larbert House has been extended with the former service courtyard apparently filled in or incorporated into the house. A glasshouse range has been built against the south-facing wall of the walled garden. In keeping with OS policy, the layout of the garden is not mapped. The ice house and boat house are no longer depicted. A kennel is shown in an enclosure in parkland north of the house. The main north-west/south-east drive through the estate is now marked as 'Roman road (site of)'.

Illus 7: Ordnance Survey 25-inch (3rd edition), Stirlingshire n024.13 (includes Dunipace, Falkirk, Larbert). Revised 1913, published 1915.

By 1913, small extensions have been added to Larbert House, including what may be a conservatory on the west front and a porte-cochère on the south. A pair of adjacent, rectangular terraces to the south of the house may be sunken gardens or croquet lawns. A larger, terraced, rectangular area now appears to the west of the walled garden with a smaller area adjoining it on the north (labelled 'tennis court' on a later map; see Illus 8). More trees have been planted on what was formerly open parkland to the north-west of the house, and several small outbuildings now appear to the south of the stables. A new approach has also been added (just visible to the lower right of the map extract above) forking from the Main Drive to lead east to a new lodge. The Roman road is shown running through the estate but not annotated as such.

Illus 8: Ordnance Survey 25-inch (4th edition), Stirlingshire n024.13 (includes: Dunipace; Falkirk; Larbert). Revised 1943, published 1947.



By the OS map 1943 revision, the estate retains its 19th-century structure but 'The Colony (Mental Hospital) Royal Scottish National Institution' has been built. It consists of a large complex of buildings to the north of Larbert House. The rectangular area west of the walled garden is now marked 'tennis court'. A boathouse is depicted at the north end of the pond. The rectangular terraced gardens are still shown to the south of the house. The Roman road is shown running through the estate but not annotated as such.

Illus 9: Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 map (1961).

By 1961, the tennis court west of the walled garden has disappeared, and a new one has been established west of Larbert House. Westerpark, the stables, walled garden with glasshouse range, boathouse, lodges and areas of parkland still appear. What is now named 'The Royal Scottish National Hospital' has expanded with additional buildings. The footprint of Larbert House appears to have shrunk, and many trees have been cleared.

4.2 Aerial Photographs

Illus 10: This mid-20th century photograph shows The Colony hospital; the walled garden appears still to be under cultivation. Air Photo Mosaics of Scotland, 1944-1950 NS 88 S.E. (Stirlingshire).

Illus 11: Recent (2016) satellite image of the estate, showing the Forth Valley Royal Hospital occupying the northern part (Google Earth image).

Illus 12: Oblique aerial view of the Larbert House estate, from the south (2012). Cat No DP 114672 (http://canmore.org.uk/collection/1272708).

5.0 Timeline for the Development of the Larbert House Designed Landscape

Date/Period	Event/Phase of Development
1790-1821	About 1790, Sir James Milles Riddell of Ardnamurchan had a mansion house known as Mount Riddell built on the highest point of the parish, north-west of the village of Larbert and overlooking the Carron valley. Roy's (c1750) map shows the area as under unenclosed cultivation before this. Grassom's (1817) map (Illus 4) shows the mansion house and a U-shaped stable block standing in the middle of a roughly square estate, comprising parkland with shelter belts and areas of woodland on the north-east and south-west.
1821-1883	The industrialist and baronet Sir Gilbert Stirling purchased the estate (1821) and had the house remodelled by Glasgow architect David Hamilton (1822-25). The work began in 1822. It was renamed Larbert House. Hamilton's portfolio included Hutcheson's Hall and the Royal Exchange in Glasgow (now the Gallery of Modern Art). It was presumably Stirling who also remodelled the landscape and expanded the estate's infrastructure, building a large walled garden, lodges and an ice house, and expanding the U-shaped stable block into a courtyard stable complex. All of this was in place when the Ordnance Survey mapped the area in 1861. The OS *Name Book* (Stirlingshire, Volume 18) describes it as 'a large plain mansion situated in a splendidly wooded park in the centre of which is a large pond. The offices attached are one storey slated.' Stirling had served in the Coldstream Foot Guards at the Helder and in Egypt under Abercrombie, and in the Peninsula under Wellington. He retired in 1812 as a Lieutenant-Colonel, having succeeded to the baronetcy of Mansfield in 1805. He amassed considerable wealth, investing in the Forth-Clyde canal and Glasgow Railway. When he died in 1843 he had £61,222, including £31,700 in bank shares. He left his estate to his sister's descendants (she had married Sir Thomas Livingstone, another baronet), but when they died without issue, it passed to Sarah Mary Emily Robertson, his nephew's daughter, who had married Francis Day Chalmers. Their son, Gilbert Stirling Chalmers (who was born a month before Sir Gilbert Stirling died) inherited Larbert. He sold it in 1876 to John Hendrie, a Calder Park coalmaster, who sold it on to Sir John Noble Graham in 1883. Source: http://archive.stjohns-edinburgh.org.uk/StirlingGilbert.html

