

# **Aberdeenshire Forest District**

## **Strategic Plan 2007 - 2017**

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# 1 Planning framework

## 1.0 Introduction

This Plan defines the framework and explains the rationale behind the choices that Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) managers make to deliver multi-objective forestry in an evolving 21st century context.

Timber production - for so long at the heart of the forest industry - remains a core activity, but it is now complemented by a wide range of environmental, educational and social objectives. As a result, forestry is an integral component of sustainable development and social inclusion. We seek to make best use of the available resources to optimise delivery of public objectives.

## 1.1 Forest policy context

The Plan sets out how the higher-level national targets prescribed in the overarching 2006 Scottish Forestry Strategy (SFS) will be translated and delivered at a local level. In particular, it addresses the two key themes of sustainable forest management and social and environmental justice/inclusion:

- Sustainable forest management recognises the need to link the social, economic and environmental values of forestry, based on good evidence and through effective engagement with people. At its simplest, it means making sure that today's woodlands are still here, with the same or better benefits for future generations.
- The Plan will ensure that forest management in the District will be delivered, monitored and validated against the independent standards prescribed under the United Kingdom Woodland Assurance Standards (UKWAS) programme.
- Social and environmental justice/inclusion means that:
  - people should not be disadvantaged by who they are or where they live ('social justice');
  - people should not have to live in degraded surroundings with a poor quality of life ('environmental justice');
  - everyone should have the same opportunity to enjoy a good quality of life and access to appropriate services ('closing the opportunity gap' and 'social inclusion').

Developing the Plan through consultation with stakeholder groups will facilitate local tailoring to ensure that design and content are fit for purpose in meeting both national and local objectives. In particular, we will seek to engage with communities of interest to ascertain that the national forest estate contributes fully to delivery of public expectations and aspirations.

## 1.2 Vision and outcomes

The Scottish Forestry Strategy (SFS) sets out a vision for forestry in 2025 and beyond, and incorporates the outcomes that we hope to deliver in support of the vision.

### Our Vision for 2025 and beyond

"Scotland's trees, woodlands and forests are a central part of our culture, environment and economy. People are benefiting widely from them, actively engaging with and looking after the resource for the use and enjoyment of generations to come."

## **Outcomes**

Scotland's trees, woodlands and forests contribute to:

- improved health and well-being of people and their communities;
- competitive and innovative businesses contributing to the growth of the Scottish economy;
- high-quality, robust and adaptable environment.

The Plan sets out how forests managed by the District will deliver the vision and outcomes at a local level, in alignment and support of the national objectives. The Plan provides a framework and point of reference to prescribe and gauge operational delivery through forest design plans and local policy guidance. Forest design plans will continue to be subject to public consultation in their own right.



## 2.1 Climate

The climate of North East Scotland is significantly influenced by the surrounding landform. Weather systems from the west are buffered by the Cairngorms, creating a rain shadow effect over much of the region. Weather from the north-east has no such barrier to overcome, which can lead to coastal haar and drizzle throughout the year.

The climate in the region is generally cooler and wetter than in neighbouring Moray and Tayside. Over the last 100 years, in common with the rest of Britain, there has been a reduction in the number of frost days and shortening of the snow season annually. But frosts do occur well into May, posing a threat to new growth. Localised drought conditions also caused damage to crops in recent years.

The most notable variation from national trends has been the increase in precipitation between September and November, and the increase in heavy rainfall events in the winter months. The wind profile is generally moderate, but there is a recurring pattern of high-strength winds from the north and north-westerly direction. The region has experienced catastrophic wind damage events, but generally the risk to tree crops is moderate.

The climate in the region gives rise to a shorter growing season than other parts of Scotland, around 210 days compared with 225 in Lothian and Fife.

Climate -related issues influencing forest management and planning include:

- Silviculture: Climate is a factor in determining the types of tree that grow best at any site and which silvicultural systems are feasible;
- Harvesting: Windiness determines the likelihood of wind damage in plantations and can determine at what age upland plantations are felled.

Table 1 and the charts below show data from two local weather stations illustrating the variation between the interior (Braemar) and the coastal plain (Craibstone, near Aberdeen).<sup>1</sup>

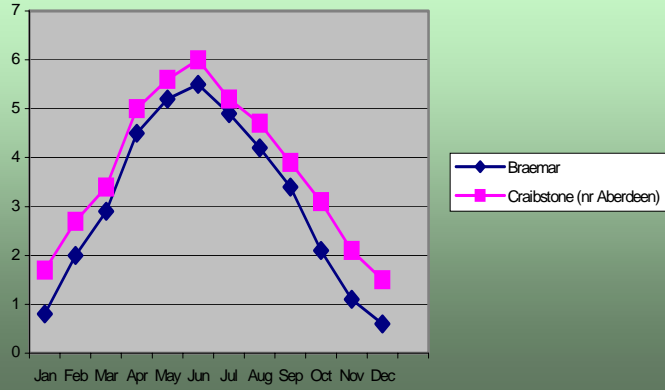
**Table 1 - Sample weather data**

Weather station	Mean highest daily temp, °C (July)	Mean lowest daily temp, °C (Feb)	Highest average daily rainfall, mm (Dec)	Lowest average daily rainfall, mm (April)	Annual rainfall, mm	Annual sunshine hours	Highest average daily sunshine hours, (June)	Annual snowfall days
<b>Craibstone</b>	17	0	80	51	821	1367	5.5	33
<b>Braemar</b>	17	-3.1	96	51	859	1137	6	59

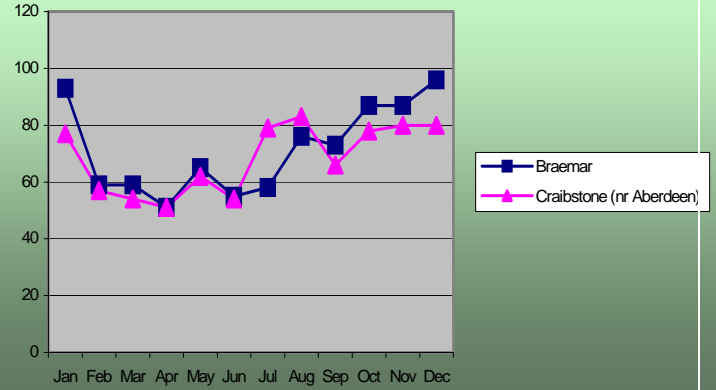
<sup>1</sup> Data source <http://www.weather.org.uk/climate/scotclim.html>

## Charts - monthly weather patterns at Craibstone and Braemar

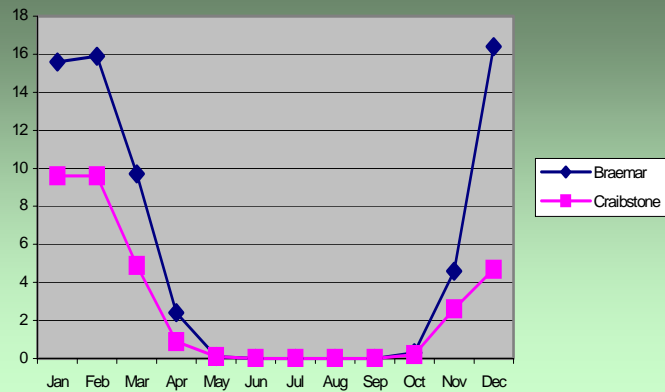
### Average daily sunshine hours



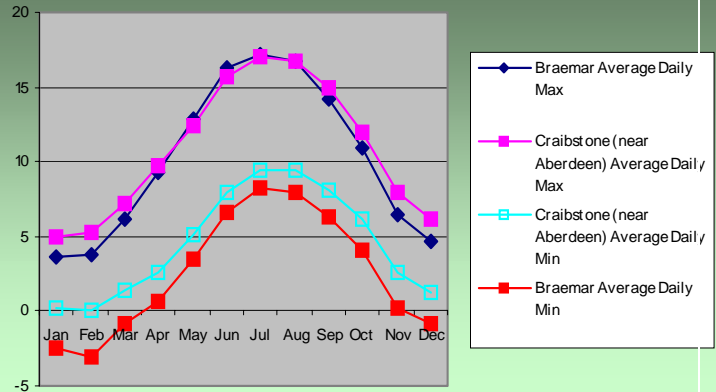
### Average monthly rainfall



### Average monthly snowfall



### Average daily min and max temperature



## 2.2 Water

Five major rivers flow through the District - the Dee, Don, North Esk, Deveron and Ythan. The Ythan was designated a nitrogen vulnerable zone (NVZ) in May 2000 and the Dee is a special area of conservation (SAC), with specific management focus on freshwater pearl mussel, Atlantic salmon and otter.

Many smaller tributaries feeding these key watercourses are significant for their fishing, their link with whisky distilling and their natural beauty, as well as being a source of water for the local population. There are no significant areas of open water in the District.

Water -related issues influencing forest management and planning include:

- Protection of water quality: Woods and forest operations are managed to control run-off and the effect of acidification in line with the EU water framework directive and Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) forest and water guidelines;
- Water supply: Many rural properties draw domestic water supplies from forested catchments. The Herricks reservoir, which supplies the town of Keith, is situated in the District;
- Landscape and recreation: Rivers are used for watersports as well as fishing. Forest operations can have a significant effect on water quality and are planned to minimise the risk of damage;
- Acid sensitive catchments: The District has three forests that fall into critical load exceedance squares. Bennachie and Delgaty are on the margins at <1 keq/ha.yr with our Durris blocks at <1 keq/ha.yr. Our forest design planning process will take this into account, with particular emphasis on Spruce crops at higher elevations.

## 2.3 Geology and landform

### Geology

The geology of the region is varied with igneous and metamorphic rocks underlying glacial-derived till and moraine, with fluvio glacial deposits along riversides. In the south-east of the District, the Highland boundary fault forms the border between the upland and coastal areas. North of the fault the geology features metamorphic rocks, hornblend and Dalradian schists, and there is a predominance of basic and ultra basic igneous rocks. South of the fault is dominated by red sandstone.

### Landform

The District covers the northern foothills of the Grampian mountains, the Mounth (the hilly region running east-west between Drumochter and Stonehaven, which divides Aberdeenshire from Angus), and the undulating Buchan plain. This varying landform gives a range of landscape types from the steeper-sided valleys of upper Strathdon and upper Deeside to the wide straths of lower Deeside, the Don and the Deveron. The north and eastern edge of the region is characterised by the rolling farmland of the coastal plains.

A distinctive feature of the area is the rounded hills and ridges, many of which are covered with trees, surrounded by well-farmed fields on the lower levels. The landscape characteristics are described in more detail in the Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) individual landscape assessments for the region (South and Central Aberdeenshire (1977) and Banff and Buchan (1993)).

The flat nature of the coastal plain has its own character and the forests do not feature highly in the landscape that is mostly sky. In an area dominated by arable farming, the forests managed by FCS provide an opportunity for residents of the area to walk unrestricted in the countryside.

Geology-related issues relating to forest management include:

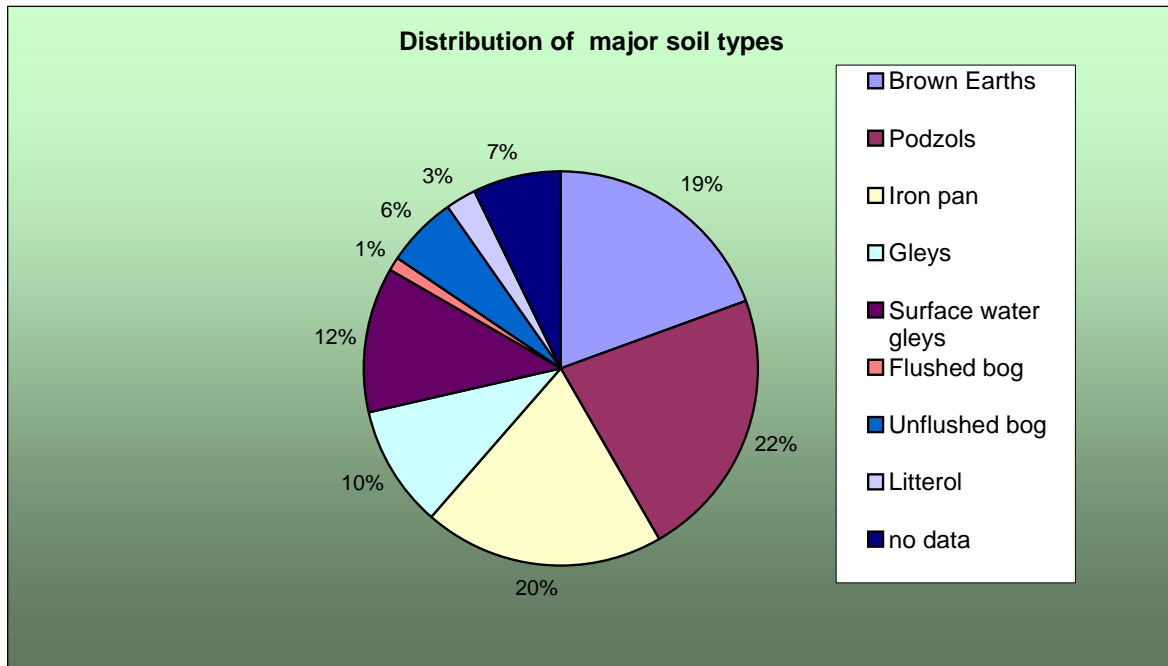
- Silviculture: Underlying rock types determine the fertility of soils, which influences the choice of tree species and the need for any supplementary nutrition;
- Geological features: Safeguarding significant geological outcrops;
- Mineral development: Quarries for sand, gravel and stone .The glacial deposits make good material for building roads, but schist-derived rocks are very weak and quarries of harder rock have to be created.

## 2.4 Soils

Soils in the District are varied and include gleys and thick peats in the uplands, and mostly podzols and brown earths on the dry slopes of Deeside.

There are areas of wet gley soils, base-rich soils over hornblende schists, brown earths over Dalradian schists, and nutrient poor soils over granite and quartzite. Soils are free-draining on hill flanks, with drainage worsening as slopes ease and at its worst in the valley bottoms. Figure 2 shows the distribution of major soil types.

**Figure 2 - distribution of major soil types.**



Soil-related issues influencing forest management and planning include:

- **Silviculture:** Soil type determines which tree species grow best, which cultivation techniques are appropriate, and what fertilisers are required. It is also an important factor in determining wind damage to plantations (trees uproot more easily on wet soils);
- **Protection of soils:** Forest practices are carefully planned and follow soil conservation guidelines to minimise damage to soils, e.g. by erosion or compaction;
- **Harvesting:** Soil type influences the choice of harvesting machinery and timing of operations. It also determines what ground preparation techniques are appropriate for planting and re-stocking.

## 2.5 Landscape setting

The landscape can be divided into five regional character areas:

- **Hill forests:** On the Mounth and the foothills of Cairngorm. Large scale forests on hills, ridges and steep sided straths. Often linked with neighbouring large blocks of forest, private woods and estates, and blended with open hill tops and moorland;
- **Rural hill straths:** The Deveron and Don valleys. Seen from the air, these stand out from the surrounding landscape of fields, but careful landscaping is helping to reduce their impact;
- **Coastal plain -** The north-east corner following the Moray Firth and North Sea coasts to the area below the Highland boundary fault. Characterised by undulating landform, agricultural landscape and small fragmented forest blocks lost in the patchwork of fields;
- **Deeside:** The Dee valley. Native pine woods cover the sides of glaciated river valleys, with distinctive geological features;
- **Urban woods:** Predominantly around Aberdeen. Featuring small fragmented blocks integrated closely with towns and communities.

This is a very broad characterisation. Some woodland blocks could fit into more than one type. More detailed descriptions of the landscape can be found in the 1998 Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) landscape character assessments (102 South and Central Aberdeenshire and 101 Moray and Nairn).

The District has a diverse forest landscape. Large productive hill forests link with surrounding estates and private woods, while small diverse blocks integrate with towns and communities providing recreation, education and employment.

The dominant landscape object in the District is the Bennachie Massif. This distinctive ancient volcano is visible from almost any high point. It stands out from the surrounding rural landscape and lends its unique character to the area.

Other prominent features in the District include Hill of Fare, the Buck, Mount Keen, Morven and Tap o Noth. The Cairngorm National Park boundary includes the blocks Cambus o May, Pannanich, Inver, Auchernoch and the Bunzeach. Inver is also in a national scenic area (NSA).

Trees and forests are very important features in the general landscape. The main landscape-related issues for forest management and planning are:

- **Forest design:** The good landscape design of forests, following landscape guidelines especially in designated areas and other visually sensitive sites;

- Interpretation: Helping visitors to appreciate and understand wooded landscapes, e.g. Bennachie.

