



Moray and Aberdeenshire Forest District

Corniehaugh

Land Management Plan



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Design concept (OS background)

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Management

1.0 Introduction

Refer to Map 1: Location.

1.1 Location

Corniehaugh is 212ha of land acquired by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) in November 2011 in an open market sale. The site is located in the Deveron river valley 3km south east of Rothiemay and straddles the boundary of Moray and Aberdeenshire. The land rises from the south bank of the river Deveron to the top of Fourman Hill on one of the rivers many sinuous bends.

1.2 Setting and Context

Corniehaugh lies within an extensive area of rolling land form that supports a variety of land uses. These include arable farmland on the more fertile lower lying land, improved grazing, conifer and broadleaved woodland on the low hills and steeper slopes while moorland and open rough grazing pasture covers some of the higher hill land.

The site itself is made of sloping land that contributes to the enclosure of the valley and drains broadly north into the river Deveron, which is a SEPA designated priority catchment and a popular fishing river. There is some public access along a track that runs through the site.

In terms of the draft Moray & Aberdeenshire Forest District Strategic Plan¹ Corniehaugh is located in a key area identified with potential for:

- Developing starter farms;
- Supporting woodland creation objectives working at a landscape scale and integrated with other land uses;
- Growing broadleaves.

A more detailed analysis of the national and local context for how this site might best support the integrated land management objectives of the Scottish Government can be found in Appendix 1.

¹ Moray & Aberdeenshire Forest District Strategic Plan (Public consultation) - <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fesplans>

1.3 Land Management Objectives

The purpose and objectives for managing this land have been identified following a review of:

- the physical context and existing land use;
- a review of the land management objectives already established by statutory bodies;
- the physical capability of the land;
- the locational objectives identified in the draft Moray & Aberdeenshire Forest District Strategic Plan;
- the views expressed by the public and statutory stakeholders (see appendix 2 which shows comments from the initial information gathering session and appendix 6 which shows the comments made on the draft plan).

Analysis of the available information has led to the **primary objective** for this land being the introduction of a **starter farm** of a size and quality that will be attractive to a new, part-time entrant into the agriculture sector, which will help support and diversify farming interests in the Deveron Valley.

Additional **secondary objectives** for the future management of Corniehaugh have been identified as:

- Managing existing broadleaved woodlands to provide a diverse income from this land holding and to improve them as habitat ;
- Establishing new productive broadleaved woodlands to benefit income diversity for this landholding, reduce water runoff into inbye fields, extend habitat networks and to sequester carbon as part of the national climate change mitigation efforts;
- Establishing new riparian broadleaved woodland that will mitigate the effects of diffuse pollution into the river Deveron while retaining access for fishing interests ;
- Maintaining open space on the hill tops, to reflect the visual prominence of the hill, maintain hill grazing options and views from the access route and also extend the holdings habitat diversity.

The information and analysis which follows explains the reasons why these objectives have been identified and prioritised.

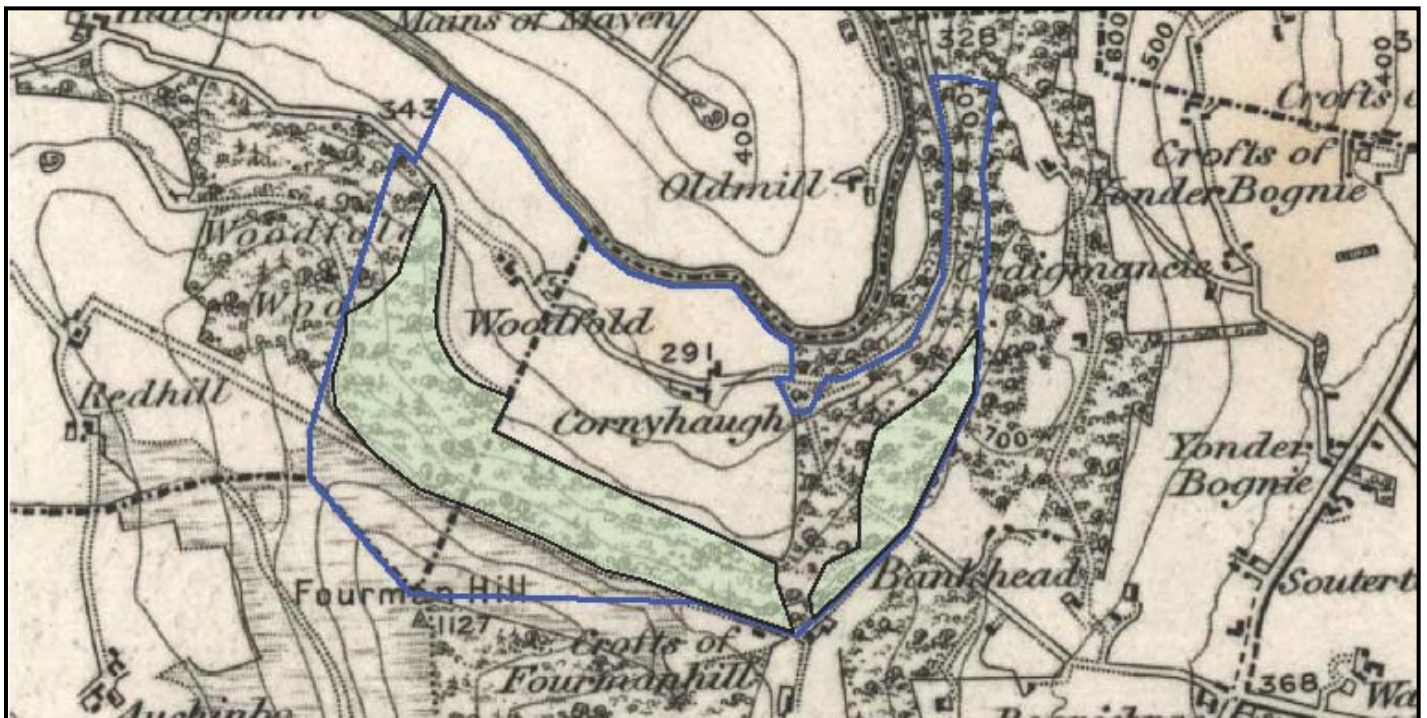
2.0 Background information

2.1 History of the site

Prior to FCS's acquisition of Woodfold and Corniehaugh in 2011 it was managed as a single farm unit. The acquisition contained 2 farmhouses and associated buildings. The Corniehaugh house and steading is scheduled for sale, along with a small parcel of land.

Under the previous ownership the joint holdings maintained a beef cattle herd and provided a base for an agricultural contracting business.

In the more distant past it is clear from the extracts of the Ordnance Survey (OS) maps published in 1874 that the higher elevations of the site were originally under woodland cover.



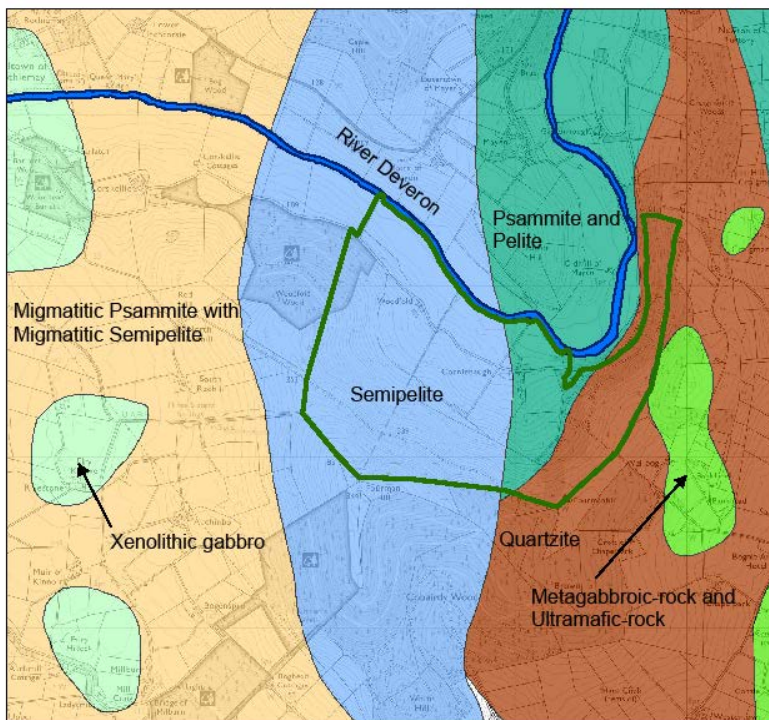
Extract of the 1874 Ordnance Survey map. Areas highlighted green shown as forest but now open.

The subsequent editions of OS maps show that much of the area had been felled and there were only remnants of the original woodland area remaining.

2.2 Physical site factors

Refer to Map 2: Key Features.

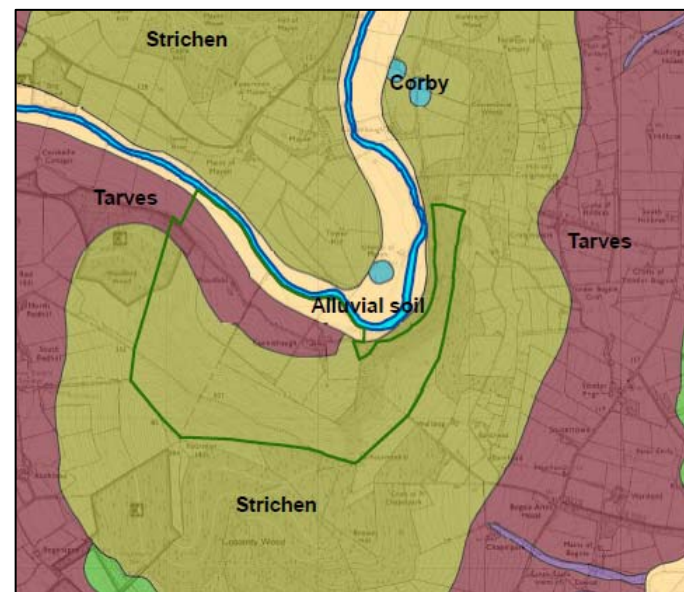
2.2.1 Geology, Soils and topography



Geology - According to the British Geological Survey Geological Map of the UK Corniehaugh is underlain by Quartzite, Semipelite, Psammite and Pelite of the Southern Highland Group of the Dalradian Supergroup. These rocks give rise to overlying soils with medium nitrogen availability.

Extract from British Geological Survey 50k Geology map of the UK.

Soils – According to the Soil Survey of Scotland part of this design plan area is underlain with soils of the Strichen and Tarves associations with some Alluvial soil. The Strichen association is dominated by humus-iron podzols. Natural soil profiles of this association would normally support moorland communities. The Tarves association is dominated by freely and imperfectly drained brown forest soils. Finally the Alluvial soils are comprised of sandy loams which are inherently fertile and free draining.



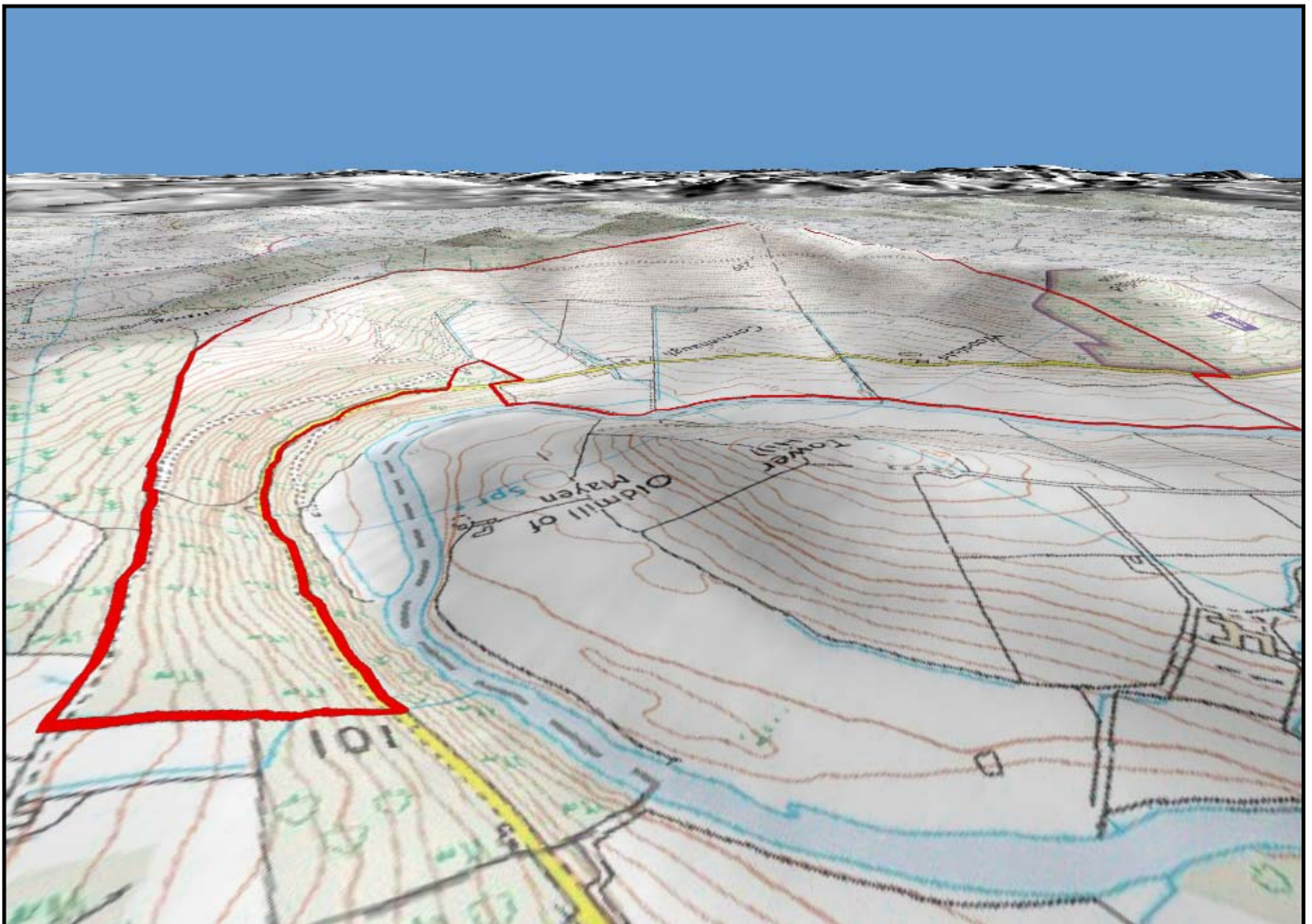
Extract

of the Soil Survey

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of Scotland map.

Topography – Corniehaugh is situated on the north facing side of the Deveron river valley in a slightly concaved bowl. The height variation across the site is from 60 metres in the bottom of the river valley to 345 metres at the top of Fourman Hill.



Topography of Corniehaugh.

2.2.2 Water

Corniehaugh is situated on the banks of the river Deveron. SEPA has designated the Deveron as a priority catchment. "Priority catchments are river and coastal catchments that are currently failing to meet water quality standards, and which will not achieve improved water quality without a focused management approach...The River Deveron catchment has several designations relating to the importance of its waters which, coupled with a range of diffuse pollution effects, make restoring and protecting it a high priority. The main pressures in the catchment include: agricultural pollution, sewage treatment works discharges, septic tanks, morphology and abstraction." The SEPA publication "Diffuse Pollution Priority Catchment: Technical Summary – River Deveron" is available from the SEPA website and contains more details of the issues and how these are being addressed. The land management proposals in this plan (see section 4) will be designed to contribute to the alleviation of the issues raised.



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The river Deveron with Corniehaugh on the far bank.

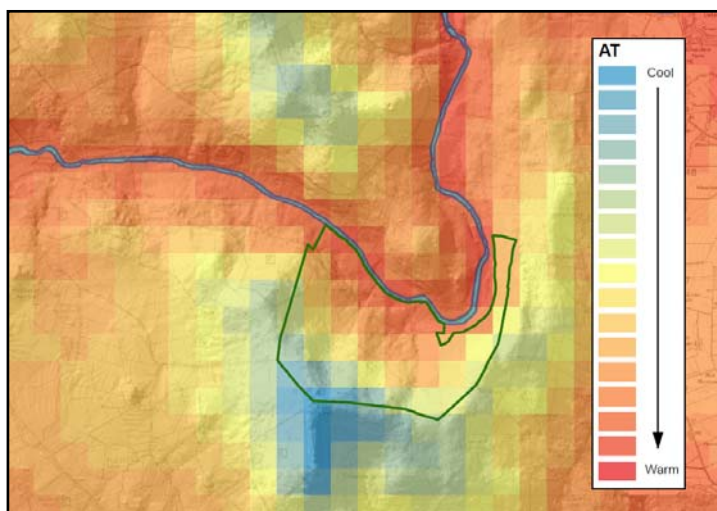
Additionally the Deveron is a famous and prolific salmon, sea trout and brown trout fishery and in terms of catches is consistently the fifth highest in Scotland. In 2012 The Environment Agency has published a comprehensive guidance on creating riparian shading on rivers and its benefits. The guidance has been produced to support the creation of shade over rivers using riparian trees and vegetation (riparian shade). The focus is on maintaining a suitable freshwater habitat for salmon and brown trout (salmonid) populations that are expected to be at risk from the effects of climate change and water temperature rises. This publication is available from the Environment Agency website as a PDF download. Again the planting proposed in this plan will be designed to contribute to the alleviation of the issues raised.