1876-1925 John Noble Graham was a member of the firms William Graham and Co., merchants in Glasgow, and Grahams Co, East India merchants in London. He was created a baronet in 1906.

He extended Larbert House with a large, ornate conservatory, a curved loggia and a porte-cochère over the main entrance with four Doric columns, bowed sides and an ornately carved square tower with a segmental pediment, flanked by full-height bowed windows. He and his family hosted parties and entertained guests with curling competitions on the frozen loch. Sir John lived at Larbert House until he died in 1925.

1925-2007 Larbert House and the 750-acre estate were purchased in 1925 for £40,000 to establish the Royal Scottish National Hospital. The house was converted into accommodation for mentally handicapped young people.

Longer-term plans involved the creation of an industrial colony where people with learning disabilities could work on the land and in other occupations. The provision of lifetime care for disabled people had been facilitated before World War I by the Mental Deficiency and Lunacy (Scotland) Act 1913. An extensive fundraising campaign raised money to build five villas, each to house 50 patients, an administrative block and a nurses' home. The Colony was officially opened by the Countess of Mar and Kellie on September 12, 1935, and soon housed over 700 children, teenagers and young adults.

Following the establishment of the National Health Service in 1948, its grounds, buildings and funds were transferred to the state. The NHS implemented a 12-year plan to spend £1 million increasing bed numbers to 1300, which was completed in 1967. By the 1980s, community care was beginning to replace institutional care, and the Colony was eventually vacated in 1991. The hospital, however, continued in use.

Larbert House was closed in 2002. In 2007, a fire destroyed the roof and caused the collapse of the porte-cochère and tower.

Sources: *Glasgow Herald*, 13 September 1935; T M Jeffery, *Life and Works of F T Pilkington*, unpublished thesis, Newcastle School of Architecture.

2010-present A large new hospital, the Forth Valley Royal Hospital, was built on the site of the former hospital and opened to patients in 2010. The planning permission for it required the development and delivery of a Masterplan and Management Framework for the Residual Estate. Prepared by IWA, it considered the woodlands/parkland, habitat and ecology, land and recreational uses, and buildings and structures. It recommended measures to restore the Residual Estate as a woodland park and bring the hospital grounds back to what was judged a basic acceptable standard, including managing the core parkland around Larbert House. It was recognised that, through implementation of additional works, the Residual Estate had the potential to deliver significant outcomes against Woodland In and Around

Towns priorities, and over time to become an exemplar site and therapeutic resource for patients, staff and visitors.

In order to capitalise on these opportunities, a partnership was established between the NHS Forth Valley, Forestry Commission Scotland, Central Scotland Forest Trust and Falkirk Council to reinvigorate the woodland and parkland setting and to bring the estate back into sustainable management. A Long Term Forest Plan was developed for the site to address its silvicultural management for the next 20 years, with a detailed and costed programme of works for the first five-year delivery phase.