## 2.6 Biodiversity

### Habitats

The forests of Deeside are recognised as important habitats for plants, invertebrates, birds and mammals associated with pinewoods. The mature stands of second and third rotations have a diverse species and age structure, while the first rotation woods are all at, or approaching, the age where clearfelling will take place. The Deeside woods are an important link with the pinewoods in neighbouring estates and are managed in consultation with Deeside Forest and Cairngorms National Park Authority. Riparian zones in the forests are important as salmon and trout spawning grounds, and for other freshwater species.

Along with Glen Affric/Glen Strathfarrar, Speyside and Deeside form the three most outstanding areas for boreal native woodland. These woodlands contain native species such as Scots pine, birch, aspen, hazel and oak, and are the best area in Scotland for boreal lichen. Several important species are to be found, some subject of species action plans (SACs), e.g. capercaillie and red squirrel.

Elsewhere in Aberdeenshire, much of the land is intensively managed for agricultural production or sporting activities. The forests, woodlands and unplanted land offer an important alternative habitat. On the hill and ridge tops, there are areas of heathland and peatland that offer other types of habitat. In the woods, forest design planning is creating further diversity by producing more open habitats, networks of open or partially open corridors, more diverse age structure, areas of continuous cover, more broadleaf, and areas of Scots pine and larch that will grow on for longer rotations. The Darroch Wids carbon sequestration project, in partnership with the Scottish Forestry Alliance, has created 510ha of native pinewood containing a range of broadleaf woodland types and habitats.

There are 709ha of woodland designated as plantation on ancient woodlands (PAWS). A schedule of action has been drawn up following surveys of these sites in 2000 and 2005:

- Management category 1 – PAWS areas to be restored to native woodland;
- Management category 2 – PAWS areas to be managed in a way that enhances their environmental value;
- Management category 3 – PAWS areas to be managed as conventional plantation with management to maintain biodiversity.

Further detail, including a full list of sites can be found in the District PAWS plan.

### Species

The range of animal and plant species in the District is not fully known, but survey work to address this is being carried out by North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC). Species that attract attention and comment include woodland and open hill raptors, badger, otter, capercaillie, black grouse, newts, twinflower, creeping ladies' tresses, bats, water vole and red squirrel. Of these, the red squirrel and capercaillie are in the process of being included in local management plans that tie into national plans (species action plans, SACs; local biodiversity action plans, LBAPs; and UK biodiversity action plans, UKBAPs).

A full list of known priority habitats and species in the District will be incorporated into the new biodiversity planning system to be introduced during 2007. Currently, this list can be accessed through the District conservation plan.

Conservation-related issues that influence forest management and planning are:

- Designated sites: Protection and enhancement of conservation value;
- Locally important sites: Identifying areas of forest of high conservation value and instituting proper management;
- Ancient woodlands: Restoration and management of ancient (native) woodland.

## **2.7 Cultural environment**

### **Historical context**

The history of the forests in the north-east is similar to that of the rest of Scotland. People exploited the natural woods, consisting mainly of oak, ash and elm, to provide shelter, fuel and grazing for livestock. Gradually, land was enclosed and cultivated, and forests were used to shelter wildlife, with deer providing food and sport.

The woods of the north-east were remote enough to avoid the worst effects of the demand for timber to build ships and houses. This changed only when the Dee was used for moving timber, coinciding with an increase in the amount of livestock being sheltered in the woods. This limited natural regeneration of trees, reducing the forest cover in the region to its lowest level.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, legislation to control felling and encourage reforestation was enacted, and plantation forests began to spread. Estate owners, such as the Earl of Strathmore at Glamis and Sir Archibald Grant at Monymusk, had a significant role in creating large forested areas. During the 20th century, the national forest estate grew as the Forestry Commission carried out land acquisition and planting. Woodland grant schemes encouraged farmers to plant small blocks of woodlands, often for shelter.

The importance of tourism and recreation has grown during this period, and is now a major factor in forest management and planning.

### **Heritage**

There are 16 scheduled ancient monuments (SAMs) in the District, all covered by management plans approved by Historic Scotland (HS).

There are also over 200 unscheduled archaeological monuments (UAMs) and one listed building. There is no specific management requirement, but we are following best practice guidelines at all times to preserve and protect these features. A local archaeologist is contracted to research and produce site monitoring records (SMRs) for our UAMs. Surveys are carried out on sites scheduled for forest operations and findings are taken into account during operational planning. This data is being shared with Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service.

Heritage-related issues that influence forest management and planning include:

- Protection of ancient monuments: Sites are protected and any new sites are reported to HS and local council archaeologists to determine their historical significance;

- Promoting knowledge of woodland heritage: There are small-scale education activities e.g. Techfest and Forest Education Initiative (FEI). We are also in discussion with the Ballater Historic Forestry Society regarding the Dalmochie Second World War Newfoundlander logging camp in Pannanich. This will focus on logging activity during the war and the role of forestry in Deeside through the ages.

#### Scheduled ancient monuments in the District

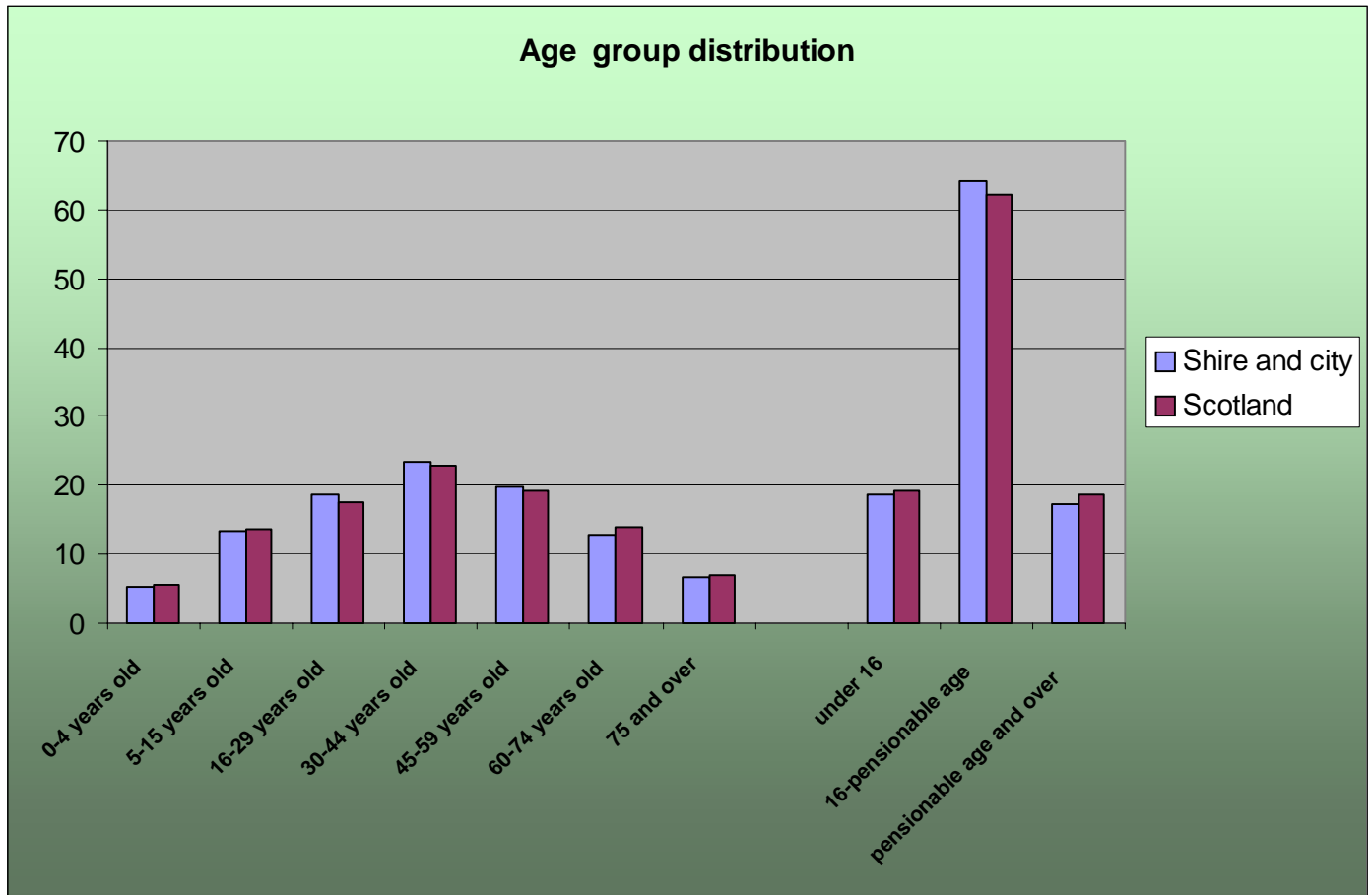
SAM No.	Monument name	Date that plan ends
2114	Mither Tap Fort	Mar-10
5316	Tillymuick Settlement	Dec-08
55	Whitehill Stone Circle	Dec-13
3278	Wormy Hillock	Dec-08
63	Tap O' Noth	Dec-08
4892	Cairn-mon-Earn	Mar-10
4810	Cairnshee Cairn	Mar-10
4444	Capo Long Barrow	Mar-10
4857	Clochanshiels	Mar-10
4910	Clune Wood Cairn	Mar-10
974	Clune Wood Stone Circle	Mar-10
6437	Cowie Line Pillbox	Mar-10
4849	Gallowhill Cairn	Mar-10
978	Glassel Stone Circle	Mar-10
979	The Nine Stanes	Mar-10
9245	The Slacks	Mar-10
4823	Witch Hillock	Mar-10

#### Pattern of settlement

Figures from the 2001 census<sup>2</sup> show the combined population of Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City is 439,000, with 60% of people living in the shire areas. Outside of Aberdeen City and its satellite communities, main population centres include Inverurie, Stonehaven and Banchory, followed in terms of size by Huntly, Alford, Ballater and Braemar. There most notable difference between the population of Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City is that the number of 16-29-year-olds in the shire areas is 3% below the national average and in the city it is 5% above. Figure 3 shows how the distribution of age groups differs from that of Scotland.

<sup>2</sup> Source of data <http://www.scrol.gov.uk/scrol/common/home.jsp>

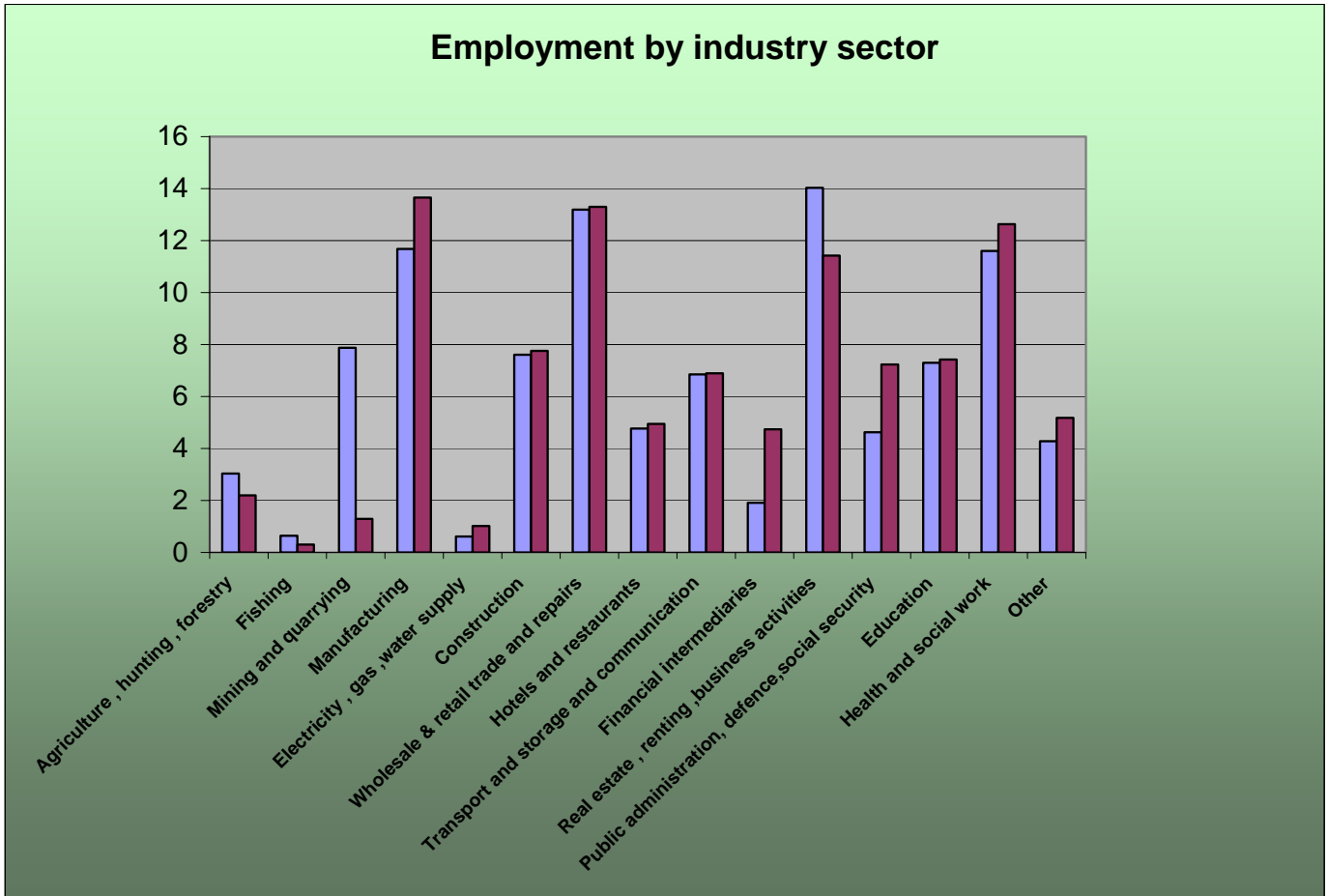
Figure 3 - Distribution of age groups in Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City.



There is a significant rural population contributing to the economy and the demand for recreation. Census data show that Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City makes up 9% of the population of Scotland, but provides 10% of overall Scottish employment.

Agriculture, forestry, and field sports (deer stalking, game bird shooting and fishing) are a significant part of the economy, with employment in these sectors twice the national average. Mining and quarrying (including oil exploration) is also significant, with employment at five times the national average. House building is increasing, particularly in towns close to Aberdeen. Figure 4 shows the distribution of industry of employment by industry sector.

Figure 4 - Employment by industry sector



Pattern of settlement-related issues that influence forest management and planning include:

- Forest design planning: Aspects of forest planning need to be integrated with wider planning issues, using local authority plans (e.g. local plans);
- Public consultation: Consultation and information distribution has to reflect the types of neighbouring communities and/or complexity of user groups.

## 2.8 People's relationship with the forests

The people of the north-east have interacted with the forest throughout history. It has provided them with shelter, food, fuel and recreation. This continues today, although the forest has changed from a natural to a largely man-made environment.

FCS has an open access policy for walkers, paddle sports, cyclists and horse-riders. The forest is excellent resource for recreation and education, as detailed in the District recreation and education plans. The team of community and education rangers implement these strategies, linking with ranger services in the local councils and on private estates.

In line with the Scottish Forestry Strategy (SFS), a woodlands in and around towns initiative, (WIAT) has been drawn up for Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City. This sets out the aim of promoting new woodlands in and around settlements and establishing successful community

woodland projects. The initiative is being taken forward in partnership with FCS Grampian Conservancy and Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils.

Recreation and education-related issues that influence forest management and planning include:

- Provision of recreational facilities: The forest is used by a great number of people, both locally and through tourism. There are around 650,000 day visits to the District each year. The greatest use is in the small to medium blocks near towns. Current facilities are listed in Table 2;
- Forest design: Identifying areas of high recreation value and instituting appropriate management;
- Management operations: Carrying out forest operations in ways that minimise disruption of recreation activities, while maintaining safety;
- Partnership working: Contributing to projects with other agencies/owners to improve provision of recreation, e.g. the Bennachie Centre, FEI, and Dunnottar Woodland Park Association. The District works with many community groups in its efforts to manage the national forest estate for the greater benefit of the population (see Table 3);
- Health and education: In line with government initiatives, maximising the use of resource available to individuals and groups for education and health. Partly as a consequence of the economic benefits from the oil industry, the area has only small pockets of social deprivation clustered around Aberdeen City itself. There are rural areas, both west of Huntly and associated with the fishing communities, where deprivation is not high, but is a distinct feature.

The forest is an excellent resource for initiatives such as Scottish Health at Work, Green Gym and Active Woods, and for the Scottish Mental Health Association. Community and education rangers work with schools providing outdoor classrooms, Forest Schools and educational visits in line with curriculum and the District education strategy. Educational and health-oriented events, e.g. 10,000-steps, are held throughout the year.