2.2.3 Climate

The climate at Corniehaugh falls within the relatively benign climate zone of “warm, moist, sheltered” according to the Ecological Site Classification (ESC) protocol. Four climatic factors are used to define the climate for any given location. These are warmth, wetness, continentality and windiness. Continentality has the least impact so is dropped from the overall climate zone designation.

The climate data for Corniehaugh from interrogating the ESC is:

AT5	DAMS	MD
855 – 1192	5 - 7	116 – 130

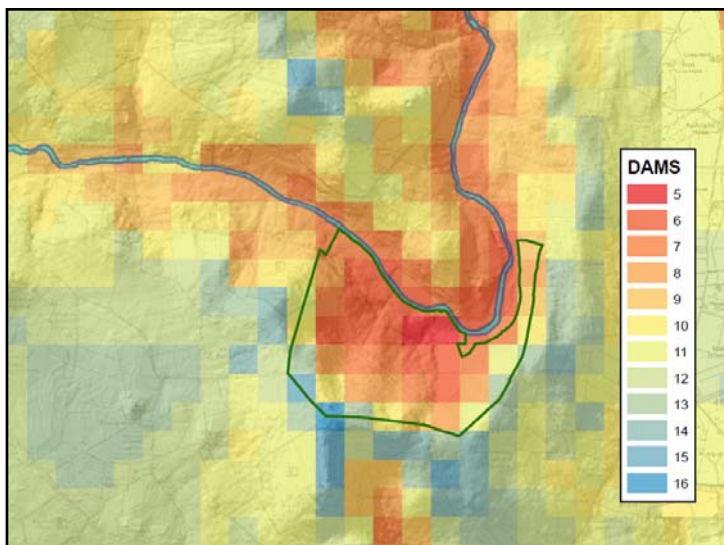


AT5 is the accumulated total of the day-degrees above the growth threshold temperature of 5°, which provides a convenient measure of summer warmth. The results for AT5

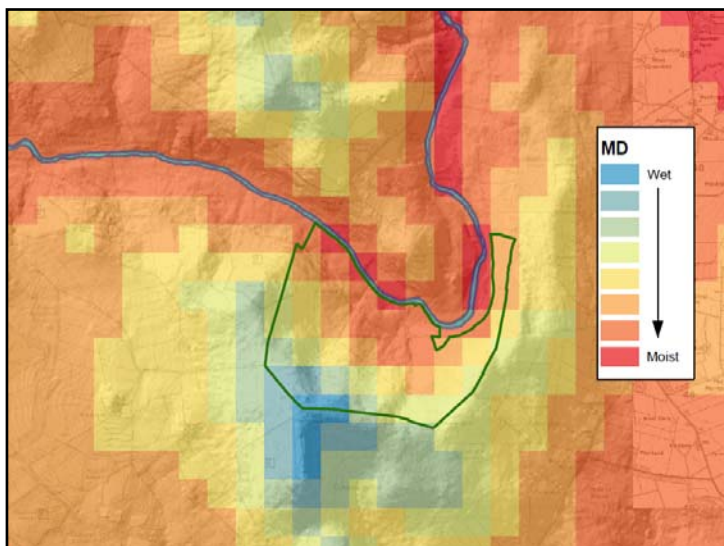
August 2014

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place Corniehaugh on the boundary of the “cool” and “warm” zones.



DAMS is the Detailed Aspect Method of Scoring. This represents the amount of physically damaging wind that forest stands experience in the year. The range of DAMS is from 3 to 36 and windiness is the most likely limiting factor to tree growth at higher elevations in Britain.



MD is the Moisture Deficit for the area. Moisture deficit reflects the balance between potential evaporation and rainfall and therefore emphasises the dryness of the growing season (rather than the wetness of the winter or whole year). These results place Corniehaugh on the boundary of the “moist” and “wet” zones.

These results will be used to help assist in the choice of tree species in the land management proposals for the site (see section 4). Each tree species has tolerances for

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these and other factors and they can be used to identify species suitable for the site conditions.

Further information on these criteria and the application of ESC can be found in Forestry Commission Bulletin 124 - An Ecological Site Classification for Forestry in Great Britain.

2.3 Biodiversity and environmental designations

A full report on the vegetation of Corniehaugh was undertaken by an ecologist in the spring/summer of 2012. The full report can be seen at appendix 4.

This report identifies nine UK biodiversity action plan priority habitats. (See map 2 – Key features)

During discussions with SNH to establish the regional significance of the individual habitats it became clear that, despite the fact that they are priority habitats, their size and current condition means that it is not essential to maintain them all as open habitats in the long term. Native woodland planted on the sites could provide equal or higher biodiversity potential.



Upland Heathland (NVC H10c-H12c and H21a). This is widespread and locally extensive on the upper slopes.



Birch woodland (W11) on the NW-facing slope in the east of the site.

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Several of the priority habitats are native woodland areas. These will be managed according to the guidance in the appropriate copy of the “Management of semi-natural woodlands” suite of practice guides.

2.4 The existing land use

Prior to FCS purchasing the land at Corniehaugh it was managed as a single agricultural unit. The total area of the purchase was 210.6 ha and this is classified as 84.26 ha of rough grazing and woodland grazing (RGR), 42.29 ha of permanent pasture (PP) and 76.47ha of arable land.

Land use	Area (ha)	%
Arable	76.47	36
Permanent pasture	42.29	20
Rough grazing and woodland grazing	84.26	40
Other (yards, buildings, etc)	7.58	4
Total	210.6	

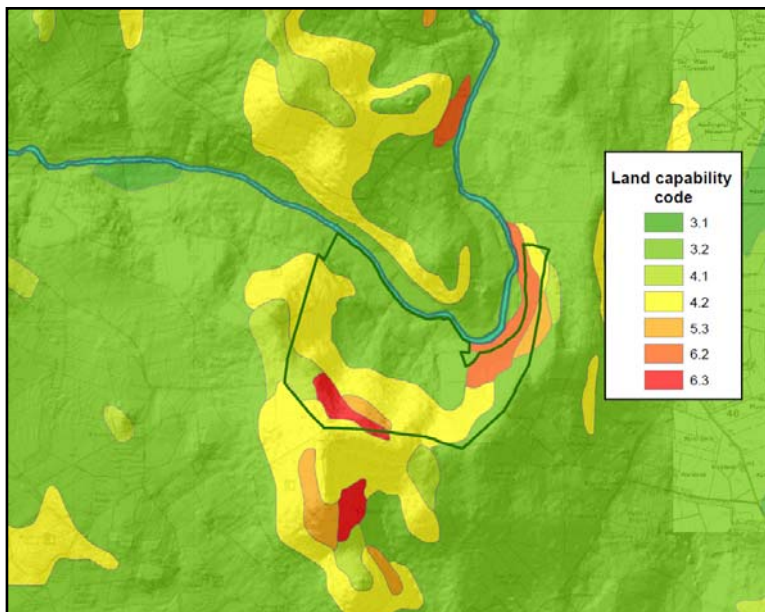


Rough grazing land looking west across the slope of Corniehaugh.

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The land lies between the 60 - 345m contour and has a predominantly north facing aspect. There is a degree of shelter from Woodfold wood to the west with the lower half of the farm sheltered by the natural topography of the site.

The land's classification according to the James Hutton Institute's (JHI) 1:50,000 land capability map is shown in the table and figure below.



Land classification	Area (ha)	%
3(2)	80	38
4(2)	98	44
5 & 6	32	18

James Hutton Institute 1:50,000 land capability for agriculture.

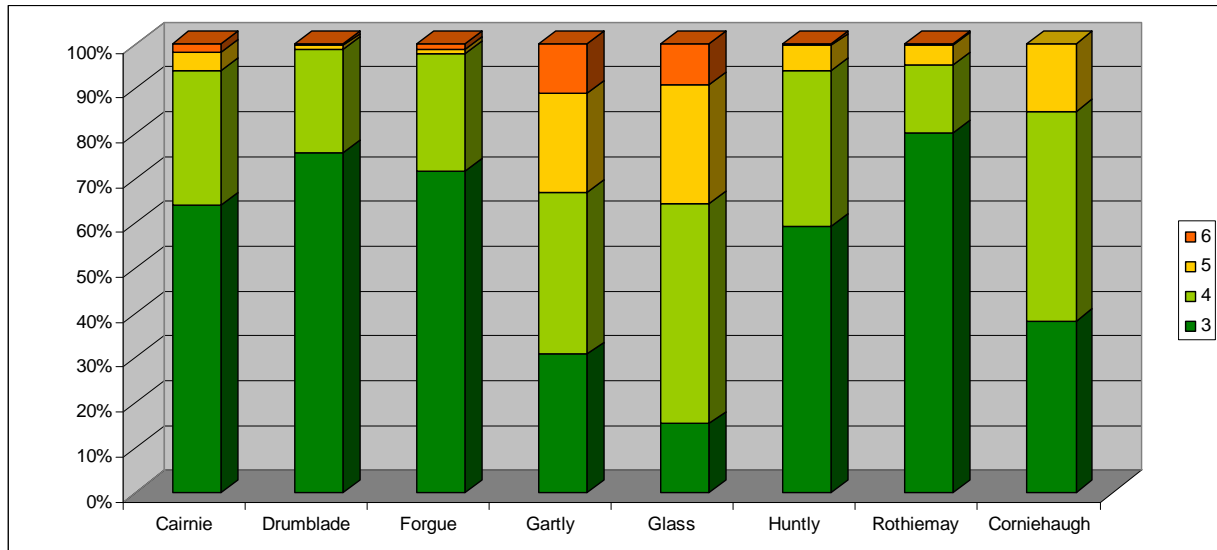
the JHI land classifications is:

The capability for the land according

- 3(2) land is capable of growing a modest range of crops with an increasing trend towards grassland where the climate become wetter and historical nutrient levels eroded.
- 4(2) land is primarily suited to grassland with some limited potential for other crops (such as barley, oats or forage crops).
- 5(3) land can be used as improved grassland, although in the case of Corniehaugh topography would make any attempts to improve the grassland very difficult.

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When the proportion of the different land capabilities at Corniehaugh are compared to the parishes of Rothiemay and Forgue, across whose boundaries the site is located, it is clear that the capability of the land is poorer than that of the surrounding areas.



Comparison of current and potential future scenarios

Under the previous ownership the joint holdings of Corniehaugh and Woodfold supported 200 head of beef cattle and provided a base for an agricultural contracting business. This was with the benefit of additional rented ground.

FCS's Starter Farm initiative was developed to test a new way of providing much sought-after openings for new entrants to the agricultural sector. Advice has been taken as to whether the land at Corniehaugh has the potential to provide a starter farm. A scenario for a possible starter farm was developed and analysed with the input of the FES Agriculture Advisor and the Grampian Area Principal Agricultural Officer for Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspections Division.

One potential use of the starter farm uses sheep and barley only, as this would require much less start up capital cost for a new entrant into the agricultural industry. As some of the buildings would be under used a portion of the space is assumed to be let out for cattle wintering on a "bed and labour" only basis.

A detailed comparison of these two scenarios is shown in appendix 3.

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The future starter farm scenario utilises 64% of the original farmland area however it retains 92% of the original farm's gross margin. Without the cattle wintering enterprise only 76% of the income is retained.

This is a comparison of only one future scenario and there are many others available. These would depend on the interests of the new occupant of the starter farm. However it is clear from this comparison that a large portion of the RGR/PP could be given over to woodland creation without significantly affecting the starter farms income potential.

Impact of potential loss of agricultural land to the local economy

Any loss of agricultural land due to tree planting, and therefore agricultural production, will inevitably have an impact on the local economy, both directly and indirectly. To quantify this impact it is necessary to establish the proportion of the local production that would be lost following the removal of any area planted with woodland.

Following discussions with the Principal Agricultural Officer for the Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspections Division base at Thainstone it was decided that a sensible area for comparison would be the parishes containing Corniehaugh and those surrounding the mart at Huntly, the main local centre for the sale of livestock.

The data in the table below was supplied by the Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspections Division to allow the comparisons to be undertaken.

Land, cattle and sheep according to the June Agricultural Census 2013 (supplied by Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspections Division)

	Arable crops ⁽¹⁾		Utilised agricultural land ⁽²⁾		Total agricultural land		Total cattle		Total sheep	
	Holdings	Hectares	Holdings	Hectares	Holdings	Hectares	Holdings	Head	Holdings	Head
Cairnie	35	1,470.2	77	2,735.6	82	3,047.7	20	2,152	25	12,005
Drumblade	46	2,792.7	56	3,176.3	56	3,334.1	21	3,636	14	7,542
Forgue	78	4,854.6	109	5,597.0	110	6,029.1	48	6,062	35	16,137
Gartly	29	2,083.4	46	3,131.2	47	3,332.8	12	3,487	10	3,992
Glass	15	1,114.0	28	2,816.0	31	3,604.1	8	1,070	7	4,737
Huntly	37	1,689.5	59	3,350.5	62	3,719.9	20	2,055	13	10,324
Rothiemay	43	2,390.7	78	3,321.5	80	3,957.8	30	4,854	16	5,994

⁽¹⁾ Includes crops, fallow land and grass under five years old

⁽²⁾ Includes arable land, grass over five years old and rough grazing

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When compared to the figures above for the various agricultural production categories the 76.5ha of arable crops at Corniehaugh is equivalent to just 0.47% of this type of production, the 70 head of cattle represents just 0.30% of the local herd and only 0.33% of the local flock of sheep.

Having confirmed and discussed these results with the Principal Agricultural Officer for Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspections Division it was his view that even if this entire agricultural holding were to be removed from agricultural production there would be no significant impact on the critical mass of the local agricultural industry. In summary there would still be sufficient capacity locally to sustain the ongoing success of agriculture in the area and additionally the downstream dependent industries in the area.

However as the plan is not to remove the whole holding from agricultural production due to the establishment of a starter farm any reduction in agricultural production locally would be even less than the figures presented above.

2.5 Landscape and land use

2.5.1 Landscape character and value

A landscape character, visual assessment and design advice was provided by Alison Grant, Head Landscape Architect for FCS on 25 February 2014 following a site visit. See appendix 3 for full details.

The River Deveron occupies a sinuous river valley that alternates between the shallow gradients of a more open and undulating plain and steep sided, much more enclosed and well defined valleys (see Landscape Context and Character map).

Across this landscape, farmland and woodland intermix, although woodland is more often associated with steep slopes and is more extensive on the 'stand alone' hills that rise out of the lower rolling relief.

Corniehaugh is located on a pronounced bend in the river, at a point where it is well contained by the steeper slopes of a sinuous valley. It occupies slopes that rise from the south side of the river and that extend to the summit of Fourman Hill. Its aspect is broadly northerly, with some of the site curving to orientate towards the east and the northwest.

2.5.2 Neighbouring land use

Corniehaugh is in the wooded agricultural Deveron valley. The aerial photograph below shows how it is surrounded by a mix of farmland, woodland and the river Deveron.

The Fourmanhill cottage is on the boundary of Corniehaugh. This will need to be considered during the planning process.



Aerial photograph of Corniehaugh.

Aerial Photography licensed to Forestry Commission for PGA, through Next Perspectives™

2.6 Social factors

2.6.1 Recreation



Corniehaugh currently has one route that is used for informal recreation, mostly by walkers. It runs from North Redhill to Fourmanhill across the slope near the top and has great views out across the Deveron valley. The opportunity to increase the access provision and maintain the views will be part of the planning process for this site.

Route used for informal access.

2.6.2 Community

The closest settlement of any size is the village of Rothiemay which is about 2.5 km from Corniehaugh. However the site is not on any of the main routes used to access the village so visiting the site would entail a specific journey for the purpose, although this can easily be achieved on foot.

There are several farms and residences closer to the site along the Deveron but only those on the south of the river have easy access to the site.

There is an active group in the area, the Marnoch and Deveron Valley Protection Group. FES has had contact with this group and will continue to have an active dialogue with them, as well as the other local residents, during the course of the planning process.

Information from stakeholders and the local community has been sought via written correspondence and a public meeting.

Letters were written to all known neighbours, both contiguous and in the local vicinity, all known local interest groups and statutory consultees. A public meeting was held as a drop in session in the local village hall.

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A summary of all the responses received from all these information gathering methods are summaries in appendix 4.

There has been a diversity of opinion ranging from outright opposition to tree planting on the site from some quarters, while others have been open to proposals for land use change.

The issues raised during the information gathering process have been taken into account and will be used in the context of the objectives for the site in drawing up the land management proposals for the site (see section 4).

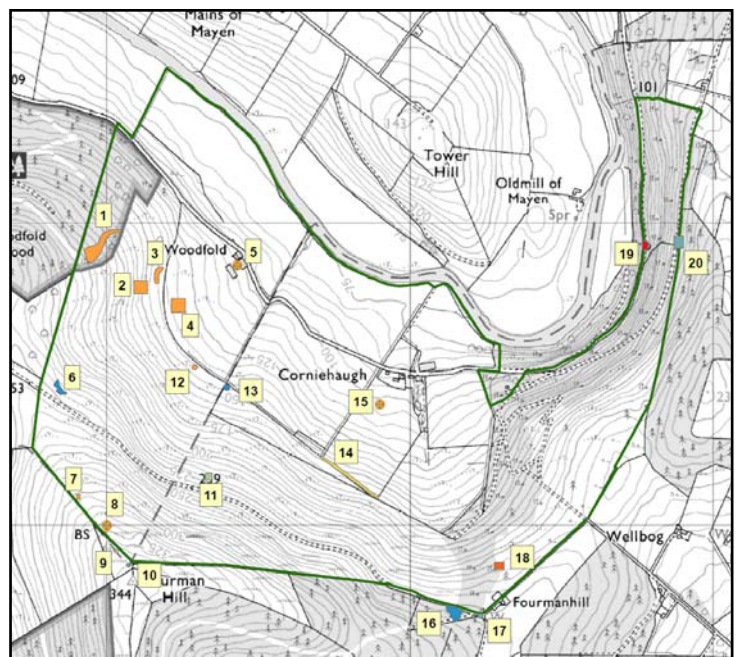
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2.6.3 Heritage

There are no Scheduled Monuments at Corniehaugh although there are 20 recorded non-scheduled monuments either within or just adjacent to the Corniehaugh boundary. These are shown on the map below and their significance will be taken into account as part of the planning process.