Larbert Woods is now the UK's first woodland-based rehabilitation programme for cardiac patients in hospital grounds. It became a high-profile Green Exercise Partnership Demonstration Project, showing how NHS Greenspace can be designed, improved and managed for multiple health and wellbeing benefits.

As a result, a local developer, attracted by the redeveloped grounds, has invested £13 million to transform the B-listed Larbert house, Stables and Walled Garden into 20 luxury apartments, 18 mews and 19 detached houses (http://www.larberthouseestate.com/).

Source: http://greenspacescotland.org.uk/project-larbert-woods.aspx

6.0 Components of the Designed Landscape

The following designed landscape components still exist at Larbert House. Illus 1 shows their locations.

Category	Name
Residential buildings	Larbert House
Gardens	Pleasure Gardens Walled Garden
Offices	Stables Ice House
Drives & approaches	Main Drive South-east Drive
Policy parkland	Larbert Parks
Policy woodland	Larbert Woods

6.1 Residential buildings

Larbert House (Illus 13, 19)

Larbert House was built in the 1820s to designs by David Hamilton, as described above (section 5). It originally had a service courtyard at the north end, which was covered over or filled in by the time of the OS 2nd edition (1896). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the house was extended to include a large conservatory, curved loggia and porte-cochère over the main entrance.

The Buildings at Risk Register carries a full description of the house from 1997 onwards. See http://www.buildingsatrisk.org.uk/details/897744

6.2 Gardens

Pleasure Gardens (Illus 15, 18)

The Pleasure Gardens were established by mid 19th century, if not before, as the setting for the house and the leisure activities of the residents. They included the large boating pond, which had a boathouse at its southern end initially and later at its northern end.

There are traces of terraced lawns to the south of the house with some planting (predominantly holly, beech, birch, yew and Scots pine), but the gardens are much depleted and degraded. The pond is used by the public for fishing and as a focus for walks. There is now a landing and a new Maggie's Centre (for children with cancer) at the site of the boathouse.

Walled Garden (Illus 21)

The Walled Garden was built before 1861, presumably by Sir Gilbert Stirling as part of his extensive development of the estate infrastructure. It was of random rubble construction, with brick surrounding the north entrance, brick facing on the interior and brick buttresses on the west side, some of the bricks as new. There were 3 pedestrian entrances and what was probably a pump house in the SW corner adjacent to the wall but this no longer exists. Later in the 19th century, glasshouses were built against the north interior wall, which was lime plastered. What may be potting sheds and boiler houses were built against the north exterior wall.

The garden is currently (2017) a building site and some of the walls have been taken down, but it appears to be undergoing restoration.

6.3 Offices

Stables (Illus 16)

The Stables and Coach House are attributed to David Hamilton, the Glasgow architect who redesigned Larbert House for Sir Gilbert Stirling in the 1820s. It is a plain but dignified structure with a symmetrical courtyard block, entered through a tall archway under a central pediment.

Once derelict, the complex has been converted into mews-type houses.

Ice House (Illus 14)

The Ice House was built before 1861, presumably by Sir Gilbert Stirling, to the north-west of the house.

It is visible today as a domed structure built of limestone blocks and set into a hillside, with what appears to be a ventilation grill at the apex. The door has been blocked up.

6.4 Drives & approaches

Gateposts still stand at several of the entrances to the drives and approaches described below. For the most part they are plain, except for a couple of domed examples.

Main Drive (Illus 22, 23)

The Main Drive was established in the early 20th century by Sir James Graham. It may have followed approximately the route of the early 19th-century main drive shown on Grassom's (1817) map, but the different scales make it difficult to be sure. In its early 20th-century form, as shown on the 3rd OS map, it led westward into the estate from the Stirling Road, curved through parkland and joined the South-east Drive to lead towards the house. A brick lodge was built at the entrance from the public road.

This is now the main access route to the Walled Garden, refurbished Larbert House and new houses, and is named Pretoria Road. The brick lodge still stands, as do two sandstone ashlar gateposts with rounded finials (in contrast to the square capitals on gate posts at the entrance to South-east Drive).