**Table 2 - Recreational facilities in the District**

Facility	Number	Km
Car parks	34	
Waymarked walks	44	143
Forest trails	14	117
MTB trail	1	2 (10 on completion)
Horse trail	1	5
Story trail	1	3
Sculpture trail	1	3
Orienteering	2	
Ski trails	6	20
Toilet blocks	2	
Picnic sites	2	
Cycle routes	8	70
Wildlife observation	1	Peregrine Centre
Visitor Centre	1	Bennachie Centre (partnership)
Long-distance route	1	18

### **Table 3 - Consultees and partners**

#### Political

Aberdeen City Council  
Aberdeenshire Council  
Moray Council  
All local MSPs, MPs and councillors  
Formartine Partnership

#### Recreation

Aberdeen Dirt Riders (mountain biking)  
Banchory Riders (mountain biking)  
British Horse Society  
Balloch Riders Action Group (horse-riding)  
East Grampian Deer Management Group  
Ecurie Neep (mountain biking, Aberdeen)  
Horse-riding groups  
Huntly Nordic Outdoor Centre  
Mountain Maniacs (mountain biking, Stonehaven)  
Ramblers Association

#### Conservation

Bailies of Bennachie (conservation volunteers)  
BP (via Scottish Forestry Alliance)  
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV)  
Cairngorms National Park Authority  
Scottish Environment Protection Agency  
Scottish Water  
Ythan Project Volunteers (conservation volunteers)

#### Heritage

Ballater Historic Forestry Society  
Banchory Paths Association  
Delgatie Castle Trust  
Historic Scotland  
National Trust for Scotland  
Scottish Natural Heritage

#### Community

Banchory Paths Association  
Birse Community Trust  
Dunnotter Woodland Park Association  
Friends of Denlethen  
Friends of Durris Forest  
Lonach Hall Community Association  
Marr Area Partnership  
Scottish Association for Mental Health  
Scolty Hill Enhancement Project Group (affiliated to Banchory Paths Association)  
Scolty Woodland Park  
Strachan Paths Association (affiliated to Banchory Paths Association)  
Upper Deeside Access Trust

#### Wildlife

Dee & District Salmon Fisheries Board

Deer Commission for Scotland  
 Deveron Fisheries Board  
 North East Raptor Study Group  
 Scottish Wildlife Trust  
 Stonehaven & District Angling Association

Forestry

Ballater Historic Forestry Society  
 Deeside Forest  
 Forest District Environmental Panel  
 Friends of Clash  
 Grampian Forestry Forum

Miscellaneous

Adjacent estates  
 Ballater (Royal Deeside) Ltd  
 Grampian Enterprise  
 Neighbours  
 Public at open meetings  
 Volunteer groups

**2.9 Forest resource**

The District manages an area totalling 35,894ha, with 32,000ha under tree cover. Forest blocks spread from the foothills of the Cairngorms to the Moray Firth coast and along Deeside. There are around 150 separate woodland blocks, ranging in size from 5ha to 5,800ha. Woodland type and distribution is influenced by the land capability for forestry. Day-to-day management is carried out by 64 staff based at Huntly, Monymusk and on the outskirts of Aberdeen.

**Extent, distribution and ownership**

Table 4 shows the breakdown of land use and woodland ownership in Aberdeenshire, based on the National Inventory of Woodlands and Trees carried out by the Forestry Commission in 1997.

**Table 4 - Woodland ownership and extent**

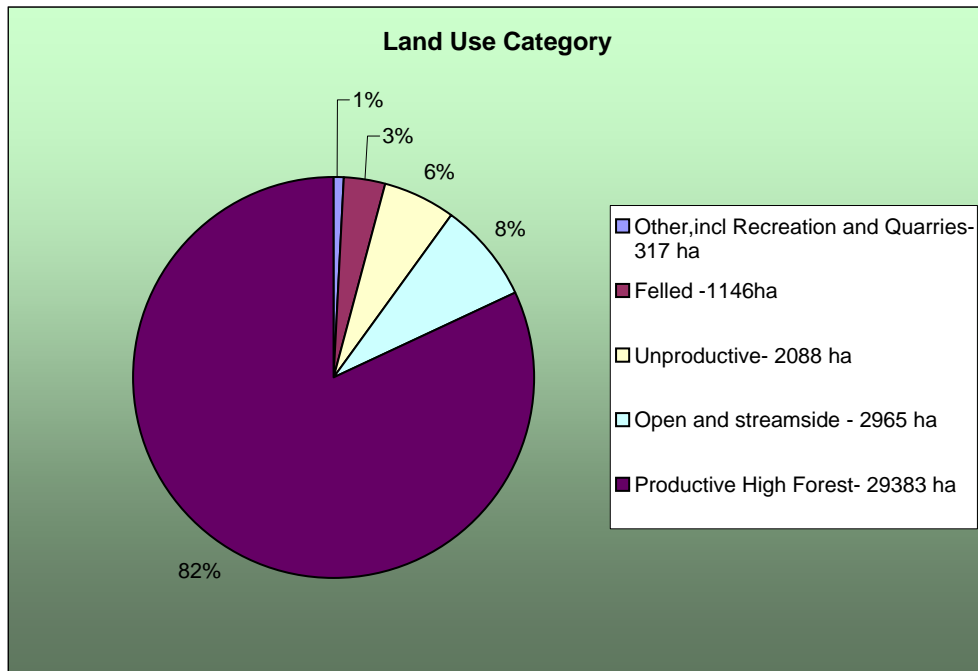
Land use in Aberdeenshire	ha	% woodland
Total area ( including inland water)	875,153	
Private woodland	98,011	63
National forest estate (managed by FCS)	56,891	37
<b>Total woodland</b>	<b>154,902</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>%woodland cover</b>	<b>18</b>	

The District manages 22% of the national forest estate in Aberdeenshire. The remaining 15% (20,997ha) is managed by Moray Forest District.

**Types of forests and tree species**

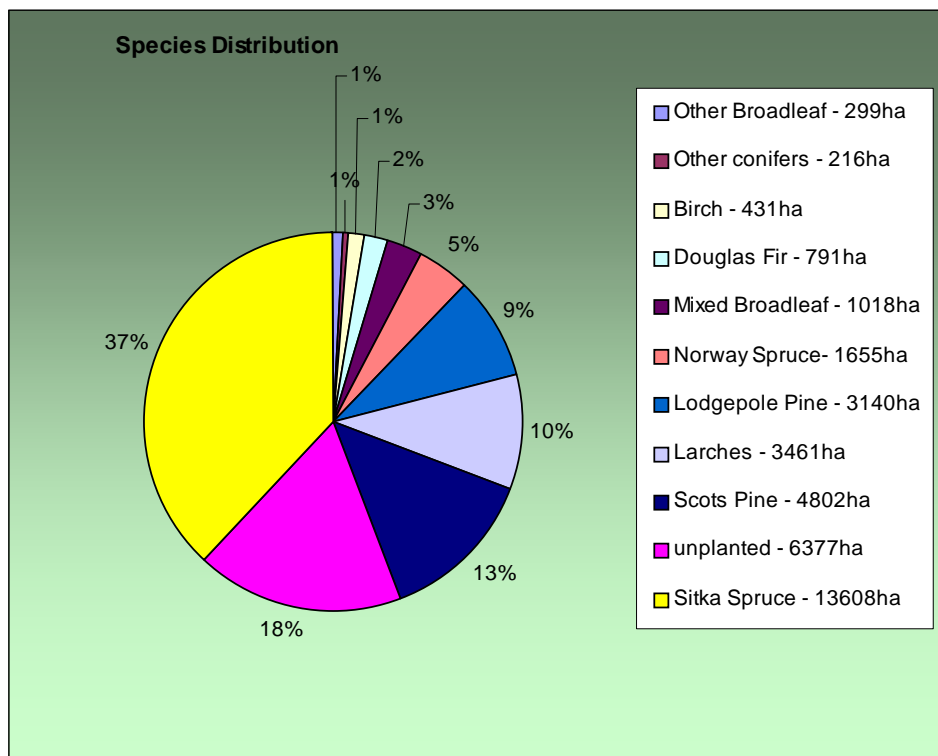
Figure 5 shows that trees cover 82% of the land managed by the District. Open space represents 15% of the total area and includes large hilltops as well as planned open ground in plantations. The remaining 3% is land in transition between one rotation and the next, i.e. clearfelled areas awaiting re-stocking or categorisation as open space.

**Figure 5 - Land use in the District**



Across the District, 96% of woodland cover is conifer and 4% broadleaf. The dominant species planted is Sitka spruce, covering 13,608ha (43%) of the area. Sitka spruce grows well in the prevailing conditions (soil and climate), making it suitable for commercial timber production. Other objectives that need to be met are actioned through the design plan process, where species choice is carefully considered. Currently, there is a presumption towards reducing the amount of lodgepole pine and increasing that of Scots pine, larches, Norway spruce and broadleaved species wherever possible. Figure 6 shows the current distribution of species.

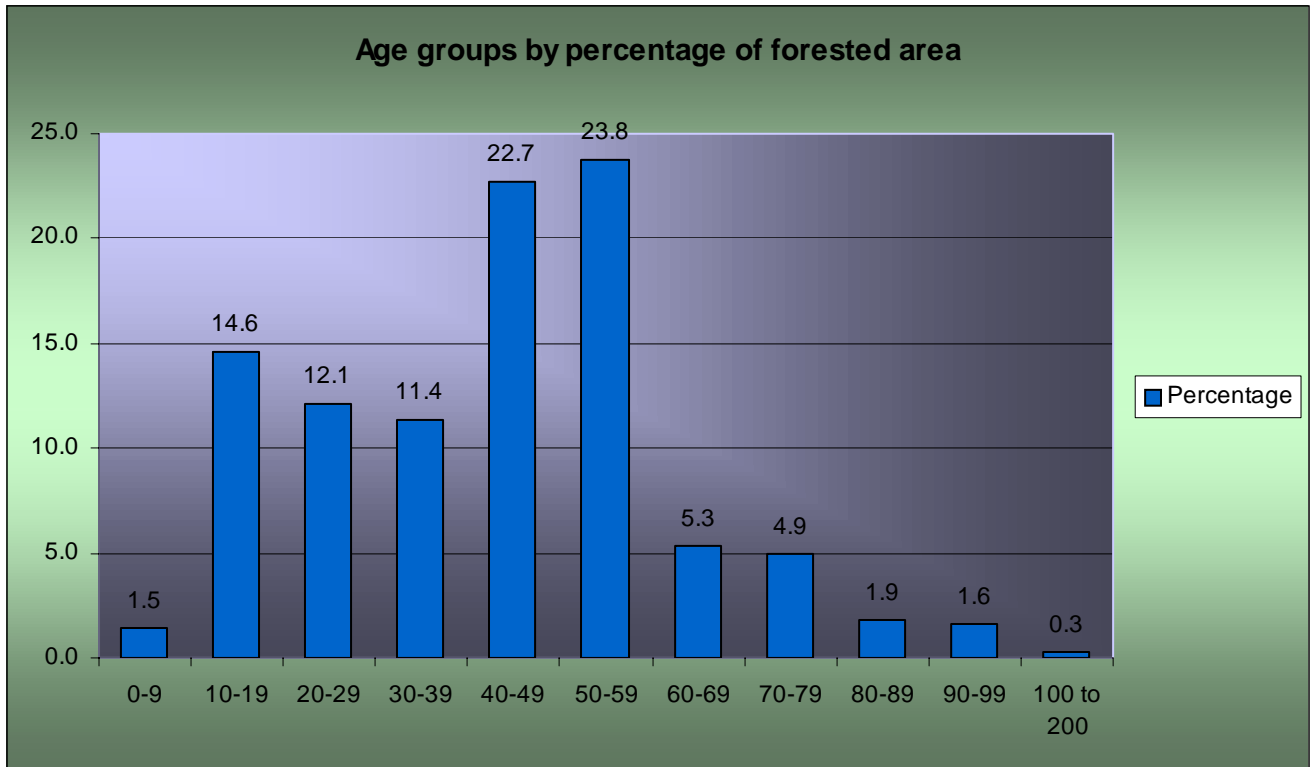
**Figure 6 - distribution of tree species in the District**



### Age structure

The forest age structure in the District is going through a period of rapid change. Many of the earliest plantings in the late 1920s, '30s and '40s have been and are being felled and replanted. Forest design plans are used to create a diverse age structure. Felling is now carried out in coupes, phased over a wide time period. Some of the older planting in each plantation, particularly Scots pine and larch, is now being retained and managed on longer rotations. The increasing area of forests and woodlands is being managed as an alternative system to clearfell. Figure 7 shows the current age distribution.

**Figure 7 - Age class distribution in the District.**



### Economic distribution

There are 12 major timber processors within 50 miles of the District. Some material is also sent to processors in Stirling and Northumbria. Timber is exported from the region to Scandinavia through five local ports. There are several small-scale enterprises - mainly sawmills - in the District and two major hauliers.

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Address</b>
A Gordon	14-16 Barrasgate Road, Fraserburgh AB43 9QD
Euroforest	Standing Sales, Bentley, Surrey GU10 5HY
Cordiners	Silverbank Sawmill, Banchory AB31 5PY
Pallet Logistics	Fordoun Sawmills, by Laurencekirk AB30 1JR
Ridell	Farnton, Alford AB33 8SU
Rosehill Timber	North Waterbridge, Laurencekirk AB30 1QD
James Jones	Garmouth Road, Mosstodloch IV32 7LH
Norbord Ltd	Station Road, Cowie, Stirling FK7 7BQ
Colin Smith	Ordbrae, Huntly AB54 4TD
John Gordon	Balblair Road, Nairn IV12 5LT
Log Haul	Bankend Industrial Estate, North Road, Inch AB52 6XP
Tillyminate Timber	Tillyminate Farm, Gartly, Huntly AB54 4QJ
Tulloch Timber	Grigorhill Sawmill, Nairn IV12 5HY
Deeside Woodlands	The Business Centre, Huntly Road, Aboyne AB34 5HE
Norbord Ltd	Morayhill, Inverness IV2 7QJ
James Jones	Kinnoir, Huntly
James Jones	Aboyne
BSW	Boat of Garten
Jones	Kirriemuir
J Gordon	Carrbridge
Iggesund	Workington
BSW/Tilhill	Standing Sales
<b>Hauliers</b>	
Log Haul	Inch
J G Ridell	Alford
K Muirden	Lumsden
A F Grant	Ballindalloch
J Yule	Laurencekirk
<b>Ports</b>	
Buckie	
Fraserburgh	
Peterhead	
Aberdeen	
Montrose	
Inverness	

FCS employs 64 staff to manage the District and carry out forest operations, such as timber harvesting and tree planting. Around half of the annual timber production of 260km<sup>3</sup> - 290km<sup>3</sup> is harvested by contract labour. Around 400ha of clearfelled land is re-stocked annually using contract labour for the majority of the work. Creation, upgrading and maintenance of recreation trails also uses contract labour. The Christmas tree sales centre at Tyrebagger forest, outside Aberdeen, sells around 6,200 trees a season, with a value of some £120,000. It is the biggest single recreation event in the District, with 12,000 people visiting the site each year.

The area provides a potential resource for renewable energy schemes. A number of windfarm schemes are being considered for sites in the District, ranging from single turbines up to 40

turbines. Schemes that use residues from harvesting, including low-quality material such as small roundwood, are also being considered.

The District makes a significant contribution to the local economy through people visiting recreation facilities and events, e.g. Huntly Peregrine Wildwatch Centre. These visits help to sustain local jobs directly and indirectly, e.g. shops and accommodation providers.

## **3 Reviewing the current District Strategic Plan and reporting on achievements**

### **3.0 Introduction**

It is good practice to review plans and strategies on a regular basis. The conclusions from these monitoring exercises should have a direct impact on management by:

- measuring the extent to which stated objectives and outcomes have been delivered;
- identifying areas of under (or over) performance so that an appropriate response can be planned and the necessary resources allocated;
- providing the raw material for transparent reporting to stakeholders.

The starting point for the 2006/07 review of the District Strategic Plan should be a review of performance since 1999. Table 5 groups performance targets under the five priorities for action in the 2000 Scottish Forestry Strategy. An additional section has been included to cover the demands placed on an efficient and effective organisation.