ID number	Feature
1	Cairn(s)
2	Cairn(s)
3	Cairn(s)
4	Cairn(s)
5	Farmstead, lade, mill
6	Farmstead
7	Cairn(s)
8	Temporary camp (Roman?)
9	Pit
10	Boundary stone
11	Mound
12	Cairn(s)
13	Farmstead
14	Track
15	House
16	Farmstead
17	Boundary stone
18	Clearance cairn
19	Quarry
20	Boundary stone

Non-scheduled monuments.



3.0 Analysis and Concept

3.1 Analysis and concept table

The information gathered in the previous section (2.0 - Background information) needs to be analysed for its relevance to the plan. This will then inform the design concept plan which is based on the land management objectives (section 1.3) and the analysis background information and stakeholder views.

These two processes have been undertaken and are presented in the table below. This has been set out against the national themes of the FES strategic directions document and the issues highlighted in the Moray & Aberdeenshire strategic plan.

National theme	Issue	Analysis	Concept
Healthy	Low Impact Silvicultural System management (LISS)	Areas of existing woodland are suitable for management under LISS.	Use LISS to manage existing woodland to produce a sustainable source of broadleaved timber.
		New woodland areas could be managed under LISS in the future.	Plan and establish new planting areas to allow LISS to be used in the future for their management.
	Domestic firewood and biomass supply	Areas of existing woodland are suitable for thinning to allow firewood to be produced.	Plan the management of existing woodland to provide a sustainable source of firewood for the local fuelwood market.
	Resilience and adaption to climate change	The climate of the site is predicted to change in the future.	Use the ESC decision support system and its' built in predicted future climate models to help guide the selection of species suitable for planting.
		More severe weather events are predicted for the future.	Provide shelter belts to enhance the productivity of livestock on the site and improve the resilience of the farm.
		Climate projections indicate warmer summers and increased extreme rainfall events can be expected in the future.	Plant trees along the riparian zones of the river Deveron, and watercourses draining into it, to help protect it from runoff of floodwater, sediments and diffuse agricultural pollutants while also providing shade to benefit the fisheries.

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Productive	Transition to a low carbon economy	The land at Corniehaugh falls into several land classification.	Identify areas where land can be removed from agriculture but have the least impact on the farms productivity.
		New planting areas would increase the amount of carbon sequestration occurring on the site.	Once established new woodland areas will be managed to produce fuelwood and contribute to a low carbon economy locally.
	Increase area for production of quality hardwoods and fuelwood.	Areas of Corniehaugh have soils that are better than many across the NFE and are suitable for broadleaved woodland planting.	Utilise some of the better quality areas to produce a quality hardwood timber supply in the long term.
		Areas of existing woodland are suitable for thinning to allow firewood to be produced.	Plan the management of existing woodland to provide a sustainable source of firewood for the local fuelwood market.
	Support jobs by contributing to the local economy.	There are areas of existing woodland that are suitable for thinning to allow firewood to be produced.	Plan the management of existing woodland to provide a sustainable source of firewood for the local fuelwood market.
		A starter farm at Woodfold would ensure the house is occupied by someone working locally and using local shops and suppliers.	Plan a starter farm unit that will provide an introduction to the agricultural industry for a new entrant.
	Increase the agricultural use of the national estate.	Corniehaugh has the potential for a successful starter farm that makes appropriate use of the currently available buildings.	Retain part of the area in agriculture to contribute to the local and national agricultural and wider economy by providing home grown food for "Scotland's table".
	The Scottish Government's woodland expansion policy.	Corniehaugh can contribute to the Scottish Government's woodland expansion target of 10,000 ha per year.	Identify areas where land can be removed from agriculture and planted with trees that will have the least impact on the farms productivity.
Treasured	Engage with local communities.	Corniehaugh offers the potential for the District to work closely with the local community, and other organisations, to promote increased involvement in work in the countryside.	Promote the work at Corniehaugh to the local community, and other organisations, as an opportunity for them to engage with various aspects of work in the countryside.

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	Provide a place for research and the development of best practice.	There is potential to work with researchers to study the costs, benefits and issues of integrated land management at Corniehaugh.	Discuss the project with researchers at an early stage and establish protocols for any potential research projects appropriate to the site.
Accessible	Encourage the use of the estate for health benefits and outdoor learning.	Corniehaugh offers the potential for the district to work with the local schools and other education providers to use the site as a learning resource for a wide range of subjects including countryside management, biodiversity, access or physical and mental well being.	Promote Corniehaugh to local school and other education providers as a site with potential to be a learning resource for both the local and wider communities.
Cared for	Restoring ancient woodland sites.	Areas of semi-natural woodland have been identified in a survey of the habitats at Corniehaugh.	Managed semi-natural woodland according to the appropriate Forestry Commission practise to ensure their biodiversity potential is maintained while also providing a level of production to ensure their long term management and survival.
	Increasing area of broadleaved woodland.	Corniehaugh has soils that are better quality than many others on the NFE and are suitable for planting broadleaved woodland.	Identify areas where land can be removed from agriculture and be planted with broadleaved trees that will have the least impact on the farms productivity.
	Maintain open habitats in good ecological condition.	The habitat survey of Corniehaugh identified several habitats covered by habitat action plans. These are in their current condition due to their past management by grazing.	Maintain or enhance the ecological condition of the identified open habitats by retaining or adjusting the grazing regime applied to them.
	Safeguard archaeological sites.	The archaeological survey of Corniehaugh, and examination of known records, has highlighted several sites of archaeological interest.	Ensure all known archaeological sites are protected during the planning and land management process.

4.0 Land Management Proposals

See Management map

4.1 Starter farm

Better quality land retained in agriculture as a starter farm based around the Woodfold farm house and buildings.

A starter farm is a part time unit that limits the start up capital required by the new entrant. It also frees up time for them to work off farm which allows them to generate additional capital to build up their business, while also expanding their knowledge and skills base. By bringing off farm income back to the unit they are effectively generating more income for the local economy.

The size of the starter farm needs to be appropriate for a new entrant into the agricultural sector. If the unit is too large the land will not be fully utilised. The new entrant would require a higher level of investment and would need to obtain more start up capital. They would also be required to pay a higher rent in the longer term. This would be a limiting factor for many new entrants to the industry. Discussions with the Principal Agricultural Officer at the Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspections Division has established that around 50ha of better quality land and 20ha of hill ground would provide a viable unit in the local agricultural context.

The management and utilisation of the area identified as the starter farm will be down to the successful applicant and their particular business case which will need to be tailored to suit the quantity and quality of land available to them.

Additional grazing land can be rented to other neighbouring farmers to manage the open habitats through appropriate grazing regimes to improve their biodiversity potential.

Once the new woodland has become established and is robust the possibility of opening up some areas to be under grazed will be investigated. This would provide shade in the summer and additional shelter in the winter for livestock. If this additional land were to be added to the starter farm at the appropriate time this would provide a larger unit of land. This could be managed as a follow on unit for the incumbent new entrant or one from another property.

As the starter farm is intended to be only part of the income for the new entrant there is an opportunity to increase the level of integration on the site by them being involved in the planting of new and the management of the existing woodlands. This would be

dependent on the successful starter farm candidate having the correct level of interest, training and skills to undertake the work successfully. The starter farm tenant will be selected on a well-established competitive and transparent process.

4.2 Existing woodland

Existing woodland managed to produce a sustainable supply of fuelwood.

A survey of the existing vegetation types at Corniehaugh was undertaken in May 2012. This identified the areas of existing woodland as a combination of three main woodland types, upland mixed ashwood, upland birchwood and wet woodland. These have now been more accurately measured and will be managed according to the appropriate practice guide for the management of that type of semi-natural woodland.

Natural woodlands are a vital part of our heritage. They provide a range of habitats which support a rich diversity of plants and animals. Many woodland species depend entirely for their survival on the continued existence of these habitats. Any management undertaken will maintain and enhance these values in harmony with securing other benefits, including wood production where appropriate. Management proposals are geared to sensitive low impact methods which are suited to the natural dynamics of these woodlands.

The aims of management of these woodland areas are:

- Maintain and wherever suitable restore the natural ecological diversity;
- Maintain and where appropriate improve their aesthetic value;
- Maintain the genetic integrity of populations of native species, so far as is practicable;
- Take appropriate opportunities to produce utilisable wood;
- Enlarge the woods where possible.

These aims lead to the following general principals for management:

- Maintain the semi-natural woodland type by growing species native to the site and appropriate to the pattern of soils. Existing abundant species should remain a significant component;
- Improve diversity of structure by maintaining a range of age classes (from very young to biologically mature) rather than a single age class;
- Increase diversity of species, where appropriate;
- Maintain diversity of habitat by retaining a diverse structure and mixture of species with open areas, which are extremely important;
- Maintain a mature habitat by retaining old, dead or dying trees both standing and fallen, and by increasing rotation lengths;
- Moderate rates of change as although woods are adapted to quite large natural disturbances, wildlife takes time to adjust;
- Use low-key establishment techniques.

4.2.1 Upland birchwood

These are normally found on the more acid infertile free-draining upland soils, over 250m elevation. Birch is normally the dominant species with rowan, holly, Scots pine, sessile oak, aspen, ash, alder, goat willow, wild cherry, bird cherry, hazel, juniper, hawthorn and blackthorn all potential associates depending on the fertility of the soil.

Upland birchwoods have great value for wildlife conservation. They provide habitat for most of the species of deciduous woodland which can tolerate the upland climate. Over 300 specialist insects are associated with birch.

Birch is used mainly for firewood because of the poor form of many birchwoods. Good quality birch timber is in fact strong and versatile and can be sawn for general use. Straight birch stems make excellent turnery wood.

Birch is a short lived species and growth rates start to decline after about 60 to 80 years. As wood production is an important objective the rotation length for much of the woodland will be within this range with some areas allowed to mature, die and decay naturally.

A survey of the woodland has recorded the presence of birch, ash, sycamore and beech in the main area. Measurement of plots within this area shows that currently the woodland is standing at a volume per hectare that means thinning can be undertaken to allow the better trees to develop in size. Currently 30 cubic metres of material could be sustainably removed annually. The size of the material removed would make it suitable for fuel wood. This programme of harvesting would make it suitable for a local firewood producer to buy and process for eventual retail sale. This could form part of a business case for the starter farm applicant if they have, or were willing to acquire, the right training, skills and equipment. As the remaining trees develop and grow they would start to produce bigger sized material that could go into other more profitable markets.

Any thinning would be limited to the well-drained ground and extraction will be undertaken with sensitive small scale machinery. Limited ground disturbance from extraction would stimulate regeneration but compaction and rutting will be avoided.

As many woodland wildlife species depend on large, old trees, standing dead trees and large fallen trunks and limbs management will aim to maintain and increase the number of large, old trees and the quantity of fallen wood. Trees in difficult areas and on the margins will be retained indefinitely.

4.2.2 Wet woodland

The practice guide for wet woodland covers both alder/ash woodland recorded as “upland ash woodland” and the willow dominated areas recorded as “wet woodland”.

These woodlands are typical of the wet and poorly-drained soils across much of Britain. These woodlands are typical of river valleys, the surrounding of mires and raised bogs, the transition zones between open water and drier ground or, as in the case at Corniehaugh, on flushed slopes well above the valley bottom.

The willow dominated woods are often scrubby in appearance with irregular, dense canopies that often include birch and alder or more rarely oak, hawthorn, hazel and gelder rose. Ground conditions are very wet and the ground flora includes many species more characteristic of fens and marshes.

The alder/ash woodland is more typical of drier sites and often includes Downy birch, pedunculate oak and hawthorn.

Wet woodlands contribute an element of diversity to both wooded and open landscapes. Wet woodlands provide cover for birds and support a rich assemblage of moths and insects. Their potential for timber production is low in the willow dominated areas with limited production of firewood. However alder and ash both have markets as firewood with ash also having potentially a higher value if stem canker is not a problem.

The willow dominated areas recorded as wet woodland at Corniehaugh will be retained as natural reserves. The main reason for this is that the ground conditions are so wet that any attempt to fell and extract produce will cause extensive amounts of ground damage that are unacceptable in this situation.

The drier area recorded as upland ash woodlands will be managed for firewood production. A coppice system will be used with a rotation length of 20 – 25 years across most of the area. Stools will be cut high enough to leave plenty of live wood in order to ensure successful regrowth. The remaining areas will be cut on a 10 – 20 year rotation. This will provide saleable firewood while permitting enough light penetration to maintain ground flora and encourage butterflies into the area.

All timber extraction will be undertaken with extreme care to ensure unacceptable levels of ground damage are not caused.

The basic aim to secure the long term survival of the woodland by coppice regrowth will require the control of browsing and grazing by sheep, cattle or deer. This will be achieved by stock fencing the woodland and controlling the deer numbers by

undertaking an ongoing cull to maintain numbers at a sustainable level to allow regrowth.

4.3 New woodland

4.3.1 Riparian woodland

Groups of trees planted along watercourses to create dappled shade and intercept agricultural runoff.

Riparian woodland can be used to stabilise river and stream banks and help prevent pollution from reaching watercourses, as well as improve water quality and fresh water habitats. Riparian woodland can also contribute to flood plain management.

The riparian woodland planned at Corniehaugh will extend at least 25m from the edge of the watercourse. Where it does not compromise the management of the adjacent agricultural land its width will vary and have an organic shape which will create a more natural appearance and also increase the length of its edge habitat, which is good for wildlife.

The species will need to be flood tolerant so will be a mix of alder, willow, ash, downy birch, hazel and aspen. Open or partially wooded conditions along the watercourses are important. Half the length of the watercourse will be left open to sunlight with the remainder in dappled shade. To achieve this only 50% of the total area will be planted with trees. Existing wetland habitats, species rich flushes, sedges and other wetland vegetation are important habitats so will be retained within the framework of new woodland.

Shelter belts are primarily aimed at sheltering stock. To meet this objective the woodland will be planted to provide a narrow strip of calm in the immediate lee of the trees.

Woodlands for shelter will be located where they can link with existing or other new woodlands to maximise the efficiency of the shelterbelt and contribute to the wider landscape pattern and habitat network. Establishing woodland around more than one side of a field will allow for variable wind direction.

Due to their location and layout the riparian woodlands will act as additional shelterbelts in the context of Corniehaugh.

4.3.2 Broadleaved woodland

Broadleaf species planted at a density that will provide the best productivity on the better quality soils.

The woodland areas will be planted with a shape to fit with the landscape and existing field boundaries, reinforcing the geometric shapes of the field pattern, but also to allow the adjacent agricultural land to be managed efficiently.

The species planted will be broadleaves with the best potential to produce usable timber such as oak, sycamore and beech. The planting will be undertaken in robust single species groups of 16 (4x4) to 25 (5x5) plants at a spacing varying from 2m x 2m to 1m x 1m with an average stocking density of 5,000 stems per hectare. This planting spacing will ensure that the woods can be managed to be productive in the future.

4.3.3 Mixed broadleaved and conifer woodland

The woodland areas will be planted with an organic shape to fit with the landscape but also create a generous length of "edge" habitat. The "edge" will also be increased by retaining open spaces within the woodland. The new woodland will link other habitats such as existing woodland, watercourses and valuable open habitats.

The species planted will be mainly locally native broadleaves such as oak, silver birch and rowan with alder and ash in the wetter areas. Hazel, hawthorn, blackthorn and holly will be included to form a shrub layer. Conifers such as Scots pine, larch, Norway spruce and Douglas fir will also be included to increase the diversity of the woodland but also to provide a supply of timber for use on the farm i.e. larch for fencing material, in the medium term. The planting will be undertaken in robust single species groups of 16 (4x4) to 25 (5x5) plants at a spacing of 1.5m x 1.5m to give an average stocking density of approx 5,000 stems per hectare. This planting spacing will ensure that the woods can be managed to be productive in the future.

When the woodlands become established the option of opening them for under grazing will be considered. This would provide additional areas of sheltered grazing.

4.4 Open ground

4.4.1 Habitat action plan open ground

The first priority for open ground that has habitat interest is to prevent where possible the loss of existing areas due to tree planting. The other priority is to maintain existing open habitats in good condition. This would normally be focussed on the most valuable designated sites. However Corniehaugh presents the opportunity to incorporate this into the integrated land management proposals for the site.

Grazing of open habitats is an important tool which, if managed correctly, can maintain habitats in good ecological condition or even improve them. Conversely grazing which is designed to deliver other objectives, without due consideration of nature conservation can be damaging to the ecological condition of open priority habitats and in extreme cases, result in their loss. For example overgrazing can cause the conversion of upland heathland into degraded acid grassland.

