



A Development Control policy to control the extraction of oil shale bings in West Lothian

Introduction

Oil shale bings are mineral waste tips and have, therefore, been considered to be derelict land. However, the regular contours and imposing height of the few intact shale bings mean they can be viewed as local landmarks to be preserved (e.g. The Five Sisters or Westwood bing). As they have matured and settled into their surroundings, so they are ceasing to be derelict land and are becoming anthropogenic landforms in their own right.

Shale bings are recognised to be convenient and useful sources of cheap low-grade fill material for the construction industry. Their use reduces the need for sand and gravel and rock from new and existing quarries. This is encouraged by Central Government to conserve finite mineral resources.

Extraction from bings exacerbates their derelict appearance. A large proportion of the material encountered in the bings is unsuitable for construction infill, usually because it is fused into large lumps, or clinkers. These clinkers tend to be left untouched by bing operators, resulting in working and abandoned bings having an unsightly jagged appearance, with large areas of clinkers visible.

When a bing is being worked, people who live nearby or along the lorry routes suffer adverse environmental consequences. The extraction operations themselves lead to dust nuisance in dry weather, lorry traffic causes dust and noise, wet weather in winter months leads to mud and shale on public roads.

The demand for shale from bings is dependent on the construction industry. The nature of this demand is cyclical, high levels of demand for shale being associated with particularly large construction projects. The larger the number of bings being worked at any one time, the slower the overall rate of removal of these derelict areas. Extraction should therefore be controlled to allow a limited number of bings to be worked at any one particular time.

In summary, the policy covering extraction from shale bings is based on the need to remove already partially worked bings first and to restrict extraction from intact bings. Some bings which have been restored may have potential for further extraction once other sources have been worked out.

The experience of past extraction from shale bings in West Lothian as outlined above leads to a division of all remaining bings in the district into four main categories:

West Lothian's Oil Shale Bings

Category 1: Bings where extraction is encouraged:

Bings covered by an existing planning permission.

- **Drumshoreland:** Planning permission Restoration to screened industrial land expires 1.3.2029
- **Niddry:** Planning permission expires 1.2.2051 Restoration to amenity woodland
- **Uphall East:** Planning permission expires 1.1.0.1999. Restoration to amenity woodland, although industrial use is also acceptable

Bings without planning permission:

- **Philpstoun North:** Proposals for extraction must overcome problems of accessibility and subsidence onto the railway to the north and Union Canal to the south and must also protect adjacent wildlife value. Restoration to nature conservation and amenity woodland.
- **Philpstoun South:** Workable deposits of shale remain, problems of subsidence into the canal to the north. Restoration to amenity woodland.
- **Green Bing:** Well vegetated. The removal of Uphall East has made this bing more obvious. It may only be acceptable to work once other sources are exhausted. The quality of the shale reserve in this bing may be doubtful.

Category 2: Intact bings where extraction is resisted. (Minor safety works excepted).

- **Five Sisters I Westwood:** Striking landscape feature. Very large bing therefore prolonged extraction period. Should be scheduled as Ancient Monument. The development of recreation and tourist facilities associated with the bing would be encouraged.
- **Greendykes Bing:** Valuable wildlife habitat. Enormous size means extraction if allowed is only likely to be acceptable by rail. Most imposing example of intact plateau bing in West Lothian. Very visible over wide area. The council would support the scheduling of the bing as an Ancient Monument.
- **Faucheldean:** Unique wildlife habitat. Very poor road access for large scale extraction. Small-scale piecemeal extraction would exacerbate derelict appearance. The council would support the scheduling of the bing as an Ancient Monument.

Category 3: Restored bings where extraction is resisted.

No potential for further extraction

- **Addiewell North:** Rehabilitation completed in early '80's. Planted amenity woodland now thriving. SWT managed nature reserve.
- **Contentibus:** Rehabilitation in 1990 - 91. Restored to industrial land.
- **Uphall West:** Rehabilitation in 1980. Restored to industrial land.

Potential for further extraction once other resources have been worked.

- **Addiewell South:** Rehabilitation in 1989. Restored to screened industrial land. Workable shale resources exist at eastern end of site.
- **Oakbank:** Rehabilitation in 1990. Restored to amenity woodland and open space. To be incorporated into Almondell and Calder Wood Country Park.

Category 4: Bings which have been abandoned or where resources are exhausted. Restoration encouraged.

- **Albyn:** In LEEL's rehabilitation programme. Various after uses possible including industry, housing and recreation although precise after use may depend on level of contamination.
- **Bridgend:** Bing recently abandoned by operator, only partially restored to agriculture. Alternative proposals for restoration to amenity woodland or open industrial storage or both may be acceptable.
- **Clapperton:** Authorised tipping operation ceased without completion. Site owners intending to re-open site as commercial tip. Restoration to amenity woodland.
- **Mid Breich:** In LEEL's rehabilitation programme. After use- amenity woodland.
- **Seafeld:** In LEEL programme. Owned by WLC. Restoration to amenity woodland as part of larger Starlaw Forest Park.

A good practice guide for bingo operators

Uncontrolled extraction from bings leads to an unsightly jagged appearance with abandonment before restoration takes place. These notes on good practice are designed to allow extraction from bings in a way which minimises the environmental consequences. Planning applications for extraction from bings will be subject to the following considerations:

Applications should contain information on existing levels and indicative proposed levels once extraction is complete.