**Table 5 - Reporting achievement against 1999 – 2005 District Strategic Plan performance targets**

**Former Buchan Forest District Strategic Plan**

<b>SFS Priority for Action 1: To maximise the value of the wood resource</b>			
<b>Target description and planned achievement date</b>	<b>Target achieved (yes / no / partial)?</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Should this target be updated and carried forward to new District Strategic Plan?</b>
Harvest 150,000m <sup>3</sup> annually from the forest.	Yes	Actual average over the six years is 168,000m <sup>3</sup> .	Yes
Harvest timber in accordance with approved design plans.	Yes	A small number of sites required timing changes and authority clearance from Grampian Conservancy before operations began. Otherwise almost all coupes identified for felling have been felled within the set time frames.	Yes
Develop and implement a thinning strategy.	Yes	District has been divided into a series of timed thinning coupes on a seven-year cycle. Area of thinning has increased and management reasons for not thinning areas now being recorded.	Yes
Continue to develop a close understanding with timber customers on supply specifications and profiles.	Yes	Early in period of Strategic Plan, visits by staff to timber mills and by mill managers to forests were organised. Regular meetings with timber customers still take place to discuss fluctuating demands from mills and also variable supply profiles from District sites.	Yes
Work in partnership with Forestry Contracting Association providing support for increased training opportunities for contractor training.	No	Structure and location of FCA changed, relationships did not build and this opportunity for training coordination did not materialise. FCA has recently been disbanded.	No

SFS Priority for Action 2: To create a diverse forest resource for the future			
Target description and planned achievement date	Target achieved (yes / no / partial)?	Comments	Should this target be updated and carried forward to new District Strategic Plan?
Extend coverage of forest design plans to the whole District by 2005.	Yes	District achieved 100% coverage in 2005 with completion of Whitehaugh plan.	No
Replant areas in line with prescriptions laid down in forest design plans.	Yes	Assessments carried out after felling on sites identified amendments to some of the coupes in individual forest design plans which were then submitted for consideration and approval by Grampian Conservancy. In general, the majority of coupes were re-stocked as outlined in the design plans. Species changes are recorded as part of UKWAS requirements and data stored in forest design plan revision process.	Yes
Replant with trees suited to the site and establish timber crop trees at average of 2,500/ha.	Yes	Year 5 District average results for 2000 - 06 exceed this target.	Yes
Develop and refine techniques in harvesting timber from areas designated as continuous cover forests.	Partial	Aim has focused on achieving natural regeneration from the existing crop trees. Early results indicate that success with well-thinned Sitka is possible. Less certain about other species.	Yes

SFS Priority for Action 3: To make a positive contribution to the environment			
Target description and planned achievement date	Target achieved (yes / no / partial)?	Comments	Should this target be updated and carried forward to new District Strategic Plan?
Manage all designated sites and monuments in accordance with agreed management plans.	Yes	All sites of special scientific interest (SSSI_ and SAM management plans renewed during the period of this Strategic Plan. Management actions required were generally low-key, but increasingly the focus is more proactive with aims towards 'favourable status'.	Yes
Manage endangered species in accordance with agreed management plans.	Partial	Very few management plans were produced but this will change following the present SNH consultation exercise on selecting a national species action list. Generally, focus has been on capercaillie, badger, red squirrel and raptors, with some detailed plans executed.	Yes
Identify and survey all known ancient, long-established and semi-natural woodland sites in the District with a view to setting up a programme to restore biologically important sites with non-native species plantations.	Yes	All identified sites in the District (around 3,000ha) have been surveyed and prioritised in biological quality terms. Work has started to restore some of the sites, but substantial programme of work still to be carried out and planned.	Yes
Continue to gather information of habitats, species and heritage, and place this information in databases and maps that are easily accessible to management staff. Set up information links with NESBReC.	Partial	Information has been gathered on a range of species, but a countrywide structure for recording and storage of data is only currently being put in place. NESBReC is currently on contract to supply information for forest design plan	Yes

		areas and for clearfell and thinning coupes in a given year.	
Promote conservation policies that are sustainable in protecting, enhancing and interpreting the diverse habitats and species throughout the District and manage agreed action points on local biodiversity action plan.	Partial	Policies were developed over the period of the Strategic Plan. A major focus has been the restructuring of the forest, creation of significant areas of continuous forest cover particularly with larch, Norway spruce and Scots pine and the enhancement of capercaillie habitat in some forests.	Yes
Promote a wider understanding of conservation and heritage issues to the public who visit the forest.	Yes	Many organised visits to and events in the forest focused on conservation and wildlife. The Huntly Peregrine Wildwatch Centre was opened to give visitors an intimate experience of peregrine falcons in the wild and to explain how vulnerable they are to actions by people. Many other wildlife aspects are explained and demonstrated at the centre.	Yes

SFS Priority for Action 4: To create opportunities for more people to enjoy trees, woods and forests			
Target description and planned achievement date	Target achieved (yes / no / partial)?	Comments	Should this target be updated and carried forward to new District Strategic Plan?
Seek opportunities to expand and enhance the recreational potential of the District woodlands by targeting resources, developing partnerships and working with others.	Yes	A number of very successful projects have been undertaken and facilities for walking, cycling and horse-riding have been enhanced through partnerships and by acquiring sums of external funding.	Yes
Carry out recreational user surveys to highlight areas of customer concern, customer requirements, satisfaction and expectation.	Partial	Initial small-scale surveys carried out locally have been replaced by national surveys targeting all recreational users of the forest e.g. Forest Tourism Initiative all forest survey.	No
Develop closer links with mountain biking groups and clubs to achieve a clearer understanding of their preferred requirements for forest cycle trails.	Yes	All major groups in Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen area have been contacted and have been jointly working on downhill and cross-country trail projects.	Yes
Develop closer links with special needs groups and organisations to develop a clearer understanding of their requirements for recreation in the forest.	Yes	Initially only made contact with one or two groups, but gradually opened dialogue with organisations such as Scottish Association for Mental Health and Grampian Service Brokerage Ltd. The District is in partnership with Aberdeenshire Council on Active Futures bid which has just achieved successful Heritage Lottery Fund bid application.	Yes

SFS Priority for Action 5: To help communities benefit from woods and forests			
Target description and planned achievement date	Target achieved (yes / no / partial)?	Comments	Should this target be updated and carried forward to new District Strategic Plan?
Continue to consult local communities over the development of forest design plans and significant planned management activities in their areas.	Yes	A variety of strategies has been used to engage with local communities over their input into forest design plans. This has been moderately successful, particularly with certain recreational interest groups such as horse-riders.	Yes
Continue to offer opportunities for the involvement of local communities in the management of the forest.	Yes.	Majority of communities satisfied with their inputs during design plan consultation and at other event opportunities. Some user groups have formed planning and project management partnerships. Significant controversy over some plans to develop renewable energy through windfarm development in the forest.	Yes
Continue to optimise opportunities for employment of local people either as direct employees or as contractors.	Yes	Very high proportion of contractors are from the area. Local employment has increased with staff recruitment for the Huntly Peregrine Wildwatch Centre.	Yes

6: Maintain an efficient and effective organisation			
Target description and planned achievement date	Target achieved (yes / no / partial)?	Comments	Should this target be updated and carried forward to new District Strategic Plan?
Ensure that delivery is compliant with UKWAS standards to maintain certification of sustainable forest management.	Yes	District is now overdue an audit, but local processes and performance are considered to be fit for purpose.	Yes
Ensure that staff resources are appropriate to delivery of SFS objectives.	Yes	Ongoing review of staff resource and deployment through annual business plan. Adjustments to total resource and configuration put in place to meet changing business needs.	Yes
Provide training to equip staff to delivery job requirements.	Yes	Unit training plan is in place. Performance management system provides for review to ensure that staff have the necessary tools for effective delivery.	Yes

## Former Kincardine Forest District Strategic Plan

SFS Priority for Action 1: To maximise the value of the wood resource			
Target description and planned achievement date	Target achieved (yes / no / partial)?	Comments	Should this target be updated and carried forward to new District Strategic Plan?
Manage the woodlands in accordance with approved forest design plans.	Yes	Kincardine FD achieved 100% design plan coverage in December 2004. The production from clearfell follows the approved design plans.	Yes. We need to maintain a schedule for five-year reviews to keep forest design plans up to latest guidance.
Ensure that the timber supply equates to the volume of output predicted in the production forecast.	Yes	<p>During the period 1999 – 2005 we maintained our harvesting programme at the levels indicated by up-to-date design plans. This meant adjusting programmes to follow latest design plans and reviewed design plans as the District moved more towards low impact silvicultural systems.</p> <p>Delivery of the programme was hit by the catastrophic windblow in late January 2002 when approximately 100km<sup>3</sup> obs (over-bark standing) or one-year's programme was lost.</p> <p>Programmes were adjusted and authority gained from Grampian Conservancy, and design plans amended to deal with this additional volume.</p> <p>Thinning volume not as accurate from production forecast and a new thinnings plan is required for the District to improve direction in this area. We are meeting the target by thinning the</p>	Yes. Essential indicator of performance.

		volume as indicated by production forecast.	
Ensure that the target minimum replanting is achieved by preparing the ground and planting to a density of 2,700 trees/ha.	Partial	All ground preparation is being completed to a minimum of 2,700. Planting sites/ha average is 2,800+/ha. But average Year 5 stocking results fall just short of the required 2,500 live trees/ha, e.g. year 2005 = 2,438 live trees/ha average. One site at Inglismaldie very poor due to rabbit damage.	Yes. Essential indicator of performance.
Replant felled sites as soon as practicable. Year 1 on sites that grew lightly-branched trees and up to three years later felling for sites that grew heavy-branched species e.g. Sitka spruce.	Yes	All pine and larch sites are planted as soon as practical, mainly to reduce weed competition and the need for chemical weeding.	No. This target is not SMART and may reduce our ability to meet other more important targets.

SFS Priority for Action 2: To create a diverse forest resource for the future			
Target description and planned achievement date	Target achieved (yes / no / partial)?	Comments	Should this target be updated and carried forward to new District Strategic Plan?
Identify and draw up a plan for areas suitable for silviculture that allow for the regeneration of successor crops without wholly clearfelling.	Yes	Areas have been identified in all design plan units that are to be worked on low impact silvicultural systems and the systems described. Further work needs to be done to ensure that these sites are suitable for these systems and to improve recording and monitoring.	Yes. Target needs either monitoring or better description of what is to be achieved.
Monitor deer numbers, tree damage and habitat impact by carrying out population estimates using indirect counting and surveying planted trees and plant species.	Yes	We have a contract with Strathcaulaidh, as well as carrying out our own dung counts and damage assessments, to estimate deer numbers and to agree cull figures that will reduce deer numbers to a density that will allow both successful re-stocking and natural regeneration to occur easily.	Yes. But this target needs to specify expected outcomes.
Restructure the woods by implementing forest design plans using alternative methods to clearfell.	Yes		

SFS Priority for Action 3: To make a positive contribution to the environment			
Target description and planned achievement date	Target achieved (yes / no / partial)?	Comments	Should this target be updated and carried forward to new District Strategic Plan?
Forest habitat networks. Strips of beech are a relatively recent addition, but are now an established part of the landscape. We will avoid planting beech and will actively break up strips of beech along woodland edges and in the woods to prevent the spread of the grey squirrel.	No	Having difficulty persuading our partners (for example Friends of Durris Forest) of the need to implement this measure to reduce the speed of spread of the grey squirrel in the area.	Yes. May need to identify specific areas of concern that would require work.
Manage the woods to enhance the wildlife conservation value of the Scots pinewood areas of Blackhall Wood and the area of PAWS in Glencommon.	Yes	Working through the PAWS restoration work at Glencommon at the moment with first felling taking place last year. Monitoring for regeneration etc will start 2007/08. Thinning has also taken place close to the old wood at Hill of Goauch, Blackhall to improve the habitat so that it might encourage the return of capercaillie when numbers start to increase.	Yes. Needs to be expanded to encompass many more areas where habitat improvements are the main drivers, including those woods in the Cairngorm National Park. Issues include wood ants, red squirrel, caper, black grouse, water vole and otter, and the many other rare and endangered plants, birds, mammals, insects etc.
Manage the river banks and the catchment area (riparian zone) of the River Cowie to maintain and enhance the conditions to support breeding salmonoid fish.	Yes	Positive improvements programmed as part of the design plan review completed recently. Also carrying out water vole surveys and trapping of mink. Riparian work has been carried out over the past six years but further improvements to the vegetation and tree cover are planned over the next period.	Yes. Should add initiatives including the River Dee SAC for Atlantic salmon, freshwater pearl mussel, otter etc. Need improved targets.
Manage areas of blanket bog and upland heath as open ground and seek guidance from conservation bodies.	Yes	Have carried out some improvement including a limited amount of heather burning and swiping. Further work still	Yes. Improved targets and action points required.

		required following the recent felling of the coupe at the Builg in Glenfarquhar, where most of the coupe is to revert to blanket bog.	
Derelict deer fences have been removed and all others marked using wooden droppers to prevent strikes by woodland grouse.	Yes	Completed all that we can meantime. Situation should be monitored as further reduction in stretches of hill deer fence may be possible as neighbouring deer populations reduce.	Yes. Need to maintain wooden droppers to ensure the safety of the capercaillie population.

SFS Priority for Action 4: To create opportunities for more people to enjoy trees, woods and forests			
Target description and planned achievement date	Target achieved (yes / no / partial)?	Comments	Should this target be updated and carried forward to new District Strategic Plan?
Continue to improve the facilities in the woods in and around Aberdeen for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders in partnership with Aberdeen City Council, Paths for All and neighbours	Yes	<p>Much work has been carried out to improve the facilities in the woods around Aberdeen. These improvements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improving the horse trails at Blacktop;</li> <li>• developing a mountain bike fun park at Kirkhill;</li> <li>• improving the quality of all the car parks surfaces;</li> <li>• working with local communities and schools to improve the area around Foggieton following catastrophic windblow and subsequent clearance of this part of the forest;</li> <li>• the recruitment of a community ranger to deal especially with the woods around Aberdeen.</li> </ul>	Yes. Much work still to be done. Future targets need to be set.
Work in partnership with the Tyrebagger Trust to continue to improve the access in Tyrebagger wood.	Yes	The sculpture trail is almost complete and the area has moved into the next phase - more care and maintenance with the occasional replacement of a sculpture as the existing ones reach the end of their lives.	No. This target should be amalgamated into that for all Aberdeen woods.
Provide car parks and informal surfaced walks at Inglismaldie.	Partial	Existing facilities have been improved by improving parking facilities. Informal walks etc are in reasonable condition and surfacing was not felt to be required	No. Should be part of a wider recreation commitment for those areas outwith WIAT commitment.

		or suitable.	
To develop a partnership between FCS, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils, Aberdeen Countryside Project, local community groups and other appropriate stakeholders to deliver WIAT through support for and implementation of the woodland element of the green space network set out in the finalised local plans for Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire.	Yes, but ongoing	This is ongoing, but at relatively early stage. FCS Grampian Conservancy has appointed a forester to work in the council offices. This officer is working closely with the city and shire councils, the District and local groups etc to develop and implement a strategy for WIAT in Aberdeen and Deeside. The District is also involved in the process committing a new ranger to the delivery of WIAT objectives from FCS land.	Yes. Improved targets.
Develop partnerships with neighbours and private woodland owners to establish long-distance paths linking communities of Aberdeen, Culter and Drumoak.	Yes	This goes further with the plans for the Deeside Way and links to many other communities, e.g. Strachan, from this planned route.	Yes

SFS Priority for Action 5: To help communities benefit from woods and forests			
Target description and planned achievement date	Target achieved (yes / no / partial)?	Comments	Should this target be updated and carried forward to new District Strategic Plan?
Manage Balfour Wood in partnership with the Birse Community Trust (BCT).	Yes	The forest design plan has been built in full consultation with BCT and acknowledges the partnership with BCT. Much work has been carried out with both felling and thinning to improve the habitat. BCT has also carried out habitat improvement work in Balfour, involving local people and local schools in these projects.	No. Should be part of a bigger statement on the many community partnerships in the area.
Develop a partnership to manage Pannanich Wood with Ballater (Royal Deeside) Ltd.	Yes	The partnership is working towards interpreting the Second World War loggers' camp as a tourist attraction for the area, rather than managing the forest in joint partnership.	No. As above, bigger statements on targets for community agreements are required to focus both FCS and communities themselves.

<b>6: Maintain an efficient and effective organisation</b>			
<b>Target description and planned achievement date</b>	<b>Target achieved (yes / no / partial)?</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Should this target be updated and carried forward to new District Strategic Plan?</b>
Ensure that delivery is compliant with UKWAS standards to maintain certification of sustainable forest management.	Yes	District is now overdue an audit, but local processes and performance are considered to be fit for purpose	Yes
Ensure that staff resources are appropriate to delivery of SFS objectives.	Yes	Ongoing review of staff resource/deployment through annual business plan. Adjustments to total resource and configuration put in place to meet changing business needs.	Yes
Provide training to equip staff to delivery job requirements.	Yes	Unit training plan is in place. Performance management system provides for review to ensure that staff have the necessary tools for effective delivery.	Yes

## **4 Identification and analysis of issues**

The issues identified below correlate to the seven key national themes derived from the Scottish Forestry Strategy (SFS).

The SFS reflects three outcomes developed further into 12 headline objectives and a total of 69 detailed objectives prescribing strategic delivery at a national scale. This will be interpreted at a local level by focusing most closely on those objectives where the District is favourably placed to contribute.

As a result, we will seek to identify areas in which we can make a difference. Issues are arranged under the key themes identified in the SFS, with analysis and evaluation of their local context.