Open areas will be let out for grazing. FES land agents, open habitats ecologist and other appropriate staff will be consulted before the grazing regime is agreed. The open habitat survey data in appendix 5 will also be used to agree appropriate ecological objectives for the grazing programme. A suitable stocking type, density and period for the area will be agreed before the area is let out.

4.4.2 Other open ground

Areas with no habitat designation will also be maintained as open ground by grazing.

Open ground around the hill tops will be maintained to retain their importance in the landscape. Areas adjacent to neighbouring houses will also be grazed as tree planting would reduce the amount of light reaching them and also block their views.

Appendix 1 – The national and local context of Corniehaugh.

National context

Corniehaugh has been purchased to support the objectives of the Scottish Government as set out in **“The role of Scotland’s National Forest Estate and strategic directions 2013-2016”**¹. This document describes the role of and strategic directions for Scotland’s National Forest Estate (NFE).

The NFE is one of the biggest opportunities for the Scottish Government to directly implement the principals laid out in its **Land Use Strategy**². The Land Use Strategy aims to deliver multiple benefits from Scotland’s countryside. Corniehaugh, as part of the NFE, provides an opportunity to implement the Scottish Government’s climate change commitments by harnessing the ability of trees to sequester carbon. It can provide additional environmental services including contributing to flood mitigation and ensuring the NFE, and its biodiversity, is robust and able to adapt to future climate change.

Within this context the role of the NFE can be described in terms of the services it has the potential to provide:

- Supporting services such as primary production, nutrient dispersal and cycling;
- Provisioning services such as timber, food (farmed and wild), water, minerals, energy (hydropower, wind energy and biomass fuels);
- Regulating services such as carbon sequestration and climate regulation, flood management, purification of water and air, detoxification of contaminated sites and biological reservoirs for crop pollination and pest and disease control;
- Cultural services around recreational experiences, cultural, intellectual and spiritual inspiration and scientific advancement.

¹The role of Scotland’s National Forest Estate and strategic directions 2013-2016

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fesplans>

²Getting the best from our land – A land use strategy for Scotland -

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Countryside/Landusestrategy>

The **Starter Farm initiative** was developed to contribute to the FSC's activities to implement the land use strategy for Scotland. It was designed to test a new way of using opportunities that arise on the NFE to provide much sought after openings for new entrants to the agricultural sector.

New entrants to farming were first offered the chance to lease part-time 'starter farm' units on the NFE as part of a pilot initiative introduced in January 2012.

The Rationale for Woodland Expansion¹ lays out the Scottish Government's thinking on how woodland expansion can best increase the delivery of public benefits from Scotland's land. The document identifies a number of woodland creation priorities for Scotland:

- Helping to tackle greenhouse gas emissions. Carbon sequestration, timber and fuel production.
- Restoring lost habitats and adapting to climate change. Forest habitat networks and new native woodlands.
- Helping to manage ecosystem services. Sustainable flood management and protection of soil and water resources.
- Underpinning a sustainable forest products industry. Consistent and reliable timber supply for timber processing and wood fuel investments.
- Supporting rural development. Supporting local businesses and farm diversification.
- Providing community benefits. Provision of welcoming and well-managed woodlands in and around communities and where health and community need is greatest.
- Enhancing urban areas and improving landscapes. Improving derelict, underused and neglected land, improving degraded or unsightly environments and diversifying farmed landscapes.

The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 places a specific duty on all public bodies to further the conservation of biodiversity and to have regard to the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy². That strategy, published in 2004, aims to achieve by 2030 a landscape where, amongst other things:

"Organisms can move, feed, reproduce and disperse effectively, and are better able to adapt to changing circumstances of land use and climate change".

¹ The Scottish Government's Rationale for Woodland Expansion - <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-7FWEQ5>

² Scottish Biodiversity Strategy - <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/05/19366/37239>

Habitat networks are one of the main ways identified to achieve this. Habitat networks are patches of habitat that are physically or functionally connected, so that dependent species are able to move and/or disperse between patches to create interlinked populations. The development of networks should increase the resilience of species populations to threats, which is especially important for species which are slow colonisers and/or those living in small fragmented populations.

Networks should help wildlife adapt to climate change, both by encouraging more robust populations that can survive change in situ, and by making it easier for species to colonise new areas if current sites become unsuitable. The predicted pace of climate change means that networks will need to be developed and functioning over the next few decades to relieve the growing pressures on our wildlife.

As there are no specific national policies for agriculture in Scotland it is difficult to link the management of the agricultural elements at Corniehaugh to an overarching national strategy. However the background to the industry is that livestock numbers have been dropping since 2005. This is as a direct result of the **Common Agricultural Policy** (CAP). With CAP currently under review it is not possible to know what impact this could have on the future for the agricultural industry in Scotland.

Local context

The strategic directions document for the NFE was published in 2013 and lays out in broad terms the story of, nature of, and vision for the NFE. District strategic plans are the next level down in the planning framework. These set out at the district level how different parts of the local NFE will contribute to the national picture. The new **Strategic Plan for Moray & Aberdeenshire District**¹ has recently completed public consultation.

The Strategic Plan for Moray & Aberdeenshire will drive our Land Management Plans (LMP) and integrate varied land management priorities to maximise public benefit, and optimise ecosystem service provision. Ecosystem services include such varied objectives as conserving vulnerable species, to maintaining a supply of timber and biomass, and providing the largest area for recreational provision in Scotland.

¹ Moray & Aberdeenshire Forest District Strategic Plan (Public consultation) - <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fesplans>

SEPA has designated the **river Deveron a priority catchment**¹. “Priority catchments are river and costal catchments that are currently failing to meet water quality standards, and which will not achieve improved water quality without a focused management approach. The River Deveron catchment has several designations relating to the importance of its waters which, coupled with a range of diffuse pollution effects, make restoring and protecting it a high priority. The main pressures in the catchment include: agricultural pollution, sewage treatment works discharges, septic tanks, morphology and abstraction.” The SEPA publication Diffuse Pollution Priority Catchment: Technical Summary – River Deveron⁴ is available from the SEPA website and contains more details of the issues and how the issues are being addressed. As Corniehaugh is located on the banks of the Deveron it has a part to play in the improvement of the catchment.

SNH, in partnership with local authorities and other agencies have carried out a National Programme of **Landscape Character Assessment**. This programme aims to improve knowledge and understanding of the contribution that landscape makes to the natural heritage of Scotland. It considers the likely pressures and opportunities for change in the landscape, assesses the sensitivity of the landscape to change and includes guidelines indicating how landscape character may be conserved, enhanced or restructured as appropriate.

Corniehaugh is on the boundary of Assessment No102 South and Central Aberdeenshire², produced in 1998 by Environmental Resources Management and Assessment No101 Moray and Nairn³, produced in 1998 by Turnbull Jeffrey Partnership.

The area in the Moray assessment falls within the Upland Farmland zone. This is characterised as broad, gently undulating slopes cut by gently graded valleys. It is a predominantly agricultural landscape with some large coniferous plantations.

¹ River Deveron Catchment -

http://www.sepa.org.uk/water/river_basin_planning/dp_priority_catchments/river_deveron_catchment.aspx

² Assessment No102 South and Central Aberdeenshire - <http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications>

³ Assessment No101 Moray and Nairn - <http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications>

One of the guidelines for this area is:

“Changes to agricultural policy and market forces may encourage farmers in this area to consider diversification in the future. This may well include the establishment of woodlands, as land values in this area are generally less than in other more favourable agricultural areas in Moray. The establishment of sensitively designed new mixed species woodlands would provide opportunities for enhancing the landscape by introducing visual diversity and creating a strong enclosure pattern to visually contain and shelter farmland.”

The eastern half of Corniehaugh that falls within the south and central Aberdeenshire assessment area is within the northern rolling lowlands of the agricultural heartlands. This is characterised as an agricultural area with generally intensive mixed farming on large fertile fields. The landscape character stems from the areas powerful relief and simple landscape pattern.

Specific guidance for this area in relation to trees and woodland includes:

- “Large scale landscape pattern can accommodate commercial forestry where it is designed to fit with the smooth rolling landform, enhancing shapes, forms and scale.
- Plantations shapes which reflect the existing field pattern will reinforce the pronounced landscape structure, although isolated hill top plantations may intrude into the skyline.
- Lines of trees, shelter belts and recurring elements such as clumps of trees, draw the eye across slopes and create rhythms in the landscape.
- Piecemeal, small scale development or patchy, small woods may distract the eye from the large scale and simple landscape pattern.
- Thick beech shelterbelts embolden landscape structure, but lack of management and over maturity will see this feature decline in importance; new beech planting, especially as an edge to coniferous plantations, will benefit the landscape.”

Aberdeenshire Council has a Forest and Woodland Strategy¹

The key aim of the strategy is:

To ensure the sustainable management of the woodlands and forests of Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City, creating a balanced landscape where woodlands and forests; add to people's quality of life and well being, contribute to the local economy, provide opportunities for recreation and tourism and protect and enhance biodiversity and the environment.

This means:

- encouraging multi-benefit forestry in new planting and through re-structuring
- balancing forestry against other land uses
- protecting sensitive areas; and
- identifying priority areas for expansion of a variety of forest and woodland types

The section on creating new woods and forests states that:

Identifying priority areas where woodland expansion might be targeted is a key role of this Strategy. Looking at the whole forest resource in the North East, it should be possible to achieve benefits to landscape, habitat and recreation whilst producing commercial timber. Whilst expecting a range of proposals for new planting to come forward, specific types of new planting are encouraged by this Strategy to work towards the aims identified. Although woodland is an important feature of the North East, the total area of woodland (14%) is low compared with many of our European neighbours where woodland cover is often greater than 30%.

Moray Council has recently withdrawn its forestry strategy due to its age and it has no plans to replace it in the short term.

Neither Moray nor Aberdeenshire council have identified the path that runs through the site as a core path. However Moray does record it as an existing path.

¹ Forest and Woodland Strategy for Aberdeenshire & Aberdeen City - http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/natural/trees/forest_strategy05.pdf

Feedback from **stakeholders and the local community** has been sought via written correspondence and a public meeting.

Letters were written to all known neighbours, both contiguous and in the local vicinity, all known local interest groups and statutory consultees.

A public meeting was held as a drop in session in the local village hall. This was advertised in the local paper and with posters in the village.

The results of the feedback received from both the letters and meetings are presented in appendix 2.

Appendix 2 - Information gathering meeting results

Date: 26 March 2014

Introduction

An information gathering session for the Land Management Plan for Corniehaugh, Rothiemay was carried out on 21st March 2014 at the Rothiemay village hall. This took the format of a drop-in session and ran between 1pm and 7pm. The event was advertised by sending out letters to all known neighbours and any other members of the public or local groups who had already expressed an interest in the process. Additionally posters were put up in Rothiemay village shop & post office and on the village notice board two weeks before the event. Also a quarter page advert with accompanying editorial was placed in the Huntly and Keith editions of the Huntly Express, the local paper for the area.

Summary of results

Approximately 30 people attended during the course of the afternoon and evening. 17 questionnaires were completed. See figure 1 for the results.

The comments on the questionnaires, or in letters sent in with questionnaires completed after the event, are recorded below in Table 1.

Additionally we asked for comments on nine specific areas of interest on the site. These were written on post-it notes and stuck to the large sheets of paper. Copies of the sheets and the comments received can be seen at Table 2.

In addition to the comments received at the event a number of letters were received before the event. A summary of these is included in Table 3.

Due to the small sample size no attempt has been made to analyse or interpret the information obtained, it has simply been recorded and will be used during the planning process to inform the decision making.

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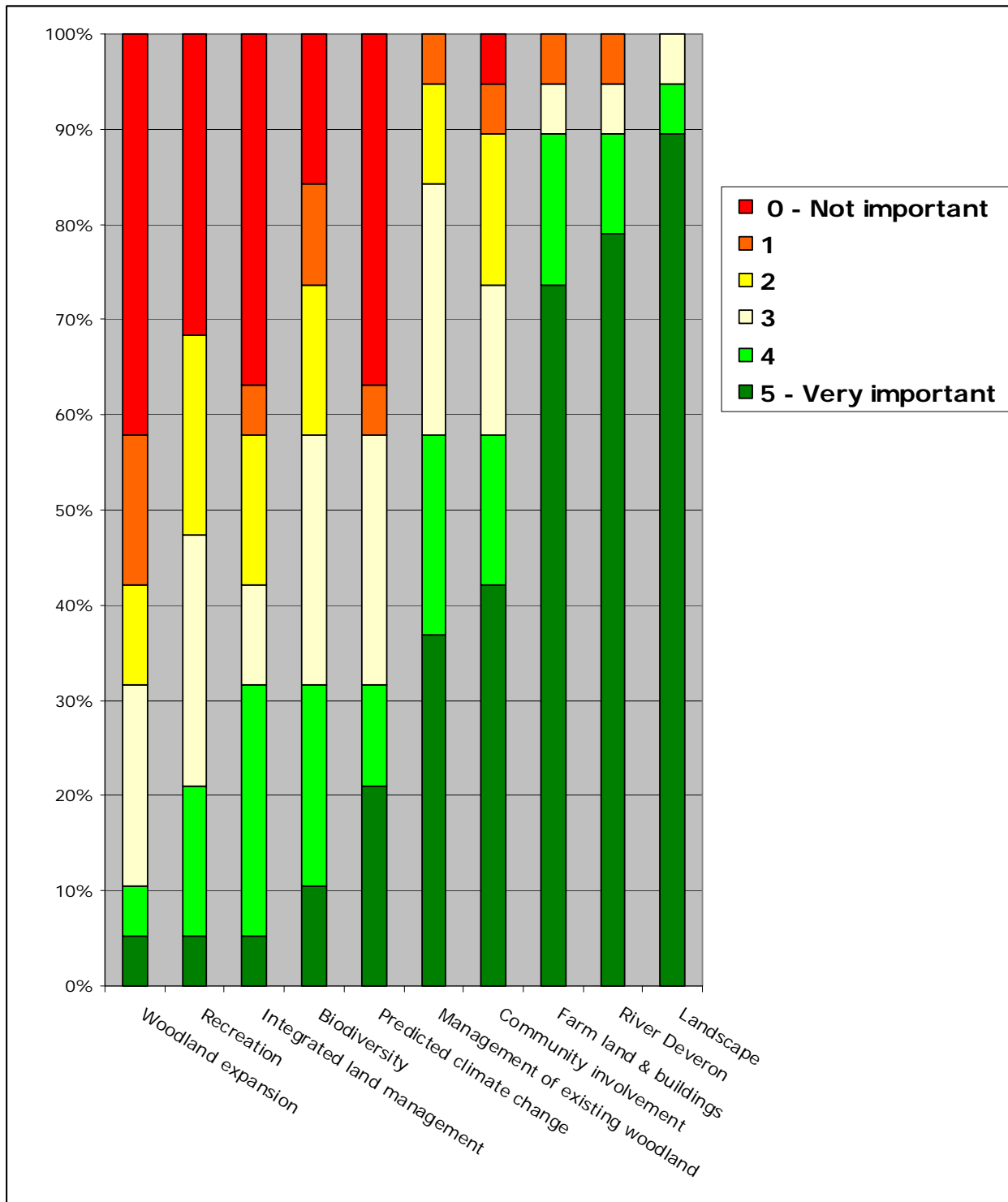


Figure 1 Questionnaire results

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Table 1 – Questionnaire comments

“The land at Corniehaugh should not be planted in trees. The Forestry Commission should sell this high quality agricultural land on the open market. Agricultural land should be conserved. Low quality land in other areas unsuitable for agriculture should be planted in trees.”

“The preservation of the Deveron strath landscape should be kept in mind in considering any proposals.
Beef farming may currently be profitable for farmers but it should not be the main land use as it is a significant cause of pollution and is not sustainable long term. Modern farming does not provide much employment and is too dependent on carbon based fuel. There has been a tendency to combine farms into larger units in recent years and this has made this worse.
Farming organisations do not represent the interests of the local community as a whole. The same applies to the fishing organisations.
The arable land should not be absorbed into a larger unit. Preferably there should be diversification involving recreation or forestry uses.”

“Land should be put on open market for sale as farm land.
This is AGRICULTURAL LAND.
Trees should be planted in land appropriate areas.
Farm land is scarce.
The valley should be retained in its present landscape.
I oppose the planting of trees on this agricultural site.”

“As the present tenants I think it would be disadvantageous to remove any of the existing farm buildings as they can be fully utilised as they are at present.
The arable land should be retained but no objections to planting hill.”

“Based on the scoping map, I don’t have a particular problem with improving the ground to the west and to the east as regards existing woodlands, reducing commercial woodland and generally upgrading the species content.
However, I feel that nothing should be done to the area that is immediately visible if you are driving from Rothiemay to Marnoch and look across the valley. 90% of this is on the existing agricultural holding and I do not think this should be significantly planted, other than edges; likewise, I do not think there should be any planting up to the main Bognie to Rothiemay access track along the hill as it is this “sweep” of visibility from the Rothiemay road which is so attractive in that community and to the valley.”

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Table 2 - Comments on specific topics.

What is important for the future management of the land at Corniehaugh?