If not specified in the application, planning permission will be subject to conditions specifying a limited working area within the bing including areas for disposal of clinkers and other unsuitable material. Extraction should proceed in level steps avoiding jagged edges. These measures will minimise the visual intrusion of extraction operations. In addition, boundary and off-site landscaping may be required

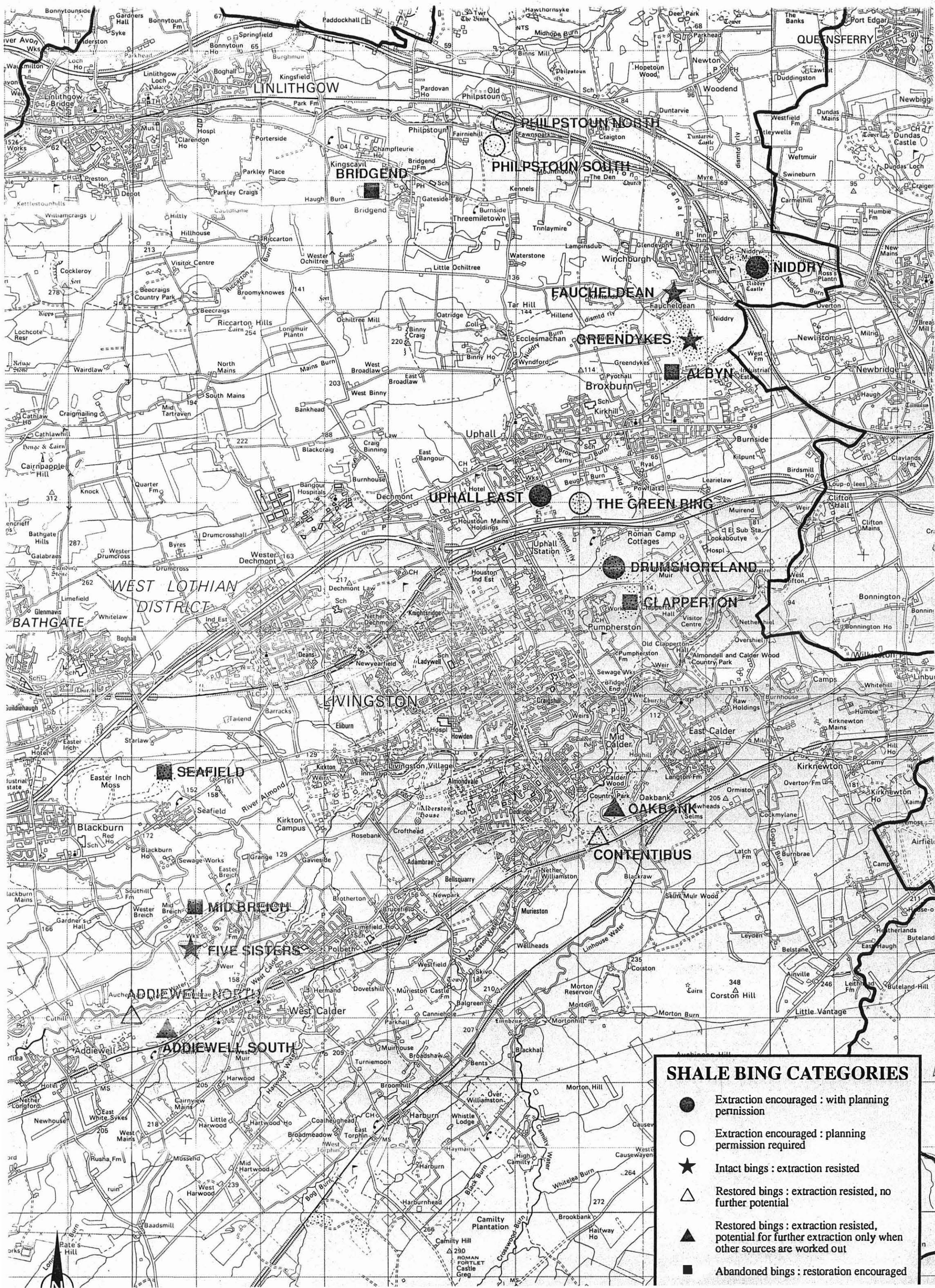
Bing operators will be expected to install a tarmac surfaced access road and wheel wash. All lorries leaving the site must be hopped.

Noise and dust nuisance caused by the extraction operations themselves must be minimised. Hours of operations will be controlled and a limit on the amount of lorry traffic leaving the site may be imposed. These measures will reduce the impact of bing operations on neighbouring residents and of lorry traffic on those who live along the traffic routes.

Regular monitoring or progress on site will be carried out to re-assess likely finished levels.

Detailed conditions will be imposed on planning permissions to require proper site restoration. Importation of soil for restoration will require a separate planning application and this may be discouraged where nature conservation is the required after use. Usually nature conservation will be the preferred after use, including amenity woodland and provision for public access. The council may decide to require a restoration bond before planning permission is granted.

(Revised July 1998)



SHALE BING CATEGORIES

- Extraction encouraged : with planning permission
- Extraction encouraged : planning permission required
- ★ Intact bings : extraction resisted
- △ Restored bings : extraction resisted, no further potential
- ▲ Restored bings : extraction resisted, potential for further extraction only when other sources are worked out
- Abandoned bings : restoration encouraged