National theme	1 - Climate change
Most relevant SFS action	Priority issues for the District
Adapting to climate change	<p>Climate change and the resultant effects are now recognised as a key global agenda. Debate continues as to the likely consequences and scale, and as a result it remains difficult to predict change with any degree of confidence. If weather patterns in recent years are a foretaste of the future, we can anticipate a gradual rise in both winter and summer temperatures with increased rainfall and a heightened incidence, and severity of short-term storm conditions. The District will consider the implications of drought and windblow in relation to the development of forest design plans. This will take into account <b>species choice</b> and provenance, but most particularly will seek to tailor silvicultural regimes to local circumstances to reduce the impacts attributable to these two key factors. In Aberdeenshire, there is anecdotal evidence that Sitka spruce are suffering stress caused by summer drought conditions. Equally, stock density assessments indicate drought stress on Scots pine particularly on higher ground. Consideration will be given to more resilient species. In parallel, the District will keep under review the potential implications for species selection arising from pests, diseases and competitors responding to climate change.</p> <p>The detailed effects of climate change on habitats and species are equally uncertain, but forest habitat networks will consider issues of connectivity to aid translocation, both in terms of design plans and possible acquisitions.</p> <p>Climate change and associated impacts on vegetation may potentially result in an increase in availability of fuel to exacerbate the consequences arising from forest fires. The incidence of fires may also increase if springtime muirburn conditions are drier and windier.</p> <p>The District incorporates a number of significant water courses of the rivers Don, Dee and Deveron, all of which are important for fishing and recreation. The impacts of forestry on the ecological quality of these catchments require to be considered in terms of design plans, operations and monitoring in the context of <b>flood and catchment management plans</b>.</p> <p>There is also a generic theme of <b>sustainable management</b> linking all of our operations and infrastructure.</p>

Mitigating climate change	<p>The District is actively involved in the promotion of <b>renewable energy</b> projects, with three windfarm developments currently under formal consideration at Clashindarroch, Cushnie and Mid Hill. Future proposals are likely to be of a lesser scale, but some further potential remains. There is an increasing local interest in development of a woodfuel industry. In general, the timber produced in the District is of relatively high quality, specification and value, and as such is inappropriate for woodfuel utilisation. Residues arising from harvesting are largely if not wholly absorbed in providing brush mats to support harvesting machinery. As a result, there is limited material in the national forest estate that is available for woodfuel at the present time. The District does wish to make a positive contribution whenever possible. In a harvesting and marketing context, the relative proximity to markets reduces haulage costs and associated climate impacts arising from vehicle use.</p> <p>The Greenerways strategy will have a key role in evaluating and mitigating the ecological impact of FCS operations through the key areas of energy, water and built estate, travel and transport, waste, procurement and communications. The District will be actively involved in this process.</p>
Increasing carbon sequestration and retention	<p>The District is well placed to contribute to mitigation of climate change. The area is widely recognised for its capability to produce high-yielding quality timber, which sequesters greater volumes of carbon. The proportion of continuous cover forestry has also increased. Future forest design plans will favour low impact silvicultural systems where prevailing site conditions are suitable.</p> <p>The creation of <b>new woodland</b> will contribute to mitigation of carbon emissions. The District has a flagship carbon sequestration project at Darroch Wids, extending to 500ha, and will continue to use this to promote woodland establishment as a vehicle for reducing the impacts of carbon pollution. A further acquisition of 128ha at South Balnoon will also be established with carbon sequestration as the principal objective.</p> <p>There is a particularly active land market in Aberdeenshire and further opportunities to purchase land for carbon sequestration will arise. But there is also a very significant demand and as a result the agricultural areas preferred for carbon-related purchases are attracting significant premiums.</p> <p>The Aberdeen Western Periphery Route may also bring opportunities for land acquisition, providing further woodland establishment/sequestration opportunities. This is being actively pursued.</p> <p>The District is also being approached by a number of Aberdeen-based oil companies seeking tree establishment projects for sequestration reasons. We welcome this opportunity and will pursue them as land availability and other resource requirements permit.</p>

National theme	2 - Timber
Most relevant SFS action	Priority issues for the District
Promoting predictable and stable timber supplies	<p><b>Timber supply</b> remains central to the objectives of the District, which benefits from environmental conditions suitable for growing high-yielding species producing good quality saw logs. The income derived from timber production provides a significant contribution to the delivery of wider social and environmental objectives, and maintains employment for staff and for the contractors, hauliers and processors that are all well represented in the area. There are significant downstream processing facilities in and close to the District boundary, and there is a local focus on ensuring continuity of supply. Processors are long-established firms committed to the markets in the longer term and willing to invest in up-to-date technology.</p> <p>Current annual production remains around 290km<sup>3</sup> inclusive of clearfells and thinnings outputs. Timber production is split between direct production, comprising outputs from in-house teams and contractors, and standing sales. Timber production is likely to remain reasonably stable for the foreseeable future, although the processing sector's dependency on the national forest estate will decline as private sector woodlands come on stream. In the longer term, the District will aim to continue to improve the accuracy of production forecasting where possible, and ensure that we have a reliable prediction of timber volume and species to market our timber effectively in line with current and future demand.</p> <p>The District undertakes a significant level of thinning activity, accounting for around 35% of output by volume. Thinnings contribute positively to cashflow, but also provide for silvicultural and environmental gain (particularly where associated with alternative strategies to clearfell). Thinning also provides a steady stream of timber from the crop throughout its life, ensuring a more balanced flow of timber. The key issue is to secure the delivery of timber products by matching silvicultural delivery to future market demands. Conditions in the District are conducive to growing high-yielding species producing <b>timber quality</b> suitable for use in the construction industry. There is significant local demand from local processors for this type of output to supply the booming housing market, where there is considerable use of <b>timber in construction</b>, particularly for kit homes.</p>

<p>Increase timber supply chain efficiency</p>	<p>Produce from the District is readily accessible to local sawmills in or close to the District boundaries, with all woodland blocks falling within 50km of processors. There are several major timber market outlets in the District, with two owned by James Jones at Kinnoir and Aboyne, and Cordiners' mill at Banchory. This is coupled with a number of other local outlets and ready access to port facilities. A significant proportion of output is allocated to long-term contracts, but some is subject to tender on the open market and there are local relationships in place to maintain smaller scale/specialist customers. The haulage sector is also well represented, with a combination of national and local firms operating in the District.</p> <p>There is an increased interest in developing a woodfuel market, but presently the District has limited surplus production. Much of the residue from timber harvesting is required to enable machines to operate on sites and to reduce ecological impacts attributable to harvesting machinery. The District participates actively in the <b>timber transport groups</b>.</p> <p>Timber harvesting combines direct production with a significant in-house operation, direct production using contractors and standing sales. District-based operational staff have a key role in developing the production monitoring IT equipment that eases the flow of information from harvesting sites to supervisors, enabling quick information sharing and matching of outputs to demand.</p>
<p>Develop the hardwood sector</p>	<p>There is an anticipated market demand for commercial <b>hardwood timber</b> that is not presently well represented in the national forest estate. Broadleaf planting, both in FES holdings and on private sector land, has tended to focus on amenity planting rather than timber production. The District has attempted to amalgamate carbon sequestration and amenity planting objectives (Darroch Wids), and recognises the potential to deliver a commercial broadleaf crop as a component of this approach. It is possible that the emerging woodfuel market will allow greater management of species like birch, which are better suited to growing in this area and form a valuable native broadleaf resource for conservation and species diversity.</p> <p>The District has limited experience in the cultivation of commercial broadleaves and will need to develop in-house expertise through training and shared learning opportunities. Future land acquisitions will take account of the opportunity to develop commercial broadleaves where silviculturally viable.</p>

National theme	3 - Business development
Most relevant SFS action	Priority issues for the District
Realising economic potential	<p>A number of opportunities arise from <b>non-timber sources of income</b> in the national forest estate. In particular, the area is attractive to potential renewable energy developers as it benefits from suitable topography and wind conditions. There is only small-scale development to date, but a number of developments are awaiting approval, subject to grid connection. Windfarm developments will continue to be controversial, with strong opinions robustly stated particularly with regard to landscape and ecological impacts. But it is fair to say that the environment in the District is, with some exceptions, relatively robust for this kind of development.</p> <p>By comparison, other opportunities are relatively small-scale, although there is undoubtedly potential for recreational/tourism-related ventures utilising the estate. Consideration will be given to any new economic initiatives or opportunities. Quarrying and telecommunications masts will continue to provide positive cash flows. Commercial shooting will maintain an income stream, but in practice the returns do not significantly outweigh the administrative costs and there are question marks over the sustainability of some elements of game shooting in the context of UKWAS. Ongoing review of the estate and in particular <b>portfolio analysis</b> will provide opportunities to consider realisation of assets where this can be rolled over to acquisitions or partnerships that provide a better fit to contemporary objectives.</p>
Contributing to rural development	<p>Outwith Aberdeen City, the area is predominantly rural and has a long agricultural heritage. The changing global market for agricultural produce has been reflected in a significant downturn in agricultural employment, services and farm income. As a result, diversification, particularly on marginal units, has been a notable facet of the north-east. In practice, some farmers have sought to take advantage of SFGS Challenge provisions to establish woodlands of their own, e.g. the Grampian Forest. Others have developed local businesses that capitalise on their mechanical skills through transfer to the forest sector. Diversification to date has largely focused on mainstream forestry operations of establishment, harvesting, haulage and processing. The farming supply sector also provides a significant number of materials such as fencing, tree stakes and protective clothing.</p> <p>There are a smaller number of local facilities making use of the forest for organised recreation, but this remains fairly low-key. The District will be keen to encourage the utilisation of the national forest estate by <b>local businesses</b> where this is compatible, and ideally complementary, to FCS objectives.</p>

Tourism	<p><b>Tourism</b> in North East Scotland has traditionally tended to major on the three key areas of the Castle Trail, the Whisky Trail and Royal Deeside. More recently, there has been an increasing recognition of the role of the environment to include both quiet enjoyment and active participation. The District's forests provide a significant recreational resource for walking, cycling, mountain biking and limited fieldsports, and there is a wide range of activities provided by our in-house team of recreational rangers. There is limited formal tourism provision, with the exception of associated centres at Bennachie and the FES-managed Huntly Peregrine Wildwatch Centre.</p> <p>The District is working more closely with VisitScotland and local tourism groups to maximise the positive contribution that the national forest estate makes to the tourism industry in the city and shire areas.</p> <p>Woodland resources do make a significant contribution to the visitor experience of the area, but the financial returns are retained in the tourism rather than forestry sectors and as a result are difficult to evaluate.</p>
Skills	<p>There is a continued need for high-quality <b>staff and contractor skills</b> to deliver woodland management locally. This will require both in-house teams and the maintenance of a highly trained and skilled contractor base. There are a number of contracting firms based in Aberdeenshire that provide services to a much wider geographical area, particularly in ground preparation and harvesting.</p> <p>The key issue for the District will be to ensure that staff and contractors are appropriately trained and that <b>Health and Safety</b> issues are given priority.</p>

National theme	4 - Community development
Most relevant SFS action	Priority issues for the District
Contributing to quality of life	<p>Communities in the District are very diverse. Approximately 40% (175,000) of the population lives in Aberdeen City where, despite a general financial well-being, there remain pockets of social deprivation. The wider District has a range of fairly vibrant communities most particularly, but not exclusively, along the core A96 road/rail corridor and in Royal Deeside. The settlement pattern in the more rural areas forms a scattered distribution of small towns and villages, for the most part linked to traditional industries such as fishing along the coast and agriculture/ estate management, and more recently tourism, inland. A relatively high level of disposable income, much of it oil related, has been reflected in a migration outward from the city to areas within commuting distance.</p> <p>The distribution of woodland in the District will tend to focus activity in and around Aberdeen and Stonehaven, although Huntly has health deprivation issues that we can assist in addressing. Locally-based staff are actively engaged with community interests and will continue to develop partnership working to deliver benefits to communities of interest closely linked to the WIAT agenda and associated health and environmental education gains. This will include gathering information from local townships to seek to ensure that provision matches closely the objectives of local people. There will be a continuing need to work with other agencies to safeguard the interest in these sites from anti-social behaviour through fostering a sense of ownership and robust intervention where appropriate.</p> <p>The key issue is to ensure that existing woodlands are fit to contribute to these objectives and that resources are in place either directly or through effective partnership working.</p>
Education and lifelong learning	<p>The District <b>education</b> strategy is based on the national FCS strategy. Education is seen as having a vital role in promoting the multi-benefits of forests. Two full-time staff have a main objective of delivering education in the District (30% of time) and from 2007/08 they will be aided by two seasonal staff. The full-time staff also support the development officer and partners in the north-east FEI. They work closely with the Conservancy and WIAT officer. The District also manages the relatively new Huntly Peregrine Wildwatch Centre and employs three part-time wardens (80% of time), plus volunteers, to directly engage and educate the public and schools on peregrines, wildlife and forestry matters. The Darroch Wids Project officer (10% of time) has used local schools in the Huntly area to appreciate and understand native woodlands and carbon sequestration.</p>

<p>Enhancing engagement with communities</p>	<p>There are a number of established community linkages and more formal partnerships in the District, and the level of <b>community engagement</b> in the national forest estate covers a wide spectrum of aspirations. In many cases, community engagement, particularly through forest design plan consultation, reflects a general support for continued management by FES with a particular emphasis on ensuring that woodlands will continue to be accessible for quiet enjoyment, including dog walking. These frequent users are a valued sector who generally do not seek to become more directly involved in the management of woodlands, but equally develop a sense of ownership. They can be both a useful sounding board, and a set of eyes and ears, and can add considerably to the planning process. It is important that the need to provide places to deliver the objectives of this group are recognised.</p> <p>Equally, there are communities that seek a more frontline role in the management of the forest through specific recreational opportunities, e.g. mountain biking or specific woodlands associated with geographical community boundaries. The aspirations of these groups are diverse and can evolve over time. As capacity develops, the District will continue to work to assist communities to realise their objectives, compatible with the SFS. Specific opportunities for engagement with communities adjacent to woodlands arise through forest design plan consultation. Recent evidence suggests that there is an increased interest in the planning process and a desire to contribute and add value.</p> <p>The District maintains a number of long-standing relationships with community groups, particularly in the former Kincardine FD area. There are varying degrees of formality, from binding legal agreements to very loose arrangements based on shared objectives or special interests. Servicing these groups can be demanding in staff time and, in practice, commonly the least formal relationships can be the most productive by focusing on outputs. We support a number of active community <b>partnerships</b> including Friends of Durris Forest, Friends of Dunlethen, Foggieton, Dunnottar Woodland Park Association and the Bailies o Bennachie. Other opportunities are considered positively. A realistic evaluation of group objectives, aspirations and capacity at the outset is appropriate to ensure that the partnership mechanism under consideration is fit for purpose.</p>
<p>Encouraging community ownership and management</p>	<p>Engagement suggests that there is limited interest in an increased role in community ownership of national forest estate woodlands. There are a number of active local groups, but the area lacks the drivers more prevalent in the Highland communities. These groups for the most part have a specific interest in local woodland issues, with access being the most prominent. There is a common perspective that FES is best placed to deliver woodland management, but there are some specific opportunities for wider community engagement arising from the further promotion of the WIAT agenda, with potential for local groups to take on increased responsibilities where capacity exists or can be developed.</p> <p>To date, a single National Forest Land Scheme application has been progressed at Slewdrum, which forms part of the wider Blackhall Forest. The acquiring interest, Birse Community Trust, has previous experience of <b>community ownership and management</b> and as a result have been in the vanguard of these procedures. It is considered unlikely that there will be a significant wider interest in community purchase, except to meet specific local objectives.</p>

National theme	5 - Access and Health
Most relevant SFS action	Priority issues for the District
Making access easier	<p>Social deprivation in communities in the District is confined to small clusters in Aberdeen City and in the fishing towns on the north-east coast. The former are reasonably well served by national forest estate woodlands in the city boundary and those owned Aberdeen City Council. The latter less so, as many of the smaller woodland blocks formerly part of the estate in north-east Buchan were disposed of in previous years.</p> <p>With only a very few exceptions, the distribution of woodlands in the District means that people have to use a vehicle to reach the forest. But most woodlands will be used by local people, most commonly dog walkers, who will either drive or walk to the site. As a result, while there is a significant pattern of local use across much of the District, there are a relatively small number of 'honey pot' sites, e.g. Bennachie and Blackhall that attract visitors from outwith the immediate area.</p> <p>The District employs an open <b>access</b> policy in accordance with the access provisions contained in the Land Reform [Scotland] Act 2003. Walking, cycling and horse-riding are the highest participant number activities, but there are also organised events for Nordic ski-ing, orienteering, mountain biking and motor rallying.</p> <p>It is recognised that that the woodland resource in the vicinity of Aberdeen City could contribute further to the quality of life. The fragmented ownership and distribution require a joined up approach from agencies and local authorities through co-ordinated implementation of the <b>WIAT</b> initiative. The advent of the Aberdeen Western Periphery Route will modify the traffic flows and create opportunity through improved access provision to existing woodlands and potentially by application of mitigation measures.</p> <p>The District has five forests in the Cairngorms National Park, where early discussions have taken place with National Park staff in relation to <b>core paths</b> as part of the scoping process for wider consultation. Similar situations are reflected in relation to both Aberdeenshire Council and the small area of the District included in the Moray Council area.</p>