Tell us what you think by writing your comments on the yellow post-it notes provided and stick them in the box for the appropriate location

Location	Scope of options	Comments
Fertile land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be the focus of a farming enterprise. • Low-lying sheltered fields, easily seen from Woodfold buildings. • Potential to increase hedges & field trees. • Farming maintains open views along Deveron valley. 	Have you considered flooding from the river?
		All land to be kept for agriculture.
		The units should be sold for retention in agriculture.
		The scenic beauty will be lost forever by planting.
		Yes. Farming enterprise & preserving open views.
		Keep land as commercial farm.
		All land should be sold for agriculture. Views would be spoilt, but also agriculture is a large part of our economy and needs support.
Farm buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be the focus of a farming enterprise. • Shelterbelt could provide shelter for buildings and some fields. 	Shelterbelts are not necessary in the valley.
		Do we <u>NEED</u> a shelterbelt?
		Size of farm is not economically viable for a start-up farmer. Set-up costs too great.
		Too small in scale for start up farm. Shelterbelts are not necessary in this area

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		The valley is sheltered and buildings should be revitalised as a commercial farm.
Neighbouring properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain open space and views but provide shelter. 	Neighbouring properties already have trees.
		Neighbouring properties are already well forested therefore additional shelter is not required.
		Neighbouring properties are responsible for planting trees for their own shelter.
Existing woodland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodland management required to ensure its future. • Management operations could provide for local business and/or woodfuel. 	Providing fire wood does not help Government carbon reduction target.
		It would be dynamic to link up the existing woodland with native woodland.
		Forestry to attract wildlife.
Woodland at Woodfold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently managed by Forest Enterprise Scotland. • Good potential for future timber production. • Shape wood could be improved by additional planting. • Tree species could be diversified at replanting. 	Replanting with hardwood would improve landscape and enable boundary to be softened.
		Any land has potential for tree production, however this is a disgrace to smash an already good unit.
		This is a very geometric shape at present so any improvement would be welcome. Existing woodland would be responsibly of future farming enterprise.

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		Scotland has quite enough tree planting without invading quality farm land.
Footpath	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain views from footpath. 	Footpath should be maintained.
		Would be good to promote the footpath past Fourman hill. Maybe it could be a community project.
		Views from the footpath will be destroyed by planting.
		Fourman hill is a spectacular view point. There needs to be an integrated path network connecting into the existing paths
		Ban planting on this area.
		Yes. Views from footpath & from opposite side of river.
		Good paths through area – there are many dog walkers in the village.
		Footpath should be maintained with the views!
		The view from the Queens way is a local asset. The views over the Deveron are exceptional & must not be hidden.
Hill tops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open habitat benefits biodiversity. Fourmanhill is highly visible and an open summit is appropriate in landscape terms. Open hilltops give options for summer grazing. 	Keep hill tops open and avoid geometric shapes.
		Hilltops should be kept open.
		Hills should be left as they are open and scenic.

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		YES. Keep hillsides like Fourman clear of trees.
		This hilltop is a local landmark. It should be kept open.
		Very good viewpoint. Must be kept open.
		Path to top of the hill.
		Summer grazing for sheep and cattle. AGRICULTURAL use.
		Fourman Hill heathland should be considered as part of Corniehaugh.
River Deveron	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planting of groups of trees could shade river and improve fishery. • Groups of trees would retain open stretches of water. • Tree planting could intercept diffuse agricultural pollution. 	Fish like trees too especially in the watercourse.
River Deveron		Not suitable on arable land.
River Deveron		Trees get in way of FISHING!!
River Deveron		Waste of agri land. Trees are not advantageous on this stretch.
River Deveron		Shading the river does not improve fishery. Decreases tourist appeal. Maintain as agricultural land.
River Deveron		I thought the run off from forestry creates flash spates in the river.
River Deveron		Suitable for watersports?
River Deveron		Fishing is part of the local economy – tourism. Trees get in the way of riverbanks.

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Less fertile land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not the most productive land for agriculture. • Potential to create woodland with a long edge to increase biodiversity interest. • Woodland could reduce water run-off on to lower fields and create shelter for fields and stock. • Woodland could be developed to be suitable for grazing in the future. 	It would be good to see some native trees planted on these sites.
		Land should be kept for <u>agricultural use</u> .
		Use as grazing for agricultural use.
		Shelter is not a priority in a valley. This rough grazing is useful to a sustainable farm unit.
		Plenty of shelter already.
		Less fertile land should be used for hill grazing of sheep and cattle.
		Formation of ponds to attract birds & insects.
		Food production is a <u>NECESSITY</u> .

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Table 3 – Comments from initial scoping prior to public meeting

Correspondent	Issues raised
A.R.M. Smith	Concern that not all neighbours had been contacted directly.
Marnoch and Deveron Valley Protection Group	Petition of 238 signatures submitted opposed to woodland expansion at Corniehaugh.
NFUS – North East Region	Challenge appropriateness of planting trees based on comparative value of use for Corniehaugh. Grass in food chain as sequester of carbon. Loss of good agricultural land. Doubt over use of trees to prevent water and fertiliser run off. Questioning need for additional shelter. Concern that planting trees prevents drainage and causes water logging of soils. Trees harbour midges and flies, an issue for animal health. Unsuitable as a starter farm unit. Potential for Corniehaugh as follow –on agriculture unit. World population growth requires all land to remain in food production.
NFUS – Huntly & Inch branch	Only land unsuitable for arable or grazing of livestock should be planted with trees. Agricultural industry key in rural areas and for local communities.
Strathisla community council.	Opposed to productive farmland in the Deveron valley being used for woodland expansion. Concern that tree planting will alter the character of the Deveron valley.
J Lochhead	Not enough detail for clients to pass opinion on proposals.
SEPA	Referred to “ Advice for the Forestry Commission Scotland and forest managers on how and when to consult SEPA including standing advice for small scale felling and planting applications and forest plans ” as area below 200ha.
Aberdeenshire council	Support for mainly native woodland up to 200ha as fits with principles of the adopted Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2012.

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Marnoch and Deveron Valley Protection Group	Request for extended consultation time to allow professional landscape advice to be sought.
A Sharp	Glad to see 70ha retained in agriculture. As riparian owner happy to work with FCS on related issues.
RSPB	No strong view except to favour native species in any planting.

Appendix 3 – Agricultural use of Corniehaugh

Under the previous ownership the joint holdings of Corniehaugh and Woodfold supported 200 head of beef cattle and provided a base for an agricultural contracting business. This was with the benefit of additional rented ground.

Latterly the addition rented land was given up. Subsequently cow numbers were reduced to 60-70 and 150-200 ewes introduced with some (unspecified) grazing let out. 52ha of spring barley was grown with the balance of the low ground being used for silage production and grazing. The upper land was all used for grazing purposes.

On the low ground a rotation of five years of grass followed by three or four years of barley has been utilised. This rotation worked this classification of land very hard and such a period of consecutive barley crops required high inputs in terms of nutrition and disease control.

The following comparison of current and potential future output scenario's was prepared by Robin Waddell, FES Agricultural Advisor in April 2014 and subsequently presented to the Principal Agricultural Officer for Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspections Division who raised no major concerns with the figures and assumptions used.

All data and gross margins are taken directly from the SAC Farm Management Handbook 2014.

Figures quoted are gross margins (outputs less variable costs) and take no account of fixed costs. Nor is any account taken of Single Farm Payment or Less Favoured Area income.

The figures generated amply display the lack of profitability in livestock farming without subsidy support.

Analysis of current agricultural land use

This scenario assumes all of the land and all the buildings Woodfold are utilised.

50ha of barley is grown. For ease of calculation and comparison all the grain and straw is assumed to be sold and all feed is bought in. In reality a proportion of the crop would be retained for home feed resulting in cost savings for the livestock enterprises but reduced sales from the barley enterprise. This would likely to lead to a small net gain in profitability.

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70 head of spring calving suckler cows are maintained. All cattle would be housed in winter, with calves finished at 18-20 months old out of the shed in their second winter. Cattle would be turned out on to the low ground grass in spring and then moving to higher land as grass became available, thus freeing the better fields for silage production.

200 Cross bred ewes are maintained. A 160% lambing rate is assumed with the majority of the lambs sold fat off grass with the balance sold as stores. Cover is only required for short term housing at lambing time.

The farm has 74ha arable (after the sale of 2.45 at Corniehaugh), 42ha PP and 86ha RGR. The table below uses very rough "productive equivalents" to calculate available "hectares".

Type of Land	Area Ha	Productive equivalent	Adjusted Ha
Arable	74	1	74
PP	42	0.5	21
RGR	86	0.2	17.2
	202		112.2

* excludes "other" unproductive land

Enterprise	No.	Ha/ unit	Ha	GM/ unit	Total GM
Spring Calving Sucker Cows. Grazing area 0.3/ha/cow, Silage 0.16ha/cow, 0.11/ha /calf. = 0.55ha per "unit"	70	0.55	38.5	£86	£6,020
Cross bred ewes, grazing and silage area 12ha/100	200	0.12	24	£5	£1,040
Spring Barley – 4.0t/ha, all output for feed market	50	1	50	£344	£17,200
Total Farm GM			113		£24,260

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Analysis of one possible use of starter farm unit

This scenario assumes all the buildings at Woodfold would be available. It also assumes most of the arable land would be retained along with a portion of the PP & RGR.

This system uses sheep and barley only as this would require much less start up capital cost for a new entrant into the agricultural industry. As some of the buildings would be under used a portion of the space is assumed to be let out for cattle wintering on a “bed and labour” only basis.

Type of Land	Area Ha	Productive equivalent	Adjusted Ha
Arable	65	1	65
PP	25	0.5	12.5
RGR	40	0.2	8
	130		85.5

Enterprise	No.	Ha/ unit	Ha	GM/ unit	Total GM
Wintering for 26 weeks at £3/hd/week	50	0	0	£78	£3,900
Cross bred ewes, grazing and silage area 12ha/100	300	0.12	36	£5	£1,560
Spring Barley – 4.0t/ha, all output for feed market	49	1	49	£344	£16,856
Total Farm GM			85		£22,316

Comparison of current and potential future scenarios

The future starter farm scenario utilises 64% of the original farmland area however it retains 92% of the original farm's gross margin. Without the cattle wintering enterprise only 76% of the income is retained.

This is a comparison of only one future scenario and there are many others available. These would depend on the interests of the new occupant of the starter farm. However it is clear from this comparison that a large portion of the RGR/PP could be given over to woodland creation without significantly affecting the starter farms income potential.

Appendix 4- Landscape character and value

Context

The River Deveron occupies a sinuous river valley that alternates between the shallow gradients of a more open and undulating plain and steep sided, much more enclosed and well defined valleys (see Landscape Context and Character map).

Across this landscape, farmland and woodland intermix, although woodland is more often associated with steep slopes and is more extensive on the 'stand alone' hills that rise out of the lower rolling relief.

Corniehaugh is located on a pronounced bend in the river, at a point where it is well contained by the steeper slopes of a sinuous valley. It occupies slopes that rise from the south side of the river and that extend to the summit of Fourman Hill. Its aspect is broadly northerly, with some of the site curving to orientate towards the east and the northwest.

Landscape character

The character of this stretch of the river valley is dominated by:

- The sinuous shape of the river and its associated river valley;
- The steepness and elevation of the upper slopes, that provide containment to the river valley;
- The farmland, dominated by improved pasture and rough grazing, with some cultivated fields;
- The contrast between the more formal enclosure of improved fields along the lower slopes framing the river, and the unenclosed, more varied texture and colours of the vegetation associated with the upper slopes;
- The woodland, dominated by conifers but with some large areas of broadleaves, that occupies the steeper slopes and upper summits of the hills;
- The dispersed settlement pattern, with farms and single houses scattered across the landscape at a wide range of elevation;
- Parkland and policies associated with larger houses and estates located at intervals along the length of the river.

Landscape experience

Travelling on the roads along the length of this stretch of the river Deveron the landscape experience is dominated by:

- The sinuous shape of the valley, which "reveals" the landscape as a sequence of views, often limited in extent by landform when viewed from lower elevations along the valley floor;

- A pattern of alternating enclosure and openness is created at a strategic scale by landform, as the river extends through shallow, less contained undulating landform alternating with more enclosed steep sided stretches of valley;
- This pattern of alternating openness and enclosure is further reinforced by the sequence of relatively open farmland alternating with enclosed woodland;
- The views along the river from low level vantage points are framed by the valley sides when these are steep. The landform and woodland sometimes curtails the extent of the view, ensuring that views are revealed in sequence;
- From elevated viewpoints, views along the river can be panoramic;
- The narrow, sinuous roads reinforce the sense of 'winding through' the landscape.

Visual Assessment

The site at Corniehaugh is not widely visible as it lies within the contained river valley. It is most significantly visible from 'close quarters', when travelling through the site or from the road and settlement to the north of the river.

The most visually prominent element of the site is the summit of Fourman Hill, which at 314m is the highest hill both within its immediate group and is more widely visible as a landmark hill. The visual prominence of the open summit and north facing slopes of this hill is most clearly seen from Viewpoint 1 (see Landform Analysis map), but it is also visible from other viewpoints.

Landscape and Visual Design Principles.

The pattern of land use at Corniehaugh should aim to enhance existing landscape character and respect both the experience and the visual amenity of the landscape. These aspects are illustrated in the Landform analysis map and the Landscape and Visual Analysis map.

In terms of landscape and visual design, therefore, the arrangement of land use should aim to:

- Retain a balance between enclosure created by woodland and more open farmland, wetland and moorland, so that the experience of travelling along the valley retains the alternating sequence of open space and woodland;
- Maintain key views along the valley of the Deveron, including View A, which is a dramatic view revealed on exiting existing woodland, views from the upper level path and views along the length of the valley from the road;
- Create visual drama where possible, for example by reinforcing enclosure at the eastern end of the holding, so that an additional 'revealed' view can be created with new planting;
- Maintain clear lines of unobstructed sight between the river and the road, so that the river can be seen, at least in part, from the elevated road;
- Remove or hide existing fringes or 'tufts' of woodland that appear along the upper ridges of the hillsides and which are out of scale with the landform;

- Avoid creating new fringes of woodland which may be visible from within the site or elsewhere;
- Maintain open space on the summit of Fourman Hill, which is a landmark hill where the open space counterbalances woodland on adjacent summits and ridges;
- Interlock farmland and woodland to create varied spaces along the valley floor;
- Within any woodland, create a diverse pattern that both reflects landform and the varied vegetation pattern, with an emphasis on broadleaves to retain the seasonal variation and create a landscape of soft texture which is appropriate to the agricultural setting;
- Within any woodland, consider establishing trees at varied density in some areas, and using shrub layers, to further reflect the existing variety of vegetation types;
- Working with any tenant farmer, create detailed features, such as an avenue, groups of river bank planting, field trees and shelter woods that add to visual diversity and reinforce the pattern of intermittent policy/designed landscape woodland which is characteristic of the Deveron valley.

Other considerations

The proposals should aim to build in as many options for alternative land uses as possible. The proposals have to reflect a wide range of objectives as well as landscape and visual considerations. These points are illustrated in the Design Concept map. These include:

- Establish well-proportioned summer grazing on the upper hill slopes, so that stock can be removed and allow grass and other fodder crops to grow and be harvested during the summer period;
- Establish well designed links between the low lying inbye fields and the hill summits so that stock can be easily moved around the agricultural land;
- Plan open space to make the most of maintaining existing wetland, more important open ground habitats and areas which would benefit from continued grazing, including any archaeological sites that have been identified;
- Ensure that where land is available for agriculture that there is access to water for stock;
- Explore how best to move stock/vehicles around the farm, and identify any opportunities to access fields directly (rather than moving through one field to another);
- When designing any woodland, create a 'long woodland edge' that provides opportunities for shade and shelter for stock and farmland, including establishing a shrub layer that will increase shelter, while also establishing valuable woodland edge habitat which will be add to biodiversity value;
- Ensure that any open ground is accessible to stock grazing, from either Corniehaugh or neighbouring farms;
- Establish some woodland that could be accessible from adjacent pasture with potential to be used, in the future, as woodland grazing if required;
- Establish some woodland that is easily accessible and might be used for a future wood fuel enterprise as part of a potential starter farm;
- Establish woodland above the inbye fields, so that trees will slow down water run off and maintain drier pastures across the most valuable fields;

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- Establish groups of trees that will shade the river at appropriate locations, to improve the habitat for fishing.

Appendix 5 – Summary report on the vegetation of Corniehaugh

MORAY/ABERDEENSHIRE, MAY 2012

Ben Averis

6 Stonelaws Cottages, East Linton, East Lothian, EH40 3DX. Tel: 01620 870280.

Email: benandalisonaveris@tiscali.co.uk

May 2012

A survey commissioned by Forest Enterprise Scotland



INTRODUCTION

In this survey, commissioned by Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) and carried out on 14th May 2012, the vegetation of Corniehaugh Farm, 8.5 km NNE of Huntly, Aberdeenshire, was mapped at the scale of 1:10,000 using the FES UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) classification. The approximate centre of the site is at Ordnance Survey grid reference NJ 577 463. The site has an area of 251 hectares and an altitudinal range of 70-340 m. The site has a mixture of improved grassland, arable farmland, native broadleaved woodland, conifer plantation and unenclosed open hill ground with mosaics of grassland, bracken, mire and heath. The lowest ground with enclosed improved grassland and arable land is gently sloping; the remainder is mostly moderately to steeply sloping. Most of the site

slopes toward the north and north-east, but the easternmost part is on a steep west-facing slope.