South-east Drive

This was the main drive leading to Larbert House from the mid 19th century, as shown on the 1st edition OS map of 1861. It entered the estate beside a lodge from the Denny-Larbert Road (B905) and meandered north through parkland, with spurs leading off to the Walled Garden and farmhouse, towards the house. From the early 20th century, with the addition of the Main Drive, it ceased to be the primary access route into the estate and appears to have become a service drive. It was still in use in 1947.

It is still in use. The lodge no longer exists, but two sandstone ashlar gateposts remain.

6.4 Policy parkland

Larbert Parks (Illus 17)

By 1817, as Grassom's map shows, the roughly square area comprising the 750-acre Larbert estate was mostly laid out to parkland with shelter belts along the outer edges. The more detailed OS maps of the mid and late 19th to early 20th centuries show roundels of trees, which would have provided shelter for grazing stock. This parkland retained its basic structure until the 1930s, when The Colony was built on its northern part, followed in 1961 by the more extensive Forth Valley Royal Hospital.

Today, much of the remaining parkland is given over to cultivation but the area centred on the house contains numerous trees, mainly holly, yew, beech, birch and Scots pine. Bat boxes have been installed, probably as mitigation for woodland lost due to house construction and the restoration of the mansion house. Some of the roundels of trees (generally separate groups of deciduous or conifer) still survive.

6.5 Policy woodland

Larbert Woods (Illus 20)

In 1817, Grassom mapped areas of woodland towards the north-east and south-west of the roughly square estate. These gradually expanded over the following century, wrapping around the west side of the Walled Garden in the late 19th century. By the 1940s, woodland also extended around the newly built Colony.

Today, the area between the Walled Garden and what is now the Forth Valley Royal Hospital is still largely under mixed woodland with some oak, with another rectangular area of woodland to the north-west of the hospital complex. A stone-walled ditch crossed by several footbridges runs north-west to south-east between parkland and woodland. It may have channelled water from wetland to the north in the direction of the Walled Garden.

The Greenspace Scotland Larbert Woods initiative revitalised the woodland and developed a Long Term Forest Plan to address its silvicultural management for the next 20 years.

Illus 13: Larbert House in 1956, from the south (©RCAHMS). http://canmore.org.uk/collection/1537094

Illus 14: Ice House, with ventilation grill at the top.

Illus 15: Boating pond, from the south.

Illus 16: The restored, converted Stables.

Illus 17: Parkland walls, generally well maintained.

Illus 18: Remains of terraced lawns to the south of Larbert House.

Illus 19: Larbert House under renovation.

Illus 20: Footbridge over the ditch that leads towards the Walled Garden.

Illus 21: The remains of the north wall of the Walled Garden.

Illus 22: Gateposts at the main entrance to hospital (moved from their original positions) and at the Main Drive entrance (right).

Illus 23: The early 20th-century lodge at the entrance to Main Drive.

7.0 Assessment of Significance

7.1 The concept of significance

In the context of national policy, it is necessary to identify and understand the cultural significance of an aspect of the historic environment before its national importance can be considered. The concept of cultural significance, which is now widely accepted, was introduced in policy statements including the *Burra Charter* (2013). Assessment of significance is designed to help establish why a place or feature is considered to be important and why it is valued. It can be a subjective exercise – reflecting the moment in history when it is written and the state of knowledge about the site at that time. This means that the

assessment of significance has the potential to change as knowledge and understanding of the site increase, as ideas and values change or as a result of alterations to the place or feature.

In order to be considered to be of national importance and therefore inscribed on the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes, designed landscapes must have a particular cultural significance - artistic, archaeological, historic, traditional, aesthetic, scientific and social - for past, present or future generations (*Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement*, June 2016).

The cultural significance of a designed landscape rests on three types of characteristics, as set out in the *HES Policy Statement* (2016).