<p>Helping to improve the nation's health</p>	<p>Around 435,000 people live in the District, with 40% living in Aberdeen City and the remainder throughout Aberdeenshire. There are limited and localised areas of social deprivation, but there is a wide recognition of the contribution that the national forest estate can make to improving general <b>health</b> through exercise. District staff have worked on a number of, mostly local, initiatives to encourage increased use of the woodland for health benefit. But the development and implementation of the Paths to Health programme is key to delivery of this agenda.</p> <p>Grampian Health Trust has appointed a Paths to Health co-ordinator who will play a lead role in facilitating establishment of a network of walks leaders. Initially, it is likely that this will focus particularly in an urban context, but FES will seek to ensure that woodland walks are actively promoted to contribute to this agenda. Events run by the District have been vastly oversubscribed, and there is a clear demand and enthusiasm for further organised activities. District staff have promoted the Active Woods programme, e.g. 10,000 steps, with a particular link to schools to further encourage activities and interest in the local environment. The District has also established a partnership/contract with the Scottish Association for Mental Health to undertake practical work in and around the City woods. District staff continue to work closely with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) and its Green Gym programme.</p> <p>The key issue is to sustain and where possible enhance these opportunities through wider partnerships as appropriate.</p>
<p>Enabling people to enjoy woodlands</p>	<p>There is a very significant urban population in the District and an opportunity to promote the use of the national forest estate as a key social resource. But there are only a small number of woodlands in the immediate vicinity of Aberdeen City on which to focus the delivery from FES teams. It is also equally clear that there is a very significant demand for forest-based activities beyond those deliverable using the existing in-house resource.</p> <p>As a result, there is a need for a wider joined-up delivery in partnership with other landowners agencies and providers. Despite the levels of local demand for <b>access</b>, there is also opportunity to increase the use of the resource through targeted events, appropriately promoted. There is limited information on the current use patterns beyond anecdotal evidence and there is a need for good market research prior to project implementation.</p> <p>The staff resource to deliver recreational facilities is stretched and opportunities to increase capacity through, for example, the use of community and/or volunteer groups will be pursued.</p>

National theme	6 – Environmental quality
Most relevant SFS action	Priority issues for the District
Protecting water, soil and air resources	<p>Large-scale or riparian forestry can have a significant influence on <b>water quality</b>. The effects can vary in scale from large river catchments to individual water supplies at a more localised level. The quality of water can be affected by siltation through surface run off, direct impacts through harvesting machinery, and contamination through pollution from fuels, oils and forest chemicals. Acidification can also be exacerbated. But, by contrast, riparian woodlands can contribute positively to water quality and the environment for aquatic life, including by stabilisation of fragile riverbanks and steeper slopes. Soils are vulnerable to compaction and erosion attributable to timber harvesting activity. Air quality can be enhanced by trees, particularly those in or adjacent to built-up areas, absorbing carbon dioxide and in some cases other pollutants.</p> <p>The District will require to evaluate forest design plans and their impacts on water, soil and air resources to comply with and, as appropriate, contribute positively through the FCS forest and water guidelines and the EU water framework directive. We will work in conjunction with the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), as appropriate. The introduction of a national strategy for fallow ground to reduce the requirement for herbicides and pesticides will contribute to this through the District chemical reduction strategy.</p> <p>The District has few <b>designated sites</b> with the exception of the River Dee special area for conservation (SAC) and seven sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs). Of our SSSIs, three (Hill of Towanreef, Mortlach Moss and Greenhill of Strathdon) also have SAC status, five are in a favourable or recovering condition, and two sites contain declining attributes. The District has a very small percentage of the land holding in the two declining SSSIs (Hill of Towanreef and Muir of Dinnet). Following discussion with SNH, it is clear that we cannot positively affect favourable condition but we will, of course, continue to manage our small areas and maintain favourable condition there in line with agreed management plans.</p> <p>The land on which our proportion of the Greenhill of Strathdon SSSI is located is due to be transferred to a neighbouring landowner during 2007 as part of an excambion.</p> <p>The District recognises that adoption of <b>low impact silvicultural systems</b> can make a positive contribution to environmental quality through moderating the impacts of dramatic landscape, habitat and hydrological change associated with clearfelling programmes. There are many positive factors in favour of alternative strategies to clearfell, but it remains important to ensure that the silvicultural regime is appropriate to the site conditions.</p>

<p>Contributing to Scotland's landscapes</p>	<p>Woodlands can significantly influence <b>landscape quality</b>. Autumn colours can contribute to tourism and highlight other landscape features, but the straight fence lines associated with planting right up to legal boundaries commonly introduce geometry alien to a natural landscape and counterproductive to establishment of habitat networks.</p> <p>The varying topography of the District means that while some extensive blocks are essentially inward-looking and harvesting operations can be planned with relatively little landscape impact, there are other blocks that are prominent in the local landscape where considerable caution is required, particularly at or close to the natural horizon.</p> <p>Five woodland blocks are in the Cairngorms National Park, but only one (Inver) in the national scenic area (NSA).</p> <p>The issue for the District will be to develop and implement forest design plans using FCS landscape guidance to ensure that the woodland is generally perceived as contributing positively to landscape through species choice and management. Consideration of windfarms will be addressed through the planning system but may, in some cases, provide enhancement opportunities.</p>
<p>Managing the historic landscape</p>	<p>In the context of <b>cultural heritage</b>, the District has 16 SAMs and over 200 UAMs. We have been notified by HS of an additional five SAMs and anticipate these sites being fully designated by late 2007. The District has three listed buildings. All SAMs are managed in line with management plans agreed with HS. The District has highlighted a limited number of UAMs that will be actively managed and interpreted as part of our recreation/ education infrastructure, e.g. Colony Houses at Bennachie. We actively support the local historic society at Turriff, and work closely with the Huntly Archaeology Group and a local archaeologist who surveys and produces site monument records for a number of UAMs. These records, which we share with Aberdeenshire Council Archaeological Service, have led to the proposed scheduling of four of the five new SAMs.</p> <p>The District is supporting the Ballater Historic Forestry Project, which aims to educate visitors through the recreation of aspects of a Second World War logging camp near Ballater, upper Deeside. We are also working closely with the Delgaty Castle Trust to restore aspects of the historic landscape near Turriff, with support from SNH.</p> <p>We remain alert to potential new projects and are currently working with Aberdeenshire Council and other partners to restore historically important farm buildings on the Cabrach with the aim of using the resource to tell the story of upland farming activity in Aberdeenshire to the visiting public.</p>

National theme	7 - Biodiversity
Most relevant SFS action	Priority issues for the District
Reverse biodiversity decline by targeted action	<p>The District has a rich heritage of PAWS sites, extending to some 709ha. We will continue to promote and implement a policy of restoration to native woodlands in accordance with approved management plans. Our PAWS sites will be managed to fully restore 241ha, enhance 298ha, and maintain the current status of the remaining 170ha. Many of these sites have a greater ecological value in the current habitat than we could create by active restoration e.g. Blackhall has a greater current habitat value for red squirrel than as a restored ancient woodland.</p> <p>Around 500ha of woodland adjacent to our PAWS remnant exhibits many of the features of neighbouring ancient woodland sites and we aim to manage this woodland as if it were PAWS.</p> <p><b>Priority habitats</b></p> <p>The District has a limited number of designated sites, but will look to address those areas where forestry activity can influence the condition of <b>priority habitats</b>. Conservation efforts will be focused on biodiversity action plans and rare habitat and species action plans.</p> <p>Non-designated priority habitats in the District that are particularly relevant are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2,229ha of upland heathland that is taken account of through good forest design</li> <li>• 276ha of blanket bog</li> <li>• 10ha of lowland raised bog</li> <li>• 2ha of reed bed</li> <li>• 25ha of fen</li> </ul>

Reverse biodiversity decline by targeted action (continued)

### **Priority species**

For many of the UK and Scottish priority species, building resilient habitat networks and tailoring general woodland management prescriptions will take account of their particular needs. For those species not covered by this, priority will be given to species in woodland-related species action plans. Species that are particularly relevant in the District are:

- red squirrel - the District has 15 of the 127 woodlands ranked by SNH (2005) as priority for red squirrel conservation in north and central Scotland (with six in the top 30% and all but three in the top 60%);
- capercaillie - there are no specially protected areas (SPAs) for capercaillie or black grouse, but Pannanich is adjacent to the Glen Tanner SPA. A number of woodland blocks are known to be used by capercaillie and black grouse, and management prescriptions are specifically tailored to meet species objectives. The District has been actively managing for capercaillie through the EU LIFE project, which has now concluded;
- black grouse - this species is spread through the District in small numbers. We have few leks on the national forest estate, but there are more significant numbers on neighbouring land;
- juniper - this is a fairly wide-spread species in the District, although we have no really large concentrations. We are actively planting juniper as part of the native woodland establishment at Darroch Wids;
- twinflower - there are a few isolated sites in the District, e.g. Bin and Balloch. We are working with Forest Research colleagues and SNH to assist in trials relating to inducing the spread of twinflower;
- pearl-bordered fritillary - there are two known sites, at Cambus O' May and Inver;
- cousin german - sightings recorded in Cambus O' May;
- dark-bordered beauty - on aspen adjacent to Inver.

The above species depend strongly on woodland or woodland-edge habitats, have a high proportion of their range in Scotland and require specific woodland management measures to be applied on a significant scale.

On or adjacent to designated sites, we will help to achieve favourable conditions for notified species, where our land management can impact on the status, e.g. removal of invasive non-native tree species to remove seed source from affecting neighbouring SSSI.

Reverse biodiversity decline by targeted action (continued)

**UK biodiversity action plan species**

The District hosts a wide variety of UKBAP species. The majority are catered for through wider habitat management and good forestry practice in line with UKWAS, but we do make an active contribution to:

- water vole - Cowie Water Project linked to mink (see invasive species below) and Ythan Project at Methlick;
- freshwater pearl mussel - indirectly through our wider management for the River Dee SAC;
- otter - indirectly through our wider management for the River Dee SAC;
- Atlantic salmon - direct action to improve river and riparian habitats ongoing through EU LIFE Salmon project;
- pipestrelle bat - the District has a fairly large number of both natural and man-made roosts that are regularly monitored;
- dark-bordered beauty - two known sites, at Cambus O' May and Inver.

Reverse biodiversity decline by targeted action (continued)

### **Local biodiversity action plan species**

LBAP species in the District are varied and like UKBAP species, the majority are catered for through wider habitat management and good forestry practice in line with UKWAS. But we do make an active contribution to:

- which elm - the District has been actively planting which elm for at least eight years as part of general re-stocking operations and new planting projects;
- brown hare - we have monitored this species at a number of sites, including Darroch Wids.

### **Invasive species**

Invasive species are recognised as a national threat to natural habitats and species. The following species are significant in the District:

- grey squirrel - there is an expanding population of grey squirrel in Aberdeen City, with an increasing colonisation of surrounding areas. The presence of native red squirrel in the District, and the potential for expansion of their range through the Don and Dee river catchments to the red squirrel areas of Speyside, requires robust and sustained commitment to intervention. The District seeks to curtail colonisation by grey squirrel from, in and around the city. The two-strand approach will be to undertake direct physical control in accordance with approved methodologies and restrict planting of large seeded broadleaves. Action at 'pinch points', e.g. Blackhall and Durris, will be backed up by the management of existing refuge habitat in upper Deeside, e.g. Inver and Cambus O' May;
- rhododendron ponticum - is not widespread, but there are a few forests, e.g. Drumtochty, Inglismaldie and Blackhall, with areas of rhododendron, mostly associated with PAWS sites;
- American mink - the District has a small population of mink on the Cowie and Finglennie river in Fetteresso forest, near Stonehaven. We are working with the University of Aberdeen to carry out a licensed catch and release scheme to monitor mink spread. This work is linked to the protection of water voles, a LBAP species. The mink are radio-tagged and recaptured and culled at the end of the experiment. If populations prove to be an issue, we will consider a wider culling of mink on the national forest estate.

We will ensure that we meet the legal requirements for protected species under the Nature Conservation Scotland Act, Wildlife and Countryside Act and the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations.

Reverse biodiversity decline by broader actions

The District comprises 71 separate planning units, varying in size from 16ha to 5900ha. Much of the wider area in the District has a high-value agricultural sector that tends to dominate the lower-lying, more fertile land. As a result, larger-scale forestry has tended to occupy the higher ground or pockets of poorer-quality land otherwise enclosed by agriculture. The distribution of woodland is to a degree fragmented by both land use and altitude. There is value to be gained by the establishment of forest **habitat networks** to link existing woodlands and to integrate woodlands with valley bottoms and higher open ground. Equally, there are opportunities to improve riparian habitats. Both issues require to be balanced against the potential creation of corridors that enable colonisation by undesirable species, of which grey squirrel would be a prime example.

**Deer management** will continue to be an important issue for the District. Roe deer are present throughout the District, with red deer represented particularly in Deeside and Donside. There is increasing evidence of red deer becoming more common at the eastern extent of their recognised range. A significant level of management intervention will be required to reduce and maintain deer impacts at low levels compatible with good silvicultural practice and biodiversity.

The key issue is to ensure that biodiversity features appropriately in all forest design plans.

## 5 Response to the issues, implementation and monitoring

National theme	1 - Climate change		
Key local issues	Proposed response (including implementation )	Monitoring	Aspiration
Species choice	<p>Caution is required to ensure that plans and strategies remain flexible to accommodate climate change. Forest design plans will adopt silvicultural regimes using resilient species, e.g. re-stocking of Sitka spruce felling coupes by Scots pine or perhaps an interim rotation of Norway spruce. Implications for species selection arising from pests, diseases and competitors responding to climate change will be kept under review.</p> <p>Forest design plans will consider forest habitat network issues to improve connectivity and biodiversity. This may include the adoption of low impact silvicultural systems to reduce impacts in key current or potential habitat networks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• collation of existing information and identification of gaps that may require to be addressed through further survey work;</li> <li>• ongoing visual and, as appropriate, structured monitoring of tree species as a proxy indicator of wider habitat condition. This will involve looking at drought stress in Sitka spruce and Scots pine particularly;</li> <li>• annual review and update of the District policy on choice of tree species;</li> <li>• implementation of training programme to enable adoption of species choice suitable to the site.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establishment and maintenance of a database of species and habitats;</li> <li>• improve connectivity of habitats to aid species movement to adapt to change through implementation of District conservation plan and forest design plans.</li> </ul>
Flood and catchment management plans	<p>FCS will continue to work closely with the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency in relation to the EU water framework directive, and in particular flood and catchment management plans and river basin management plans. This will take into account both pollution control and prevention. It will also look to address situations where woodland management can alleviate flooding exacerbated by climate change, in accordance with the new European Flood Directive. Continuous cover forestry is likely to have a role here.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• training event to be organised to highlight the issues of operations in the context of both diffuse and point source pollution;</li> <li>• liaison with SEPA to consider and review results of ecological monitoring with the objective of meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make a positive contribution to favourable ecological condition of water bodies in the District through forest design plans and best practice application of FCS forest and water guidelines.</li> </ul>