The fieldwork took one day to complete. Physical access around the site was generally easy. The weather was a mixture: partly warm, dry and sunny but with some heavy showers in the afternoon. Each mapped vegetation unit (polygon) was given a code number which is labelled on the 1:10,000 map. The FES UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) classification data for each polygon were entered onto a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The appropriate National Vegetation Classification (NVC) communities were

recorded and included in the spreadsheet. In the NVC coding a hyphen (H10c-H12c) indicates vegetation floristically intermediate between two NVC types.

This brief report provides a summary account of the vegetation and botanical interest of the surveyed area. The 1:10,000 map and the habitat data spreadsheet are provided separately but the map and the table of habitat codes (for each polygon) are also copied into this report for convenience (see Maps 1-2 and Table 2 at end of report).

BRIEF SITE DESCRIPTION

It is convenient here to divide the site into three parts:

1. Western end: conifer plantation

The westernmost part of the site is dense conifer plantation with a very narrow roadside strip of birch-dominated damp woodland (NVC W7c) along its northern edge. Botanical interest here is low.

2. Central part: enclosed farmland

This enclosed farmland on gently sloping ground is mainly species-poor *Lolium perenne* improved grassland (NVC MG7). Two of the fields have arable land. Also within this area are two sets of farm buildings (each including house and garden), a road, and small areas of broadleaved and mixed woodland (NVC W7 and W8, and a very small area dominated by conifers), gorse scrub (W23), damp grassland with *Juncus effusus* (MG10) and *Deschampsia cespitosa* (MG9) and species-poor *Holcus lanatus* grassland (no NVC type). That part of the very narrow strip of land between these fields and the River Deveron has coarse neutral grassland (MG1) and tall *Phalaris arundinacea* fen (S28), with some broadleaved woodland (W8e) and a little rosebay willowherb (OV27), but it appears that most of this area is outside the Forestry Commission's ownership.

Botanical interest in this central part of the site is mostly very low because of the strongly anthropogenic, modified and intensively managed nature of most of the land. However, the woodland areas are of low to medium interest.

Giant Hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum* was seen in the strip of woodland east of Woodfold farm buildings (i.e. polygon 10).

3. Remainder of the site: mixed semi-natural vegetation mosaic

This large area (the largest of these three subdivisions of the site, and the one extending onto the highest ground) has very varied vegetation.

Native broadleaved woodland occupies much of the lower ground. In the west this is mainly damp downy birch- and alder-dominated woodland (W7 – Photographs 1 and 3) with other trees including rowan, goat willow, grey willow, beech and whitebeam, and with abundant *Deschampsia cespitosa* and *Juncus* spp. on the ground. *Carex laevigata* (Photograph 4) is widespread within this woodland. The western woodland also contains some old beech trees and a superb old specimen of whitebeam *Sorbus aria* (Photograph 5). In the east there is extensive woodland of birch, alder, rowan, goat willow, grey willow, ash and sycamore; this has ground vegetation varying from grassy and rushy (W7 and (Photograph 10) W1) on damp, gentle to moderate slopes, through grassy with small herbs (W11d – Photograph 11) on drier, steeper ground, to moss/grass-dominated (W17c – Photograph 12) on the steepest ground and thinnest soils in the far NE.

The rest of this area is mainly acid grassland (U4 – see Photograph 2) interspersed with damper *Deschampsia cespitosa* grassland (MG9; Photographs 1-3) and *Juncus effusus* grassland (mainly MG10) and wetter *Juncus acutiflorus/effusus* mires (M23; Photographs 1-3), and, on the higher slopes, *Calluna vulgaris*-dominated heath (H10c-H12c with small areas of the damper H21 community – see Photographs 7 & 9) and two areas of semi-improved grassland (U4b and U4b-MG6) and improved grassland (MG6). Some U4 and MG6 grassland in the south-east forms a smaller outlying area of enclosed farmland at a higher altitude than that described above in the central part of the site. Small areas of gorse scrub (W23) are scattered widely within this area.

Botanical interest through this large area is mostly at a medium level, the best areas being the woodland, heath and damp to wet MG9 grasslands and M23 rush mires. *Carex laevigata* occurs in the MG9 grasslands and M23 rush mires in the west. *Listera cordata* and the moss *Ptilium cristacastrensis* (Photograph 8) were found in the higher parts of the heath, near the southern site boundary. There is a well grown whitebeam tree in U4 grassland in the west (Photograph 6), about 300 m south of the woodland specimen mentioned above.

DESCRIPTIONS OF HABITAT TYPES

These are described mainly under NVC headings.

W1 *Salix cinerea*-*Galium palustre* woodland (belongs within UK BAP Priority habitat 'Wet woodland'): patches of grey willow over a rushy ground layer with species

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including *Juncus effusus*, *J. acutiflorus*, *Cirsium palustre* and *Deschampsia cespitosa*; forms part of the upper zone of wet woodland in the south-east of the site.

W7a *Alnus glutinosa*-*Fraxinus excelsior*-*Lysimachia nemorum* woodland, *Urtica dioica* sub-community (belongs within UK BAP Priority habitat 'Wet woodland'): woodland of ash, alder, bird cherry and wild cherry, with a ground flora including *Urtica dioica*, *Galium aparine*, *Aegopodium podagraria*, *Ranunculus repens*, *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, *Deschampsia cespitosa* and *Geranium robertianum*; occupies damp ground in two very small wooded valleys/gullies within the enclosed lower parts of the site.

W7b *Alnus glutinosa*-*Fraxinus excelsior*-*Lysimachia nemorum* woodland, *Carex remota*-*Cirsium palustre* sub-community (belongs within UK BAP Priority habitat 'Wet woodland'): woodland of downy birch, alder, grey willow and goat willow, with a ground flora including *Juncus effusus*, *J. acutiflorus*, *Deschampsia cespitosa*, *Filipendula ulmaria*, *Carex laevigata* and the mosses *Calliergonella cuspidata* and *Brachythecium rivulare*; on damp, gently sloping land in the west and east of the site.

W7c *Alnus glutinosa*-*Fraxinus excelsior*-*Lysimachia nemorum* woodland, *Deschampsia cespitosa* sub-community (belongs within UK BAP Priority habitat 'Upland mixed ashwood'): woodland of downy birch, goat willow, rowan, ash and bird cherry, with ground vegetation with abundant to dominant *Deschampsia cespitosa* mixed with other species including *Filipendula ulmaria* and *Carex laevigata*; on gently sloping ground in the west of the site.

W8e *Fraxinus excelsior*-*Acer campestre*-*Mercurialis perennis* woodland, *Geranium robertianum* sub-community (belongs within UK BAP Priority habitat 'Lowland mixed deciduous woodland'): woodland of ash, alder, downy birch, bird cherry, wych elm and beech, with herb-rich ground vegetation including *Silene dioica*, *Geranium robertianum*, *Symphytum tuberosum* and *Ranunculus ficaria*; on sloping, well-drained ground in two very small wooded valleys/gullies within the enclosed lower parts of the site.

W11d *Quercus petraea*-*Betula pubescens*-*Oxalis acetosella* woodland, *Stellaria holostea*-*Hypericum pulchrum* sub-community (belongs within UK BAP Priority habitat 'Upland birchwood'): birch-dominated woodland with some rowan and goat willow, and grassy ground vegetation with *Holcus mollis*, *Agrostis capillaris*, *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, *Oxalis acetosella*, *Viola riviniana*, *Veronica chamaedrys* and mosses including *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus* and *R. triquetrus*; on well-

drained, gentle to steep slopes; extensive in the far east of the site; small patches further west (these smaller areas classified to NVC community level only).

W17c *Quercus petraea*-*Betula pubescens*-*Dicranum majus* woodland, *Anthoxanthum odoratum*-*Agrostis capillaris* sub-community (belongs within UK BAP Priority habitat 'Upland birchwood'): birch-dominated woodland with ground vegetation consisting mainly of *Deschampsia flexuosa* and extensive carpets of mosses including *Hylocomium splendens* and *Rhytidiadelphus loreus*; *Vaccinium myrtillus* and *Luzula sylvatica* also present in places; patches of W17c occur in association with the less mossy W11d woodland in the far east of the site (W17c on thinner and evidently more acidic soils than W11d).

W23 *Ulex europaeus*-*Rubus fruticosus* agg scrub: small patches of gorse scrub occurring among grasslands (especially U4) and, more locally, heaths, in many parts of the site.

H10c-H12c: heath intermediate between H10c *Calluna vulgaris*-*Erica cinerea* heath, *Festuca ovina*-*Anthoxanthum odoratum* sub-community and H12c *Calluna vulgaris*-*Vaccinium myrtillus* heath, *Galium saxatile*-*Festuca ovina* sub-community (belongs within UK BAP Priority habitat 'Upland heathland'): heath with a canopy of *Calluna vulgaris* (25-40 cm tall), among which *Erica cinerea* and *Vaccinium myrtillus* are common along with the grasses *Deschampsia flexuosa*, *Agrostis capillaris*, *Festuca ovina* and *Nardus stricta*, the sedge *Carex binervis*, the herbs *Potentilla erecta* and *Galium saxatile*, and carpets of mosses including *Hypnum jutlandicum*, *Hylocomium splendens*, *Pleurozium schreberi* and *Rhytidiadelphus loreus*; widespread on the upper slopes, much of it in mosaics with U4 acid grassland.

H21a *Calluna vulgaris*-*Vaccinium myrtillus*-*Sphagnum capillifolium* heath, *Calluna vulgaris*-*Pteridium aquilinum* sub-community (belongs within UK BAP Priority habitat 'Upland heathland'): similar to the H10c-H12c described above, but with the moss carpets including many patches of *Sphagnum capillifolium*; occurs as patches within the more extensive H10c-H12c heath on the upper slopes in the south of the site; flora includes *Listera cordata* (seen only once) and the moss *Ptilium cristacastrensis* (seen in three places).

M6d *Carex echinata*-*Sphagnum fallax/denticulatum* mire, *Juncus acutiflorus* sub-community (belongs within UK BAP Priority habitat 'Upland flush/fen/swamp'): mire with tall swards of *Juncus acutiflorus* and carpets of mosses including *Sphagnum fallax*, *S. palustre* and *Polytrichum commune* (these mosses indicating acidic soil conditions); occurs on wet, gently upper slopes in the south-east of the site, in mosaics with the more neutral M23 and MG9 communities.

M23a *Juncus effusus/acutiflorus-Galium palustre* rush-pasture, *Juncus acutiflorus* sub-community (belongs within UK BAP Priority habitat 'Upland flush/fen/swamp', except within enclosed farmland where it belongs to 'Purple moorgrass & rush pasture' priority habitat): mire with swards of *Juncus acutiflorus* accompanied by herbs such as *Filipendula ulmaria*, *Galium palustre* and *Rumex acetosa*, the sedge *Carex laevigata*, the grasses *Deschampsia cespitosa* and *Holcus lanatus*, and the mosses *Callierginella cuspidata*, *Brachythecium rivulare* and *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*; on damp to wet, gently sloping ground in the south and west of the site.

M23b *Juncus effusus/acutiflorus-Galium palustre* rush-pasture, *Juncus effusus* sub-community (belongs within UK BAP non-priority habitat 'Fen/marsh/swamp'): similar to the M23a just described, but with *Juncus effusus* as the dominant rush; much less extensive than M23a at this site but occurs locally on damp, gently sloping ground in the central-west part.

MG1 *Arrhenatherum elatius* coarse grassland (belongs within UK BAP non-priority habitat 'Neutral grassland'): coarse grassland with swards of *Dactylis glomerata*, *Arrhenatherum elatius* and *Holcus lanatus*; small areas on well-drained slopes in among improved grassland in the north of the site; some is in mosaic with woodland (polygon 10) or has scattered mature trees (polygon 14).

MG6 *Lolium perenne-Cynosurus cristatus* pasture (belongs within UK BAP non-priority habitat 'Improved grassland'): improved grassland with abundant *Lolium perenne*, *Holcus lanatus*, *Ranunculus repens*, *Trifolium repens* and smaller amounts of other species such as *Cerastium fontanum* and *Dactylis glomerata*; occupies one gently sloping field in the south-east (polygon 91).

MG7 *Lolium perenne* leys and related grasslands (belongs within UK BAP non-priority habitat 'Improved grassland'): species-poor, improved grassland with swards of *Lolium perenne* and little else; occupies most of the enclosed farmland in the central part of the site.

MG9 *Holcus lanatus-Deschampsia cespitosa* grassland (belongs within UK BAP non-priority habitat 'Neutral grassland'): coarse grassland with abundant tussocks of *Deschampsia cespitosa* accompanied by other species including *Holcus lanatus*, *Juncus effusus*, *J. acutiflorus*, *Rumex acetosa*, *Ranunculus repens*, *Filipendula ulmaria* and *Carex laevigata*; common on damp, gently sloping ground in the western half of the site.

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MG10a *Holcus lanatus*-*Juncus effusus* rush-pasture, Typical sub-community (belongs within UK BAP non-priority habitat 'Neutral grassland'): damp grassland in which tussocks of *Juncus effusus* grow abundantly among other species including *Deschampsia cespitosa*, *Holcus lanatus*, *Ranunculus repens* and *Geum rivale*. Occurs on damp, gently sloping ground in the western and central parts of the site, in association with MG9 and U4 grasslands and, in polygon 25, MG7 improved grassland.

U4 *Festuca ovina*-*Agrostis capillaris*-*Galium saxatile* grassland (belongs within UK BAP non-priority habitat 'Acid grassland' except within enclosed farmland where it belongs to priority habitat 'Lowland dry acid grassland'): short grassland with swards of *Agrostis capillaris* and *Anthoxanthum odoratum*; much appears closest to the Typical sub-community U4a (with other species including *Festuca ovina*, *Galium saxatile*, *Potentilla erecta*, *Veronica chamaedrys*, *Luzula multiflora*, *Conopodium majus*, *Viola riviniana*, *Rumex acetosa* and mosses including *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*, *Hylcomium splendens* and *Pseudoscleropodium purum*), and widespread on well-drained slopes in the central and western parts of the site and especially extensive in the central-south in polygons 71 and 72; some (especially in polygon 92 in the SE) is closer to the semi-improved *Holcus lanatus*-*Trifolium repens* sub-community U4b which has less *F. ovina*, *G. saxatile*, *P. erecta*, *L. multiflora*, *V. riviniana* and *H. splendens*, and includes some *Lolium perenne* and *Trifolium repens*.

U20 *Pteridium aquilinum*-*Galium saxatile* community (belongs within UK BAP non-priority habitat 'bracken'): bracken-dominated vegetation with an associated flora similar to that of the U4 grassland described above; on well-drained sloping ground; locally common in the west of the site; also occurs very locally in the east.

S28 *Phalaris arundinacea* fen (belongs within UK BAP Priority habitat 'Lowland fen'): vegetation dominated by tall swards of *Phalaris arundinacea* accompanied by abundant *Symphytum tuberosum*; on level to gently sloping ground just south-west of the River Deveron, about 200 m NE of Corniehaugh farm buildings.

Conifer plantation (belongs within UK BAP non-priority habitat 'coniferous woodland'): this is dense conifer plantation with a very limited ground flora; there is a large (37 hectare) block of conifer plantation in the west, and some much smaller ones scattered further east among the grasslands and heaths.

Built-up areas and gardens (UK BAP non-priority habitat): the three areas classed as this habitat type are Woodfold and Corniehaugh farms and the road running NNW-SSE through the site.

Holcus lanatus-*Ranunculus repens* grassland (belongs within UK BAP non-priority habitat 'Neutral grassland'): this consists largely of *Holcus lanatus* and *Ranunculus repens* and is species-poor; some of it is rather weedy, with species including *Cirsium arvense* and *Rumex obtusifolius*; this vegetation, which does not fit into any NVC community, occurs locally on gentle lower slopes in the west of the site.

Juncus effusus 'acid grassland' vegetation (belongs within UK BAP non-priority habitat 'Fen/marsh/swamp'): in this vegetation, *J. effusus* is abundant or dominant, with a lower layer of vegetation similar to the U4 grassland described above; small patches of this rushy vegetation are scattered among U4 grassland in the central part of the site.

BRIEF ASSESSMENT OF BOTANICAL INTEREST

UK BAP Priority habitats

Nine UK BAP Priority habitats were found in this survey:

Lowland Dry Acid Grassland (NVC U4). This refers only to a small proportion of the U4 grassland found in this survey: i.e. polygons 26, 92, 93 and 95, which are within the enclosed and more intensively managed parts of the site. The remaining U4 grassland is not considered here as belonging to this UK BAP Priority habitat because it is in the large unenclosed part of the site.

Upland Heathland (NVC H10c-H12c and H21a). This is widespread and locally extensive on the upper slopes.

Upland Flush, Fen & Swamp (NVC M6d and M23a). This is scattered widely on the middle and upper slopes. The much smaller area of M23 within the enclosed farmland is classed separately as Purple Moorgrass & Rush Pasture (see below).

Purple Moorgrass & Rush Pasture (NVC M23). This refers to the small area of M23 rush mire occurring within the enclosed, more intensively managed part of the site. The remaining M23 is either Upland Flush, Fen & Swamp (where it belongs to the M23a sub-community; see above) or Fen/Marsh/Swamp non-priority habitat (M23b sub-community).

Upland Mixed Ashwood (NVC W7c). This is the damp W7c woodland found in the west of the site.

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Upland Birchwood (NVC W11 and W17). The largest area of this habitat is the woodland on NW-W-facing slopes in the far east of the site, but there are also smaller areas in the west.