1. **Intrinsic** - those inherent in the landscape and/or its constituent parts, including:
    - its condition
    - its research potential
    - the length and legibility of its apparent developmental sequence
    - its original or subsequent functions
2. **Contextual** - those relating to its place in the wider landscape or body of existing knowledge, including:
    - the rarity of the designed landscape or any part of it, assessed against its regional and national context
    - its relationship to other, similar landscapes in the vicinity
    - the relationship of the designed landscape and its constituent parts to the wider landscape setting
3. **Associative** - the historic, cultural and social influences that have affected the form and fabric of the designed landscape, and vice versa, including:
    - its aesthetic attributes
    - its significance in the national consciousness or to people who use or have used it, or their descendants
    - its associations with historical, traditional or artistic characters or events

The grading of significance here is based on a ranking system developed from Kerr (2013) for conservation plans. It grades the **quality** of the landscape's intrinsic, contextual and associative characteristics; based on the grading of quality, it assesses cultural significance according to a **range**, as set out below.

Quality:	Outstanding	**Range:**	International
	High		National (Scotland)
	Some		Regional
	Little		Local

An assessment of local cultural significance does not mean that a designed landscape or its constituent parts are not worth conserving; indeed, sound conservation and management practices can enhance their significance.

7.2 The significance of the designed landscape at Larbert House

Intrinsic value

Many components of the Larbert House designed landscape have been significantly altered and compromised, with much of the parkland under cultivation or development, many specimen trees and other planting lost and both the Walled Garden and Larbert House derelict, although undergoing restoration to some degree. The Boating Pond and Larbert Woods retain much of their integrity, especially as a result of the Greenspace initiative. The Larbert House designed landscape is considered to have some intrinsic value. The high-end housing development centred on Larbert House has the potential to enhance this through well-informed and sympathetic restoration.

Contextual value

The Larbert House designed landscape contributes to the landscape character of Central Scotland's urban and post-industrial belt. It thus has some contextual value.

Associative value

The Larbert House designed landscape has an association with the Roman military presence via the Roman road that reputedly runs across it. It has strong 19th-century associations with the Glasgow architect David Hamilton, the industrialist Sir Gilbert Stirling and the Glasgow merchant John Noble Graham at different periods throughout its history as a country estate. From the early 20th century, it has associations with the history of the National Health Service and developments in the treatment and care of the learning disabled. Currently, Larbert Woods and the Boating Pond have high amenity and therapeutic values for the hospital patients, staff and other visitors who use them.

Cultural significance

Despite the many and ongoing alterations to the designed landscape and house, some elements do survive, although in variable condition. The property's partial re-invention as a site of state-of-the-art health care for Central Scotland draws on the landscape's characteristics to promote health, widening access to surviving components. Larbert House is thus considered to have local cultural significance.

8.0 Sources consulted

8.1 Historic maps

Cartographer	*Date*	*Title*	*Sheet*
Timothy Pont	1583-96	The East Central Lowlands	
General William Roy	1752-55	Military Survey of Scotland (©British Library)	Lowlands
John Grassom	1817	To the Noblemen and Gentlemen of the County of Stirling.	
John Thomson	1820	Atlas of Scotland	Stirlingshire
Ordnance Survey	Surveyed 1861, published 1865	Stirlingshire, six-inch (1st edition)	Sheet XXIV
Ordnance Survey	Surveyed 1896, published 1899	Stirlingshire, six-inch (2nd edition)	XXIV.SW (includes: Falkirk; Larbert)
Ordnance Survey	Revised 1913, published 1915	Stirlingshire, 25-inch (3rd edition)	n024.13 (includes Dunipace, Falkirk, Larbert)
Ordnance Survey	Revised 1943, published 1947	Stirlingshire, 25-inch (4th edition)	n024.13 (includes: Dunipace; Falkirk; Larbert)
Ordnance Survey	1961	1:10,000	

Source: http://maps.nls.uk

8.2 Aerial photographs

Air Photo Mosaics of Scotland, 1944-1950 NS 88 S.E. (Stirlingshire)

Contemporary aerial view (Google maps)

Contemporary oblique aerial view (canmore.org.uk)

8.3 Other sources

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http://tompaterson.co.uk/places/SOlarbert.htm

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