		<p>favourable ecological condition;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participation in the development of new flood directive proposals linked to river basin management.</li> </ul>	
Renewable energy	<p>The District will explore potential opportunities for renewable energy production at Clashindarroch, Midhill and Cushnie, and help facilitate market growth and emerging woodfuel entrepreneurs where existing commitments allow, e.g. to guarantee supply to the proposed Balcas mill.</p> <p>The District office is already heated by woodfuel and other opportunities to reduce impacts of running the business will be pursued as part of the Greenerways initiative.</p> <p>Targeting parcels for sale through long-term contracts will minimise the distance timber is hauled to the processor and reduce the resultant carbon footprint.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contribute as appropriate to further research;</li> <li>• monitor vehicle use and work closely with Mechanical Engineering Services to identify and deploy low emission equipment;</li> <li>• review the choice and number of vehicles annually as part of the business plan programme, in accordance with forthcoming light vehicles review;</li> <li>• seek to implement the current three windfarm proposals subject to planning in the lifetime of the Strategic Plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• implement forest design plans and resultant operations that make a positive contribution to mitigating against the adverse affects of climate change through District policies on low impact silviculture;</li> <li>• capitalise on opportunities arising from renewable energy developments;</li> <li>• acquire additional land that can contribute positively to carbon sequestration as a Scottish Forestry Alliance partner;</li> <li>• reduce negative effects on the environment through District vehicle emissions;</li> <li>• reduce negative effects on the environment by use of energy efficient construction, maintenance and running of District buildings, wherever possible;</li> <li>• produce marketing plans</li> </ul>

			that take account of haulage implications.
New woodland	<p>Consider further acquisitions or leases that meet SFS strategy objectives and in particular comply with policy drivers on carbon sequestration, WIAT or strategic objectives.</p> <p>Continued involvement in the Scottish Forestry Alliance Darroch Wids carbon sequestration project. Pursue land acquisition that includes carbon sequestration objectives, e.g. South Balnoon Farm. This policy may require realisation of existing assets under the portfolio analysis heading.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>validation through purchases and implementation of sequestration projects. For Darroch Wids, sites are monitored by BP carbon monitoring group;</li> <li>annually review the area of land acquired and established where carbon sequestration is a key component of management objectives, where this remains consistent with government policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>contribute positively and significantly to carbon sequestration through new planting and adoption of alternative-strategies to clearfelling where appropriate, consistent with the District policy for low impact silvicultural systems (LISS);</li> <li>potential to explore wider oil industry interest in sequestration initiatives in the District, given the large number of world and European headquarters of energy companies in Aberdeen City. Given Aberdeenshire's relatively buoyant land market, opportunities exist for the District to take a lead role in sequestration planting in Scotland with partnership funding.</li> </ul>

National theme	2 - Timber		
Key local issues	Proposed response (including implementation )	Monitoring	Aspiration
Timber quality	<p>The District is well placed to contribute to efficient supply chains in provision of good quality sawlogs owing to relative proximity to local processing. Forest design plans will take account of timber production to ensure continuity of stable volumes and quality as crops permit. Sales plans will be delivered annually and linked to long-term contracts. Stocking densities will be maintained at 2,500/ha to deliver both volume and quality objectives.</p> <p>An active thinning regime will be implemented and alternative strategies to clearfelling adopted where appropriate to take account of climate change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>production forecasting will be routinely undertaken to monitor future outputs;</li> <li>felling and thinning programmes will be assessed across the longer period to develop an even production profile where possible;</li> <li>the District thinning plan will be reviewed to validate that it is consistent with strategic plan objectives of maintaining and where possible increasing the area of thinnings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>maintain the high quality of timber produced and work with the timber industry to maximise the benefits of that resource.</li> </ul>
Timber supply	<p>A significant proportion of outputs will remain allocated to long-term contracts to secure both price and supply. Timber will continue to be sold under open-market conditions to maintain competitiveness.</p> <p>Local disposal of niche market timber will also continue to smaller-scale customers.</p> <p>Long-term improvements in quality through encouraging safe working systems and training through these contracts will ensure improved silvicultural management of the crops worked. A proportion of work will be tendered to maintain contact with market rates and enable new contractors to enter the industry. Operations staff will liaise with</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>regular liaison between operations staff, head office teams and the timber industry;</li> <li>circulation and review of generic open-market prices and establishment of effective working relationships with long-term partners;</li> <li>appointment of a staff member to provide day-to-day liaison between internal operations and planning teams;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>deliver maximum efficiency of timber supply chains by production of timber that meets market demands.</li> </ul>

	<p>processors to ensure that production and specification matches demand.</p> <p>The District will lead for FCS in the further development and use of the Timber Navi system to monitor and relay harvesting outputs. This should increase the efficiency and speed by which information from harvesting sites is conveyed to hauliers and processors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• management of our direct production contract work quality through maintaining a proportion on the open-market to maintain competitiveness;</li> <li>• development of medium-term contracts for the direct production fleet to develop equipment and systems;</li> <li>• continued development of the Timber Navi system to assist wider application in public and private sectors.</li> </ul>	
Timber transport groups	District/operations staff will continue to participate in the Timber Transport Group to seek to maximise opportunities for efficient haulage. Operations staff will review the use of new technologies to minimise impact of haulage on forest roads.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ongoing participation in sustainable Timber Transport Group.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• seek to ensure that timber haulage is delivered in accordance with best practice that minimises financial and ecological cost.</li> </ul>
Timber in construction	The District is constructing an extension to the District office and will seek to make optimum use of wood products in design and construction. Where possible, this will be achieved using timber products from the north-east and preferably from the national forest estate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• utilise wood products to meet environmental objectives in the construction of the District office extension;</li> <li>• support initiatives in the industry and with Grampian Conservancy colleagues to promote timber products in the construction industry in accordance with sympathetic planning policies in Aberdeenshire Council.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contribute to the wider adoption of the use of home-grown timber in the construction industry (linked to timber quality);</li> <li>• promote the use of timber as a sustainable building product through formal and informal visits to the new District/Grampian Conservancy offices.</li> </ul>

Hardwood timber	District staff have limited experience of the establishment of commercial broadleaves, beyond initial trials. Forest design plans and in particular carbon sequestration acquisitions will actively consider the potential for expansion of this approach. It is recognised that hardwoods will make a positive contribution to species and habitat diversity and this will be considered in forest design plans, particularly in the context of forest habitat networks. Harvesting activity will, however, be some considerable way ahead.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• active review of area dedicated to hardwoods;</li> <li>• bi-annual review of the District broadleaf policy to ensure it is compatible with the objective of appropriately increasing the broadleaf component.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increase the area allocated to commercial broadleaves;</li> <li>• seek to contribute to adoption of short rotation coppice and/or short rotation forestry through the development of field-scale trials.</li> </ul>
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National theme	3 - Business development		
Key local issues	Proposed response (including implementation )	Monitoring	Aspiration
Non-timber sources of income. (see also renewable energy)	<p>The largest single non-timber income stream is progression of renewable energy proposals for Midhill, Cushnie and Clashindarroch. The District will also respond positively to approaches for woodfuel, but in practice this will essentially consist of in-principle support and provision of linkages to the private sector (see climate mitigation section).</p> <p>Beyond renewables, there are currently limited wider opportunities. But the national forest estate does provide a significant recreational resource and occasional opportunities for commercial events will arise from time to time. The District will continue to react to or initiate opportunities as they arise.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>positive reaction to viable commercial proposals and ongoing exploration of possible opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>seek to increase the financial contribution of non-timber products;</li> <li>facilitate the development of sustainable rural development benefiting from the opportunities afforded by the national forest estate.</li> </ul>
Portfolio analysis	<p>The routine review of the national forest estate will provide opportunities to consider the 'fit' of the estate to deliver SFS objectives. This may require the realisation of some of the current portfolio or highlight areas in which resources require to be prioritised to improve delivery. This will include disposals under the National Forest Land Scheme, and for affordable housing and development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ongoing review of the national forest estate to assess fitness for purpose through portfolio analysis.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure that the land holding in the District is positioned suitably to deliver SFS objectives.</li> </ul>
Support for local businesses	<p>There is limited identified opportunity for the District to contribute to rural development. For the most part, Aberdeenshire economies are relatively buoyant although there are localised areas of deprivation. As a result, in many cases our involvement in rural development will be working with other initiatives rather than promoting our own.</p> <p>The District supports a number of local businesses through the purchase of goods and services, and would be keen to see this continue where economically sustainable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ongoing review of purchasing policy and use of local contractors;</li> <li>review of the National Forest Land Scheme;</li> <li>consideration of cases for affordable housing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>contribute positively to sustainable rural development.</li> </ul>

	We will actively explore future opportunities to work in partnership with local communities and businesses, particularly where these provide for complementary use of the national forest estate. Applications under the National Forest Land Scheme and for affordable housing will be considered.		
Tourism	<p>The District presently has limited front-of-house tourism provision. Key features are Huntly Peregrine Wildwatch Centre and joint working with the Bennachie Visitor Centre. But there are increasing opportunities in other areas e.g. Scolty/Blackhall by Banchory, and the District remains alert to new initiatives and will support these where resources permit.</p> <p>The national forest estate is used significantly for recreation, although fewer than 50% of our visitors are tourists. The quality of evidence relating to tourist use of the estate is very limited in both quality and coverage. Provision of good quality data to identify current and future opportunity is ongoing and essential prior to any further investment in facilities. Progression of the WIAT agenda and potential mitigation in respect of the forthcoming Aberdeen Western Periphery route may serve to create further opportunities.</p> <p>The District will continue to provide a full events programme and wider marketing may attract more visitors to the area. There is a need for District engagement with possible visitor attractions to be approached cautiously where there are potential liabilities in respect of infrastructure provision and maintenance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>initial monitoring will be required to scope the current use and future opportunity. This should be delivered within a wider partnership;</li> <li>District to seek to develop a joined-up delivery to marketing of existing and future facilities where appropriate as part of destination management organisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>make a positive contribution to tourism in Aberdeenshire/Moray through sustainable use of the national forest estate;</li> <li>develop a closer working relationship with local VisitScotland staff;</li> <li>support local tourism action groups where this is compatible with District objectives;</li> <li>the District should remain alert to possibilities for hosting or co-hosting much-needed lower cost B&amp;B or self-catering accommodation, particularly in the upper Deeside or Donside areas.</li> </ul>
Staff and contractor skills	Personnel delivering forest management in the District need to continue to be equipped to deliver best practice in relation to all operations. FES will develop relationships with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ongoing contract management and monitoring;</li> <li>Investors in People</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure that all staff and contractors working in the national forest estate are</li> </ul>

	contractors at a local level and will enforce rigorous standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>evaluation;</li> <li>Performance Management Scheme reviews linked to personal development training programme;</li> <li>training through Forestry Training Services and through external providers, e.g. Cairngorms National Park Authority;</li> <li>consideration of student placements and Modern Apprenticeships as opportunities arise.</li> </ul>	trained and developed to undertake work in accordance with best practice
Health and Safety	Health and Safety training and management will be treated as highest priority for all operations in the national forest estate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>annual review of District local HASAW policy;</li> <li>review of local lone/hazardous working guidance;</li> <li>ongoing implementation of District resumption system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure the application of safe working systems and seek to avoid injury or illness associated with staff or contractors.</li> </ul>

National theme	4 - Community development		
Key local issues	Proposed response (including implementation )	Monitoring	Aspiration
Community engagement	<p>This section is closely linked to access and health provision. The District will continue to review the consultative process for forest design plans to ensure that these are tailored to local circumstances.</p> <p>The District will continue to engage communities through the design plan process and consultation on local issues. Engagement will be with geographic and thematic interest groups with an objective to seek to ensure that management of the national forest estate reflects both national and local aspirations. This may in some cases also include a training role to build capacity</p> <p>The District will respond promptly in relation to approaches from interested groups or individuals. We will continue to develop links with local communities to seek to ensure that management of the national forest estate reflects both local and national objectives.</p> <p>The Strategic Plan should also fit with national and local policies for land use and sustainable development, in particular the Cairngorms National Park Plan and local plans for Moray, Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Councils.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consultative process for forest design plans;</li> <li>review of the SFS;</li> <li>ongoing review of the national forest estate;</li> <li>portfolio analysis;</li> <li>annual business planning and project initiation documents to ensure that resources deliver public objectives;</li> <li>active engagement with existing community groups and emergent groups as appropriate ;</li> <li>collaborative working with Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and Moray Councils and Cairngorms National Park Authority.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>seek to ensure that the national forest estate contributes positively to life quality of residents and visitors to the area.</li> </ul>
Partnership	<p>Local partnerships are already working effectively in a number of areas and the success of these will provide a gauge of current and future opportunity. The degree to which FES staff are actively engaged with specific communities will be monitored as the partnerships themselves build capacity. It is desirable that these relationships are maintained and the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>appointment of additional seasonal staff to work with community and education rangers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop relationships with local community partnerships that realise their ambitions and make a positive contribution to the management of the national</li> </ul>

	District will continue to provide support.		forest estate.
Education	<p><b>Increasing the use of forests in education by promoting local woods for learning</b>  Priority will be to work with schools that are 1km from national forest estate woodlands. Where possible, all forest operations close to each of these schools will be linked to that school through a visit(s) to the wood and classroom. Where there are no nearby forest operations, schools will also be offered an educational visit to the wood and/or school.</p> <p><b>Work with priority school age groups</b>  Work with Mackie Academy and feeder schools to encourage positive behaviour in Dunnottar woods (developed in partnership with community group 2007/08). Work with Turriff, Kemnay, Inverurie and Gordon secondary schools to develop potential in local woods (2007/08). Assist and deliver education projects developed in tandem with the Conservancy, such as wooden games, Aberdeen Treefest and community involvement events. Provide work experience opportunities for S3-4 pupils at Huntly Peregrine Wildwatch Centre as part of volunteer warden scheme.</p> <p><b>Provide opportunities for educational professionals to use woods for learning</b>  Support and encourage the development of FEI. Work closely with development officer and partners. Liaise with Active School co-ordinators through local authorities. Support and help delivery of Forest School in both Aberdeen city and shire.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• each September, the District education team and FDM will evaluate the progress of the District education strategy;</li> <li>• events programmes will be evaluated during delivery and at the end of events by both leader and audience to see how delivery can be improved for future events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• employ four full-time education staff;</li> <li>• have at least two self-sustaining Forest Schools in the District by 2009 run through the FEI partnership;</li> <li>• employ a full-time north-east FEI development officer;</li> <li>• run regular teacher training events on woodland awareness.</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Increase the recognition of woods as learning resource</b>  Ensure the District is kept updated, especially with changes in the curriculum .Respond to demand from schools requiring forest visits and in particular look for opportunities to engage with urban schools at secondary and primary levels.</p> <p>Develop education materials at Huntly Peregrine Wildwatch Centre (teacher secondment.) Develop education/training opportunities at Darroch Wids.  Increase educational professionals' awareness of woods and trees, and their benefits to young people.</p> <p>Encourage the use of the forest for all user groups to provide opportunities for lifelong learning.</p>		
<p>Community ownership and management</p>	<p>Interest in the National Forest Land Scheme has been low-key in the District. A single application has been supported for the acquisition of Slewdrum by the Birse Community Trust. The District is not aware of any evidence of wider demand for ownership, although this may evolve through review of the scheme. The District will continue to work actively work with their extant community partners to realise their ambitions.</p> <p>There are a number of existing formal partnerships where local communities are actively involved in the management of the national forest estate. Partners for the most part have not expressed an interest in acquisition and appear to value the opportunity to develop alongside FCS rather than as an alternative. This may evolve over time as capacity builds.</p> <p>The District has proffered land to local councils for affordable housing. No uptake resulted from the original contacts, but the District will respond positively to approaches from communities and housing agencies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• through ongoing discussions with established partners;</li> <li>• ongoing review of the National Forest Land Scheme;</li> <li>• monitoring of numbers of enquiries arising in relation to affordable housing approaches.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• maintain constructive relations and build further capability with existing partners and work to meet their aspirations;</li> <li>• assist Birse Community Trust to develop their objectives particularly, but not exclusively, in relation to Slewdrum.</li> </ul>

National theme	5 - Access and health		
Key local issues	Proposed response (including implementation )	Monitoring	Aspiration
Access	<p>All woodlands to be accessible in accordance with the access provisions of the Land Reform [Scotland] Act 2003. Existing car parking facilities and walks will be maintained subject to funding availability. This position will require ongoing review in line with available spend.</p> <p>The District recognise the constraints imposed by the requirement for vehicle-use to reach the forest and will encourage development of transport mechanisms that assist or replace the need for private vehicle use.</p> <p>Efforts will continue to encourage use throughout the District, but the key focus will be on woodlands in the immediate vicinity of Aberdeen City, where there are added value benefits of wider social delivery.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitoring through programmed inspection and maintenance of existing facilities;</li> <li>• responding to or anticipating future demands;</li> <li>• implementation and review of existing District recreation strategy and facilities (including Interpretation).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensuring that access provision fits with reasonable local aspirations and can be financially;</li> <li>• development of a transport system that avoids the need for private vehicle use to access the national forest estate.</li> </ul>
WIAT	<p>The District recognises that it is not feasible to deliver the WIAT objectives in isolation and will look to participate actively in current and future partnership initiatives, particularly with Grampian Health Trust, Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Councils, and those with a more specific geographical locus, e.g. Aberdeenshire Countryside Project.</p> <p>The District will actively look to deliver more through working with volunteers enabling in-house staff to operate at a more strategic level. Additional staff have been allocated to this function through business planning and as a result of the amalgamation of the former Buchan and Kincardine FDs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participation in WIAT Steering Group;</li> <li>• implementation of agreed District WIAT delivery strategy;</li> <li>• appointment of two additional staff to deliver WIAT programme working alongside community and education rangers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
Core paths	<p>The District is engaged with all four access authorities in progressing core paths plans, with potential for both through-routes and local loops. The District will be keen to work with</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• engagement with access authorities/local interests on draft core paths plans to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contribute positively to the establishment of core paths plans in accordance with</li> </ul>

	<p>this initiative making best use of existing provision wherever feasible, but needs to ensure that commitments to construct and maintain core paths are sustainable.</p>	<p>ensure routes are compatible with core paths objectives and are sustainable.</p>	<p>legislative and policy objectives.</p>
Health	<p>There will be a continuing challenge to deliver the health agenda more widely throughout the District. This will require engagement and active participation from wider partnerships.</p> <p>Delivery of health agenda through WIAT, BTCV Green Gym and, in particular, Paths to Health co-ordination role linkages to Grampian NHS Health Trust.</p> <p>Provision of additional WIAT resources under the 2007/08 3-year business plan.</p> <p>Community and education rangers, augmented by the expanded WIAT team, will further develop relations with schools under the Active Schools programme. This will be facilitated through linkages established under the forest education strategy.</p> <p>The District has developed relationships leading to a three-year contract with the Scottish Association for Mental Health providing opportunities for health improvement through exercise on practical projects. There are wider opportunities to be exploited and subject to capacity in the team to manage these programmes, this is an area with further potential.</p> <p>District staff will address wider recreational provision through judicious use of available staff and financial resources. Forest design plan consultation will serve to identify demands and opportunities. The District will continue to facilitate sustainable recreational use of all woodlands, but will focus particularly on key sites where there is an identified level of demand for facilities provision - most particularly, where</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• direct monitoring of the number of participants;</li> <li>• external monitoring of health statistics in conjunction with Paths to Health walks co-ordinator;</li> <li>• development, implementation and review of WIAT strategy</li> <li>• delivery of 10,000 steps programme;</li> <li>• monitor success of SAMH contract and amend as required.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assist in a reduction in physical and mental health cases that could be positively influenced by outdoor exercise.</li> </ul>

these deliver a component of the wider WIAT agenda.