Wet Woodland (NVC W1 and W7a/b). This is the W7 woodland in the south-east of the site, with much smaller areas within the enclosed farmland in the central part of the site.

Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland (NVC W8e). Very small extent just south of Mains of Lesmoir farm buildings.

Lowland Fen (NVC S28). This is the *Phalaris arundinacea* fen just south-west of the River Deveron about 200 m north-east of Corniehaugh farm buildings.

Other aspects of botanical interest Although no markedly uncommon plant species or plant communities were found in this survey, some other aspects of the vegetation and flora are worthy of mention:

The western half of the site has a good population of *Carex laevigata*, a species with a mainly western and southern distribution in Britain, but also occurring less commonly further east in and around the Pennines and North York Moors, the Cheviot and eastern Southern Uplands, and the Grampian foothills.

The occurrences of *Listera cordata* and *Ptilium crista-castrensis* in H21 heath vegetation are of interest. These are both mainly northern species. H21 heath and M19 *Calluna vulgaris*-*Eriophorum vaginatum* bog (not seen at this site) are the main habitats of *L. cordata* in Britain. *P. crista-castrensis* is found mainly in woods but also occurs less commonly in heaths, especially where north-facing. Neither of these species is very common in Britain.

The heathland areas are also of interest in that they contain abundant *Erica cinerea*. This in itself may not seem a feature of interest, but *E. cinerea* is commonest in the west of Britain and favours warm, sunny, south-facing slopes. It is interesting to see it so plentiful here on a cool north-facing slope in this colder north-eastern part of Britain. Something similar can be found in NE-facing heathland at Ittingstone, west of Huntly (surveyed in 2010).

The two mature whitebeam trees in the west of the site (Photographs 5 and 6) were probably planted here but are good specimens of this species, especially the northern tree (Photo 5) which is notably large and impressive for a whitebeam.

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT FUTURE MANAGEMENT

If tree-planting is carried out here, the following native tree and shrub species appear appropriate to the habitats present:

In the 'marginal' areas of H10-12 heath: birch (either or both species), Scots pine (if considered native here – this must be borderline or just outside the current native range of this species), rowan and juniper. The largest block of heath (which includes some H21 damper heath) has existing botanical interest and appears worth keeping unplanted, though natural regeneration of trees and shrubs here would not be undesirable.

In the areas of U4 grassland and U20 bracken: oak (either or both species), birch (either or both species), rowan, hazel, aspen and hawthorn.

In the areas of MG1, MG6, MG7, arable land and 'non-NVC' neutral grassland (mainly *Holcus lanatus* and *Ranunculus repens*): oak (either or both species), birch (either or both species), ash, wych elm, rowan, hazel, aspen, bird cherry, wild cherry, hawthorn and blackthorn

In the areas of MG9, MG10 and M23: downy birch, ash, wych elm, rowan, alder, bird cherry, grey willow and goat willow. In my opinion it would be best to keep the M23 rush mires and associated MG9 grasslands (i.e. the more botanically interesting wetlands, with species including *Carex laevigata*) unplanted, to allow any woodland there to develop more naturally; much of the M23 and MG9 vegetation is close to existing woodland, so there could be a good seed source anyway for natural regeneration in these places.

If the area is deer-fenced and grazing removed completely in order to allow young (planted or naturally regenerating) trees to grow more freely, it would be best for this to be a temporary measure so that grazing can return when the young trees are large enough to withstand browsing (this might take about 20 years). Any period of at least a few years without grazing means some risk of a reduction in botanical diversity through ground vegetation becoming more strongly dominated by a small number of common, vigorous plant species; the longer this period is the greater the risk of losing smaller plants and causing a noticeable reduction in the diversity and conservation interest of the ground flora.

COMMENTS ON THE SURVEY METHOD

As in previous surveys of this type, these comments were requested by FES as part of the contract. In general the survey method was found to be straightforward. The habitat classification is a broad one compared with the NVC, and for the most part there were no problems allocating vegetation and habitats to their appropriate types. Vegetation types can vary on a very small scale, so it is not surprising that many of the polygons are mapped as containing mosaics of two or more habitats. Within these mosaic polygons the percentage cover figures for each component can only be estimates: two surveyors would probably each record slightly different sets of percentages. The aerial photograph provided by FES was very useful in helping to define the vegetation boundaries.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This survey was commissioned by Forest Enterprise Scotland. The contract details – including the provision of the base map and aerial photograph of the site – were arranged by Philippa Murphy at the FES office at Huntly. I thank Jackie Cumberbirch (FES Conservation Ranger) for accompanying me during the fieldwork.



Photograph 1: looking north in MG9 *Deschampsia cespitosa* grassland, M23a *Juncus acutiflorus* mire and W7 damp birch woodland in the west of the site.



Photograph 2: looking south-east across MG9 *Deschampsia cespitosa* grassland and M23a *Juncus acutiflorus* mire to U4 acid grassland in the central-west part of the site

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Photograph 3: looking east in MG9 *Deschampsia cespitosa* grassland, to M23a *Juncus acutiflorus* mire and W7c damp birch woodland in the west of the site.



Photograph 4: smooth-stalked sedge *Carex laevigata* in W7 woodland in the west of the site.



Photograph 5: superb old whitebeam tree in woodland in the west of the site.



Photograph 6: whitebeam tree in grassland in the west of the site, about 300 m south of the tree shown in Photograph 5



Photograph 7: looking ENE in upper part of largest block of heathland in the south of the site, not far NE (downslope) of the summit of Fourman Hill.



Photograph 8: one of the populations of the northern moss *Ptilium cristacastrensis* in heath in the south of the site.

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Photograph 9: looking east in the south of the site, showing mosaic of heath and acid grassland in the foreground (polygon 83), scattered larches among grassland/heath mosaic in middle distance (polygons 84-86) and woodland and fields in the distance.



Photograph 10: willow-dominated wet woodland (W1) in the SE of the site (polygon 89)

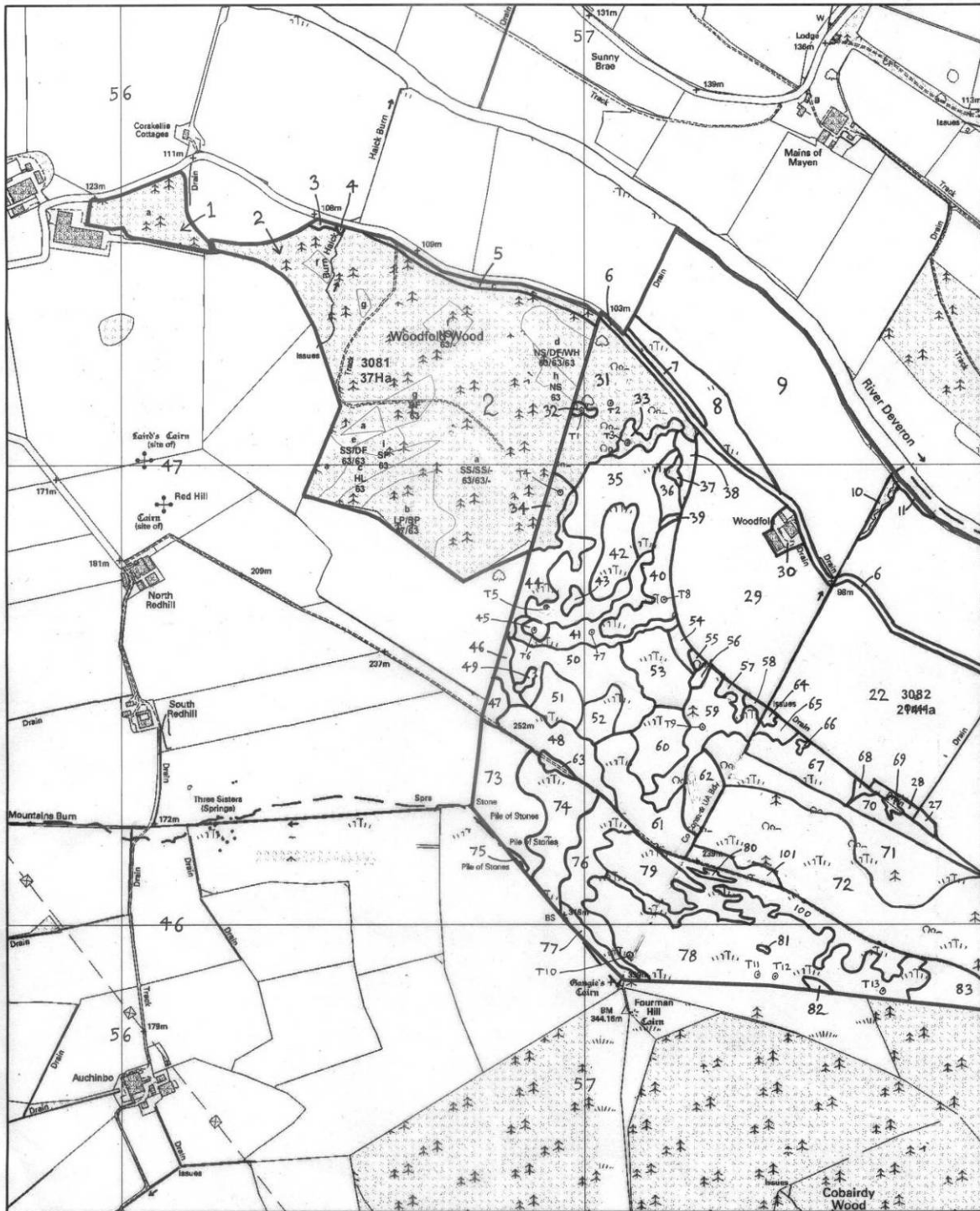


Photograph 11: grassy birch woodland (W11) on the NW-facing slope in the east of the site.



Photograph 12: mossy/heathy birch woodland (W17, including short growth of *Vaccinium myrtillus*) on a steep NW-facing slope in the east of the site (polygon 97).

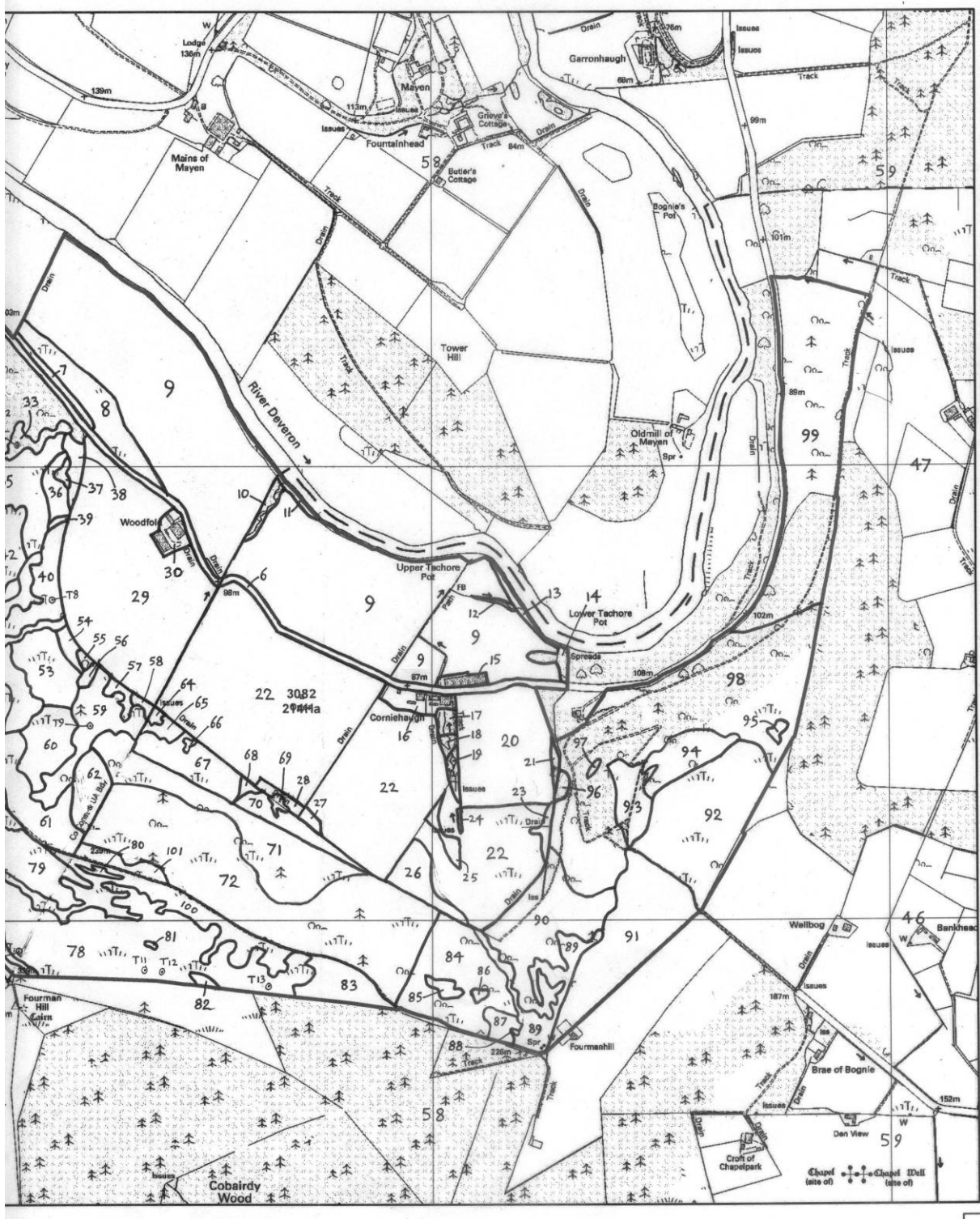
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Map 1 Habitat map of western part of Corniehaugh, Moray/Aberdeenshire, NJ 577 463

Mapped by Ben Averis on 14th May 2012. Habitat codes for polygons are in Table 2. Target notes (T1, T2 etc) are described in Table 1.

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Map 2 Habitat map of eastern part of Corniehaugh, Moray/Aberdeenshire, NJ 577 463

Mapped by Ben Averis on 14th May 2012. Habitat codes for polygons are in Table 2. Target notes (T1, T2 etc) are described in Table 1.

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Table 1. Target notes recorded in this vegetation survey at Corniehaugh, Moray/Aberdeenshire, by Ben Averis on 14th May 2012

Code number	Grid reference	Species	Common Name	Quantity and habitat
T1	NJ 5699 4712	Carex laevigata	Smooth-stalked sedge	Widespread in MG9 grassland and M23 rush mire
T2	NJ 5706 4714	Carex laevigata	Smooth-stalked sedge	Widespread in W7 woodland
T3	NJ 5709 4705	Carex laevigata	Smooth-stalked sedge	Widespread in MG9 grassland and M23 rush mire
T4	NJ 5695 4694	Sorbus aria	Whitebeam	One old tree in woodland
T5	NJ 5692 4669	Sorbus aria	Whitebeam	One mature tree in grassland
T6	NJ 5689 4664	Carex laevigata	Smooth-stalked sedge	Widespread in W7 woodland
T7	NJ 5702 4664	Carex laevigata	Smooth-stalked sedge	Widespread in MG9 grassland and M23 rush mire
T8	NJ 5717 4671	Carex laevigata	Smooth-stalked sedge	Widespread in W7 woodland
T9	NJ 5726 4643	Carex laevigata	Smooth-stalked sedge	Widespread in MG9 grassland and M23 rush mire
T10	NJ 57099 45931	Listera cordata	Lesser Twayblade	A few plants in heath
T11	NJ 5738 4589	Ptilium crustaceum	a moss	A few plants in heath
T12	NJ 5741 4589	Ptilium crustaceum	a moss	A few plants in heath
T13	NJ 5765 4586	Ptilium crustaceum	a moss	Many plants (some good patches) in heath

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Table 2 Habitat data for Corniehaugh, Moray/Aberdeenshire, NJ 577 463. Mapped by Ben Averis on 14th May 2012. For polygon code numbers see Maps 1-2.