The advent of the Aberdeen Western Periphery Route, provisionally scheduled to start in 2009, will provide either for new woodlands or for improvement to extant sites as a component of the mitigation measures.

National theme	6 - Environmental quality		
Key local issues	Proposed response (including implementation )	Monitoring	Aspiration
Sustainable management	The District will continue to ensure compliance with the UKWAS and will seek to ensure that the adoption of the light vehicles strategy and a sustainable approach to buildings construction and maintenance will make a positive contribution to sustainable management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>independent certification of UKWAS;</li> <li>annual FC17 Vehicles Review.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>seek to deliver best practice in adopting a sustainable approach to management of woodland and infrastructure.</li> </ul>
Water quality	<p>The District will ensure that all operations are undertaken in accordance with FCS forest and water guidelines to meet EU water framework directive objectives.</p> <p>The District will co-operate with SEPA securing guidance as appropriate, including consideration of the effects attributable to forestry under point source and diffuse pollution.</p> <p>The District would intend to work closely with Grampian Conservancy to run a training event to examine water quality issues.</p> <p>The District will, where practicable, make best use of fallow ground strategy to reduce the requirement for herbicide and pesticide applications in accordance with the District chemical reduction strategy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>have regard to the negative and potential positive impacts of harvesting and establishment when undertaking operations;</li> <li>develop and deliver training consistent with EU water framework directive and associated legislation;</li> <li>undertake annual review of the District chemical plan and chemical reduction strategy;</li> <li>implementation of the national strategy on fallow ground.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>deliver management that enables forestry to provide positive improvements in the quality of water, soil and air.</li> </ul>
Landscape quality	<p>Forest design plans will be developed in accordance with guidance from FES landscape architects particularly, but also with regard to advice from statutory agencies. Design plans will take account of SNH landscape character assessments and will endeavour, where possible, to make a positive contribution to landscape quality.</p> <p>Felling coupes in particular will require sensitive planning to create diversity and, where possible, should avoid coupes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>forest design plan consultations to include local, agency and NGO partners;</li> <li>assess numbers of complaints arising from felling or establishment activity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>seek to deliver a positive contribution to the landscape to include diversity of species and age class in accordance with SNH landscape character assessments.</li> </ul>

	that break the skyline. In areas of particular sensitivity or visual prominence, consideration will be given to adoption of alternative strategies to clearfelling.		
Cultural heritage	<p>All SAMs will be managed in accordance with 10-year management plans agreed with HS. The District currently logs the location of all these sites on GIS and in the life of this Strategic Plan will create a heritage action plan linked to GIS that will become our key tool for managing our historic landscape.</p> <p>The District has recently undertaken a major reconstruction of access through the Mither Tap fort on Bennachie, with HS support, to safeguard this SAM from the 40,000+ visitors each year.</p> <p>The District's 200+ UAMs are recorded on GIS to ensure that they are taken into account during forest operations and other management actions. Ongoing survey by an archaeologist of some key sites, e.g. Colony houses at Bennachie, to improve our management/knowledge.</p> <p>Our proactive surveys over the past two years have led to the scheduling of four new sites in the District.</p> <p>The District will manage its three listed structures in line with HS listings and seek opportunities to promote new structures for listing where a case exists, e.g. Blackmiddens Farm.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SAM management plans will in most cases include monitoring objectives;</li> <li>• FES and HS working closely together to ensure that SAMs and listed structure planning are better managed;</li> <li>• District to create heritage management strategy in life of this Strategic Plan to better quantify our heritage asset, opportunities and future management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improve, as resources permit, the information provided to visitors for a number of key SAMs across the District, e.g. Mither Tap fort, White Stone Circle at Pitfichie;</li> <li>• remain alert to possibilities of creating a heritage trail for visitors in the District that could encompass several key heritage sites.</li> </ul>
Low impact silvicultural systems	<p>Adopt low impact silvicultural systems where this is compatible with site conditions and management objectives.</p> <p>Climate change appears likely to result in an increased frequency of storms and as a result windblow is likely to limit the extent to which alternative strategies to clearfelling can be deployed. But the District will promote the adoption of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• deploy a lead role in the District on adoption of continuous-cover forestry;</li> <li>• review District policy on low impact silviculture to ensure that it is compatible with the site conditions;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adopt LISS wherever this is compatible with timber production and site condition constraints.</li> </ul>

	LISS wherever feasible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure that alternatives to clearfell objectives are clearly set out and limits for intervention identified.</li> </ul>	
Designated sites	All District SSSIs and SACs will be managed in accordance with management plans agreed with SNH. FCS will seek to contribute to maintaining its 90% favourable condition and securing the remainder where possible under site condition monitoring (SCM) through active work programmes and review, e.g. the District will deliver scrub control as required at Hill of Towanreef to promote favourable condition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>meetings with SNH in April 2007 to review SCM and future action. Business plans submissions made/planned to ensure we deliver required actions to maintain/achieve favourable status;</li> <li>delivery of agreed management of SNH SSSI management plans in accordance with SNH site condition monitoring and review.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>progress towards 100% favourable condition by 2010 for those SSSI/SAC features not already in that condition that can be influenced by woodland management on the national forest estate;</li> <li>maintain existing favourable condition on District SSSI/SACs.</li> </ul>

National theme	7 - Biodiversity		
Key local issues	Proposed response (including implementation )	Monitoring	Aspiration
Priority habitats (see also designated sites)	The District has approximately 709ha of PAWS. All sites will continue to be managed in accordance with agreed management plans. Sites will be fully restored, enhanced or maintained according to overarching ecological benefits of the existing habitats.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>all PAWS sites will be managed in accordance with management plans and current guidance including site monitoring programme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>effective delivery of PAWS prescriptions with a view to safeguarding and where possible enhancing the interest.</li> </ul>
Priority species	<p>The key priority species for the District are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>red squirrel - through forest design planning we will ensure that the habitat/tree species mix favoured by red squirrel is maintained wherever possible;</li> <li>capercaillie - the District will continue to support and develop the outputs delivered during EU LIFE Capercaillie project, seeking new funding opportunities to assist;</li> <li>black grouse - the District will manage for this species through the redesign of forest-edge habitat in forest design plans, e.g. Ballachalloch, Strathdon, and seek new opportunities as they arise, e.g. moorland habitat restoration at Clashindarroch windfarm development;</li> <li>juniper - the District will seek to carry out additional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>support Grampian Red Squirrel Group and its volunteer monitoring programme;</li> <li>forest design planning will monitor existing/future tree species composition with preference to increase species favoured by red squirrel in key stronghold woodlands, e.g. Cushnie;</li> <li>direct and indirect evidence of capercaillie and black grouse collated annually;</li> <li>predator control and habitat improvement works will be undertaken/monitored in key capercaillie forests, e.g. Pannanich;</li> <li>annual review of species</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>make a positive contribution to biodiversity with a particular positive impact on red squirrels and woodland grouse;</li> <li>deliver a landscape-scale moorland restoration project in the District. Most likely at Clashindarroch or Midhill windfarm areas due to large-scale forest edge clearance and partnership</li> </ul>

	<p>planting as new establishment projects get underway, assuming favourable ground conditions. Existing sources are protected wherever possible: we have been removing some conifer to stop shading out of juniper in the Bunzeach;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• twinflower - all known sites for this plant in the District are logged and monitored;</li> <li>• pearl-bordered fritillary - ongoing monitoring and habitat protection/improvement work for this butterfly;</li> <li>• cousin german - continue to manage pinewood and birch habitats in upper Deeside to benefit this species of moth;</li> <li>• dark-bordered beauty - increase coverage of aspen in upper Deeside woods;</li> </ul> <p><b>UK biodiversity action plan species</b></p> <p>The key species for the District are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• water vole - support existing initiatives on rivers Ythan and Cowie. Look favourably on new opportunities to work in partnership to safeguard this species. Aim to cover across District by good riparian management, FCS forest and water guidelines, and habitat network creation;</li> </ul>	<p>action plan to include monitoring of area and condition of juniper in District. Active planting of juniper to include Cambus, Inver and Darroch Wids;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• annual review of species action plan to include monitoring of area and condition of twinflower in District;</li> <li>• annual monitoring carried in Cambus and Inver. Habitat management carried out as required;</li> <li>• on-site monitoring at Cambus;</li> <li>• planting of aspen at beat up and identification of further potential planting sites;</li> <li>• current research on Ythan and Cowie will inform if specific riverside management is required;</li> </ul>	<p>funding potential;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• working with Forest Research, contribute to successful spread of twinflower by mechanical disturbance of known sites;</li> <li>• continue to improve habitat for pearl-bordered fritillary through experimental control of bracken to improve violet coverage;</li> <li>• continue to improve areas of good habitat for moths and butterflies in Inver and Cambus;</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• freshwater pearl mussel - indirect benefits to this species through general riparian management, FCS forest and water guidelines, and works done for Atlantic salmon through EU LIFE Salmon project</li> <li>• otter - indirect benefits to this species through general riparian management, FCS forest and water guidelines, and works done for Atlantic salmon via EU LIFE River Dee project;</li> <li>• Atlantic salmon - ongoing riparian and river habitat improvement works on the national forest estate through EU LIFE Salmon project. Works ongoing in relation to the improvement of riparian woodland to create conditions favourable to salmon in the River Dee watershed, working in conjunction with a wider initiative forming part of the River Dee catchment management plan. This should be largely concluded in the next two-three years;</li> <li>• pipestrelle bat - support existing roosts/colonies and remain alert for potential new ones;</li> <li>• dark-bordered beauty - bracken control;</li> </ul> <p>Conservation efforts will be focused on action plans for biodiversity, species and habitats.</p> <p><b>Local biodiversity action plan species</b></p> <p>The key species for the District are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• wych elm - continue to seek opportunities through restock and new planting to expand range of this</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• validation of contracted works by SNH in respect of the EU LIFE Salmon programme;</li> <li>• annual monitoring of all known roosts;</li> <li>• regular updates of sub compartment database</li> </ul>	
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	<p>species;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• brown hare - District will avoid culling this species despite need to protect establishing new-planted areas. Physical exclusion being the preferred method if populations are extensive enough to merit that investment;</li> <li>• grey squirrel - continue to pursue active intervention to limit the spread of grey squirrel through a mix of control at identified 'pinch points', e.g. Durris woods, and the removal/breaking up of large seeded broadleaved corridors, e.g. beech, where these are known to support spread of grey squirrel, and appropriate species choice when replanting riparian zones;</li> </ul> <p><b>Invasive species</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rhododendron ponticum - cut and chemically control regrowth of this species, in particular where it exists on PAWS sites;</li> <li>• American mink - following current tracking experiment on Cowie, a small culling programme may be appropriate. (see also water vole).</li> </ul>	<p>following planting;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• on-site monitoring where necessary, e.g. Darroch Wids;</li> <li>• direct and indirect evidence of grey squirrel and record keeping of grey squirrel control;</li> <li>• creation of District strategy on grey squirrel control to include section on removal of large seeded broadleaves;</li> <li>• annual programme to be created, linked to business plan submission. Monitor/record keeping via GIS dataset;</li> <li>• direct and indirect evidence of mink and record keeping of mink control;</li> <li>• annual review and revision the District conservation plan in accordance with the Strategic Plan objectives.</li> </ul>	
Forest habitat	Biodiversity will be reinforced in forest design plans to deliver	• forest design plan approval	• contribute positively to

<p>networks (see also climate change)</p>	<p>diversity of crop species and age classifications. This will include wider consideration and application of alternative strategies to clearfelling across the District where this is compatible with environmental and silvicultural objectives.</p> <p>The renewal of the Clashindarroch forest design plan will provide a key opportunity for the District to introduce landscape-scale forest habitat networks, through the improvement of riparian woodlands, the creation of open areas (particularly adjacent forest roads), and the linkages to open wet and dry heathland areas at higher altitudes. A more general approach will be applied which looks to improve connectivity and create habitat improvements through delivery of forest design plans that give greater priority to biodiversity. Key areas for improvement are provision of open space on road and ride sides, and in riparian areas. Adoption of the District deadwood strategy and provision of mid coupe retentions maintain and create localised habitats.</p> <p>The District is working closely with the local biological recording centre (NESBREC) to deliver annual ecological surveys of a number of woodlands to increase our knowledge of existing habitats across the District and to develop appropriate management prescriptions.</p>	<p>through consultation with agencies and external parties;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• woodland and individual site surveys by ecological contractors and staff to ascertain baseline of existing habitats and action for management;</li> <li>• revision and application of District conservation strategy to deliver habitat and resultant species improvements;</li> <li>• District to create biodiversity management strategy in life of this Strategic Plan to better quantify our species and habitat assets, opportunities and future management.</li> </ul>	<p>biodiversity at a strategic level;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improve our knowledge of UKBAP habitats on the national forest estate and draw up appropriate management prescriptions through forest design plans. Deliver targeted improvement works as resources allow, through partnership working wherever possible.</li> </ul>
<p>Deer management</p>	<p>High-level intervention on deer management will be practised to reduce and maintain deer populations at low levels of impact compatible with biodiversity. Deer management will be undertaken in accordance with FCS internal guidance and the published best practice guidance as part of a District deer strategy, which is currently under review as part of the District amalgamation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitoring of deer populations, culls and levels of impact, and ongoing stock density assessments and indirect grazing impact studies;</li> <li>• maintenance of ongoing resumption system in respect of deer management delivery;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• deliver woodland management without requiring the use of deer fencing or tree tubes.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• effective deployment of staff, contractors and culling leases to deliver deer and habitat management objectives.</li></ul>	
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The programmes outlined include aspirational objectives not all of which are currently resourced. Business planning and, as appropriate, project initiation documents will consider allocation of staff and financial resources, in conjunction with the FES Management Board.

There are a number of areas, notably biodiversity, in which collation of baseline information is a first step to identify any requirement for action prior to proceeding to implement any further strategy. Equally, there is a wide range of national guidelines and legislation that affect day-to-day operations and require to be further integrated.

From the key issues listed above, there are four key areas that the District is particularly well placed to address and to which we would wish to be regarded as having made a significant contribution to national delivery of the Scottish Forestry Strategy:

- **Timber production**, particularly the continued production of stable and predictable volumes of high-quality saw logs that meet local and wider national market demands;
- **Access and Health** as a component of the wider WIAT agenda, through working with other land owners and partners to contribute to facilitating access to local forests with the objective of health improvement;
- **Renewables**, through joint working with operators to identify and deliver windfarm projects on the national forest estate to include current projects for Clashindarroch, Cushnie and Mid Hill, and to remain receptive to future renewables projects for alternative energy supplies, including appropriately scaled woodfuel provision;
- **Afforestation of better quality land** as opportunities arise through land acquisition. The District will look particularly favourably on acquisitions that deliver multiple benefits, including carbon sequestration, social and environmental agendas. It will be intended to link this to growing commercial broadleaves where conditions are favourable.

### **Third Party certification**

In addition to the key issues identified above, our sustainable forest management is based on implementation of a range of important standards and best practice national guidelines in our daily work, such as FCS forest and water guidelines and legislation, such as the Health and Safety at Work Act.

Our performance is externally audited against the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) approved UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS). Our FSC certification provides third party confirmation that FCS forests are well managed. We are firmly committed to retaining the high standards required by UKWAS.