Polygon Number	Habitat 1	% 1	NVC1 (i)	NVC1 (ii)	NVC1 (iii)	Habitat 2	% 2	NVC2 (ii)	NVC2 (ii)	Habitat 3	% 3	NVC3 (i)	Habitat 4	% 4	NVC4 (i)
1	CONIFEROUS WOODLAND	100													
2	CONIFEROUS WOODLAND	100													
3	UPLAND MIXED ASHWOOD	100	W7c												
	neutral grassland	100	MG9												
5	UPLAND MIXED ASHWOOD	100	W7c												
6	built up areas & gardens	100													
7	neutral grassland	70	MG9	MG10		broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	30	W23							
8	neutral grassland	100													
9	improved grassland	100	MG7												
10	WET	55	W7a			LOWLAND	40	W8e		neutral	5	MG1			

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	WOODLAND					MIXED DECIDUOUS WOODLAND				grassland					
11	LOWLAND MIXED DECIDUOUS WOODLAND	90	W8e			other tall herb and fern tall ruderal	10	OV27							
12	neutral grassland	100	MG10												
13	LOWLAND FEN	60	S28			neutral grassland	40	MG1		other tall herb and fern tall ruderal	0	OV27			
14	neutral grassland	100	MG1												
15	built up areas & gardens	100													
16	built up areas & gardens	100													
17	WET WOODLAND	50	W7a			LOWLAND MIXED DECIDUOUS WOODLAND	50	W8e							
18	CONIFEROUS WOODLAND	100													
19	WET WOODLAND	100	W7a												

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20	arable and horticulture	100													
21	broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	100	W23												
22	improved grassland	100	MG7												
23	broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	100	W23												
24	broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	100	W23												
25	neutral grassland	100	MG10												
26	LOWLAND DRY ACID GRASSLAND	100	U4												
27	neutral grassland	100	MG10												
28	PURPLE MOOR GRASS & RUSH PASTURE	100	M23a												
29	arable and horticulture	100													
30	built up areas &	100													

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	gardens														
31	UPLAND MIXED ASHWOOD	95	W7c			UPLAND BIRCHWOOD	5	W11							
32	UPLAND, FLUSH FEN OR SWAMP	65	M23a			neutral grassland	35	MG9							
33	broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	40	W23			neutral grassland	40	MG9		UPLAND, FLUSH FEN OR SWAMP	15	M23a	acid grassland	5	U4
34	UPLAND MIXED ASHWOOD	50	W7c			UPLAND BIRCHWOOD	50	W11							
35	acid grassland	100	U4												
36	neutral grassland	100													
37	CONIFEROUS WOODLAND	100													
38	bracken	80	U20			broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	10	W23		neutral grassland	10	MG9			
39	neutral grassland	100	MG10												
40	WET WOODLAND	98	W7b			UPLAND BIRCHWOOD	2	W11							
41	UPLAND, FLUSH FEN OR SWAMP	60	M23a			neutral grassland	40	MG9							

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42	bracken	90	U20			acid grassland	10	U4							
43	neutral grassland	90	MG9	MG10		acid grassland	10	U4							
44	neutral grassland	90	MG9	MG10		acid grassland	10	U4							
45	WET WOODLAND	50	W7b			UPLAND BIRCHWOOD	50	W11							
46	neutral grassland	65	MG9	MG10		acid grassland	35	U4							
47	broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	100	W23												
48	acid grassland	50	U4			neutral grassland	49	MG10		broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	1	W23			
49	UPLAND MIXED ASHWOOD	100	W7c												
50	neutral grassland	60	MG9			acid grassland	20	U4		bracken	20	U20			
51	acid grassland	80	U4			UPLAND HEATHLAND	10	H10c-H12c		broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	5	W23	neutral grassland	5	MG9
52	neutral grassland	60	MG9	MG10		bracken	40	U20							
53	acid grassland	90	U4			neutral grassland	5	MG9		fen, marsh and swamp	5				
54	neutral	100													

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	grassland														
55	broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	50	W23			neutral grassland	50	MG9							
56	fen, marsh and swamp	100	M23b												
57	broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	100	W23												
58	UPLAND BIRCHWOOD	100	W11												
59	UPLAND, FLUSH FEN OR SWAMP	50	M23a			neutral grassland	30	MG9		fen, marsh and swamp	20	M23b			
60	acid grassland	90	U4			bracken	10	U20							
61	bracken	90	U20			acid grassland	10	U4							
62	acid grassland	90	U4			bracken	10	U20							
63	broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	100	W23												
64	broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	100	W23												
65	UPLAND, FLUSH FEN OR SWAMP	30	M23a			neutral grassland	30	MG9		fen, marsh and swamp	30		broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	10	W23

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66	broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	100	W23											
67	acid grassland	100	U4											
68	UPLAND, FLUSH FEN OR SWAMP	100	M23a											
69	broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	100	W23											
70	bracken	44	U20			neutral grassland	44	MG9		acid grassland	10	U4	fen, marsh and swamp	2
71	acid grassland	100	U4			fen, marsh and swamp	0							
72	acid grassland	100	U4											
73	neutral grassland	100												
74	acid grassland	75	U4			broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	25	W23						
75	broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	100	W23											
76	UPLAND HEATHLAND	70	H10c-H12c			acid grassland	30	U4						
77	acid grassland	100	U4											

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78	UPLAND HEATHLAND	100	H10c-H12c	H21a											
79	UPLAND HEATHLAND	100	H10c-H12c												
80	UPLAND HEATHLAND	100	H10c-H12c												
81	CONIFEROUS WOODLAND	100													
82	CONIFEROUS WOODLAND	100													
83	UPLAND HEATHLAND	50	H10c-H12c			acid grassland	50	U4							
84	acid grassland	85	U4			UPLAND HEATHLAND	15	H10c-H12c							
85	UPLAND HEATHLAND	100	H10c-H12c												
86	UPLAND HEATHLAND	100	H10c-H12c												
87	acid grassland	100	U4												
88	CONIFEROUS WOODLAND	100													
89	WET WOODLAND	30	W1	W7b		UPLAND, FLUSH FEN OR SWAMP	50	M23a	M6d	neutral grassland	10	MG9	broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	5	W23
90	WET WOODLAND	70	W7b			UPLAND BIRCHWOOD	10	W11		UPLAND, FLUSH FEN OR SWAMP	10	M23a	neutral grassland	10	MG9
91	improved	100	MG6												

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	grassland														
92	LOWLAND DRY ACID GRASSLAND	100	U4b												
93	LOWLAND DRY ACID GRASSLAND	50	U4			bracken	50	U20							
94	UPLAND HEATHLAND	50	H10c- H12c			broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	40	W23		bracken	10	U20			
95	LOWLAND DRY ACID GRASSLAND	60	U4			broadleaved, mixed & yew woodland	40	W23							
96	WET WOODLAND	100	W7b												
97	UPLAND BIRCHWOOD	100	W17b	W17c	W11										
98	UPLAND BIRCHWOOD	100	W11d												
99	UPLAND BIRCHWOOD	100	W11d	W17c											
100	acid grassland	65	U4			UPLAND HEATHLAND	35	H10c- H12c							
101	acid grassland	75	U4			UPLAND HEATHLAND	25	H10c- H12c							

Appendix 6 – Public consultation results

Date: 16 July 2014

Introduction

A public consultation event for the draft Land Management Plan for Corniehaugh, Rothiemay was carried out on 16th July 2014 at the Rothiemay village hall. This took the format of a drop-in session and ran between 1.30pm and 7pm. The event was advertised by sending out letters to all known neighbours and any other members of the public or local groups who had already expressed an interest in the process. Additionally posters were put up in Rothiemay village shop & post office and on the village notice board two weeks before the event. Also a quarter page advert with accompanying editorial was placed in the Huntly and Keith editions of the Huntly Express, the local paper for the area.

Summary of results

Approximately 40 people attended during the course of the afternoon and evening. 7 questionnaires were completed either on the day or submitted subsequently. See figure 1 for the results.

The comments on the questionnaires or in letters sent in with questionnaires completed after the event are recorded in table 1.

Due to the small sample size no attempt has been made to analyse or interpret the information obtained but has simply been recorded for use during the next stages of the planning process.

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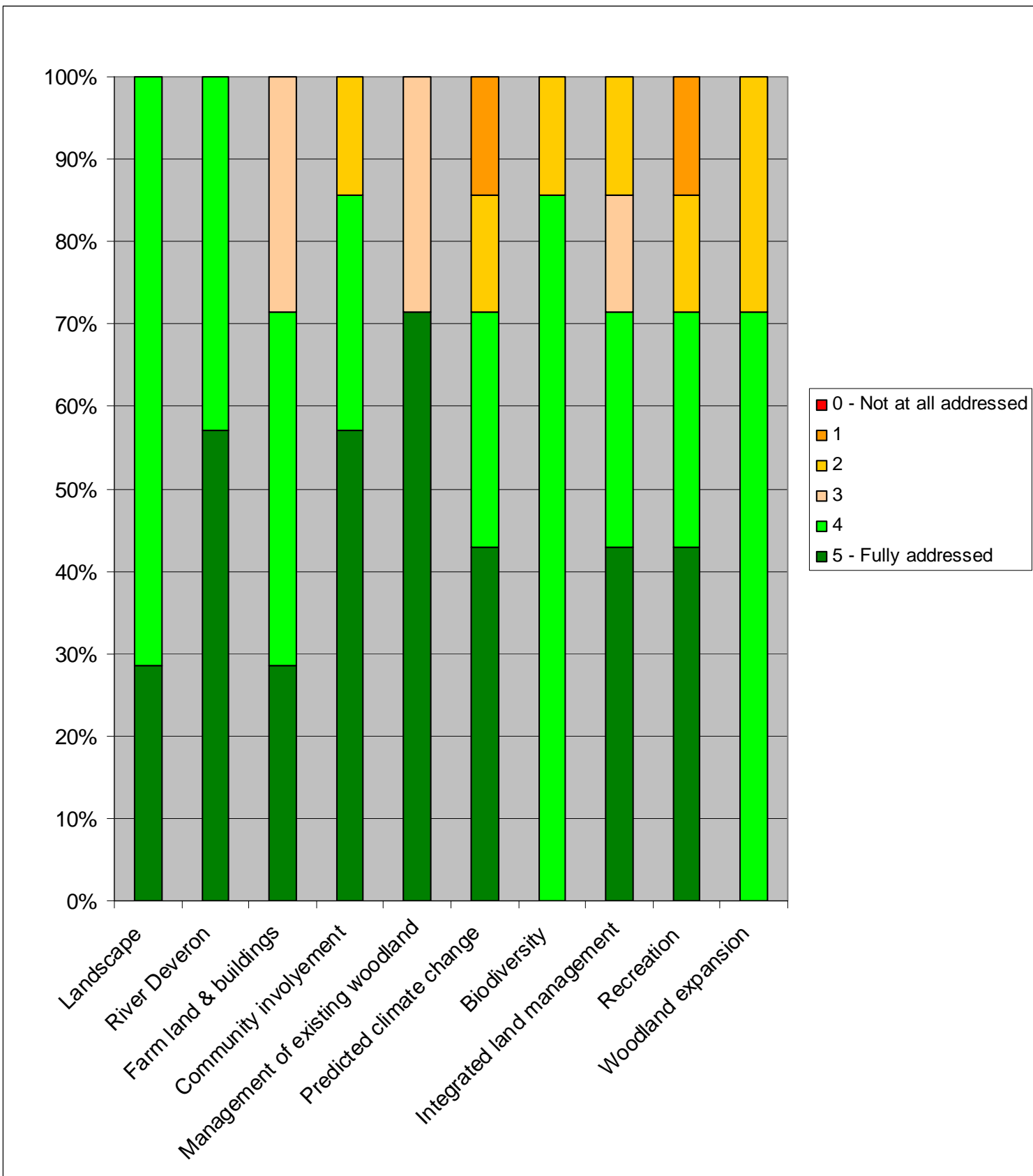


Figure 1 – Questionnaire results

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Comments received	Forest district response
Not enough advertising of initial plans or secondary meeting. Otherwise, well explained on the night.	Direct letter and email contact, posters in village post office and notice board, adverts in local paper and on FCS web site.
Could be more attention paid to recreation e.g. sites designated for holiday lets spread around landscape or within existing planted areas. Also more done with footpath over hill, maybe to form rest/viewpoints with planting clumps e.g. Scots pine. Otherwise generally favourable.	Recreation is not a priority for this site currently so there will be no formal provision of recreation facilities. However as the woodlands develop they will be informally monitored for public usage and the decision for no formal facilities may be reviewed in light of any new information.
Excited by prospects of starter farm of a more 'full time' size that could be expanded as the business develops.	Pleased with positive comment on plan.
Corniehaugh is a beautiful place and needs to be kept vital which means some changes need to be made and those proposed are forward looking and inclusive.	Pleased with positive comment on plan.
I think that this starter farm is a perfect example of where modern farming in Scotland is moving toward. With land prices the way they are it is impossible for anyone to get a start in the industry. This splits the need for both food production/biofuel production also keeping people in the countryside. Any opportunity to extend Scottish hardwood forests and support farming is in everyone's best interest.	Pleased with positive comment on plan.
What is the best use of this land? <u>Best:</u> Agricultural. Field sizes and building capacity suit an established business. <u>Second best:</u> Starter unit: With the remit from the government to set these up, this is possible for the Commission. It is an excellent objective, but the field sizes, which should not be reduced for agricultural efficiency, are larger than low funded starters can afford to stock.	Advice on the size of the starter farm and the mix of better land to summer grazing has been sought from the Principal Agricultural Officer for the Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspections Division and his

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Any tree planting needs to be limited to where there is not going to be a future need of the land for agriculture (i.e. not Macaulay class 3 or 4).

Aberdeenshire council: Report on last meeting and since: environment team: not bothered.

Contrast this with their land strategy investigation which has asked Hutton Institute to provide which land in N.E. Scotland will be available for the predicted increase in food need (i.e. for arable use). This site is part of their arable potential. This has been a very viable agricultural unit with grazing for cattle on the hill matched to the capacity of the lower ground to provide winter feed and bedding, with buildings adequate for winter housing. Breaking it up is not in Scotland's interest.

Aesthetically: The plan overleaf only refers to views from the land. The vast majority of people who enjoy views enjoy them from across the valley from the B road.

As the background information says the Deveron is a series of sudden vistas. The view for those travelling from Rothiemay after Bog wood or travelling to Rothiemay past Mayen are car stopping and seen by many people. The Corniehaugh/Woodfold vista is an entity, breaking it up with sporadic planting of trees will spoil this by-product of agricultural practice.

Riparian planting: 1. On the Deveron it is often the sections where trees grow that erosion occurs because of the rise (13 ft at this point) and debris coming down the river. This debris catches up in the trees forcing the water to divert round and undermine the trees. The roots then catch the next debris and collapsing trees pull the bank down. (See opposite bank).

2. Tree roots block drains, holding water back and creating boggy areas in fields above. Example at 'A' overleaf.

recommendations have been followed.

The Aberdeenshire Land Use Strategy Pilot will run until March 2015 and the findings will feed into the next Scottish Government review of the Land Use Strategy due in 2016. Currently no decision/guidance on specific areas of land has been reached. The figures in appendix 2 show that with appropriate management this area is able to support both woodland and agriculture with a minimal impact on its productive potential.

Visualisations of the proposed planting from three different locations out with the site had been prepared with input from the FCS Landscape Architect. These were presented at the consultation session.

Current research and advice to landowners has been used to plan the areas of riparian planting.

Discussions with Grampian Conservancy have shown that in their experience of similar schemes for riparian planting the blocking of field drains has not been an issue in practice. If should become a problem in the future we will work with the

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<p><u>Planting circled overleaf:</u> This is to the south and uphill of the fields, therefore shading it and preventing it from drying out.</p> <p>The land has a ditching and drainage system which has kept the better land dry. It has to be maintained, but when this was done it was successful.</p> <p>The whole of the cropped area should be maintained in this way and not lost.</p>	<p>starter farm tenant to address the issue.</p> <p>Current research and evidence shows that planting uphill of better land has a beneficial influence in reducing water run-off from improved grassland.</p>
<p>As a starter farm it will allow a new entrant the opportunity to consolidate their existing business and bring/encourage new blood to the industry. It is extremely difficult to source finance to purchase land in today's climate and tenancies are very few and far between to find currently, which makes it impossible for new entrants to get a foot hold in the industry.</p> <p>Creating Corniehaugh as a starter farm is a superb idea and the FCS should be commended for finding a solution to a very big problem. In my opinion the plans on the reverse are ideal with a good size of unit potentially being offered.</p>	<p>Pleased with positive comment on plan.</p>
<p>It would be good if after a period of time the other available land/grazing was offered to the resident new start farmer, before let on the open market.</p>	<p>The potential to extend the starter farm unit to a potential follow on unit has been built into the plan and detailed in the text (4.1 Starter farm).</p>
<p>I think the proposed plan is a good start, but need not be set in stone; it will evolve as it progresses.</p>	<p>Pleased with positive comment on plan.</p>
<p>Good to see another starter farm in the area. Young and 'older' want-to-be farmers do not get many opportunities to get a fair chance to get started.</p> <p>As a small farmer myself I would be interested in the possibilities of making this a feasible unit to allow us to expand and become a more integrated business allowing me to finally become a full time</p>	<p>Pleased with positive comment on plan.</p>

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farmer.	
Like the look of trying to combine forestry and farming and perhaps the starter farmer could be involved in the establishment/management of the forestry providing additional income in the early and following years of the business.	Pleased with positive comment on plan.
Access track between riparian planting and river would be appreciated.	The low planting density of the riparian areas will easily accommodate the passage of a tracked digger to allow river bank maintenance to be undertaken.
Remove trees from neighbouring boundary.	The area of trees in question has been removed from the final plan as requested.
I think there is a valuable opportunity to reinstate and upgrade the footpath which connects the upper road from Bognie to the lower road to Rothiemay. This would provide a circular walking route from Rothiemay via Fourman hill and the riverside path. It also has potential for a cycle route from the upper to lower road.	Recreation is not a priority for this site currently so there will be no formal provision of recreation facilities. However as the woodlands develop they will be informally monitored for public usage and the decision for no formal facilities may be reviewed in light of any new information.
<p>I think that the plan is totally flawed. This has been a good going farm which was improved in viability by taking in the hill ground which it is now proposed to replant.</p> <p>Scenically the plans are catastrophic. The views from the roads (Rothiemay to Bridge of Marnoch) on both sides of the river, are unparalleled, as are those from the old road which crosses the Fourman hill (Bognie to Rothiemay). This is a favourite walk of many and the tree planting will obscure the views. Incidentally those views show that the Deveron valley at this point is already heavily wooded – WHY MORE?</p> <p>If government pressure obliges the Forestry Commission to plant more trees why not buy some flat uninteresting ground to do it and not spoil some of our best countryside.</p> <p><u>Suggestion:</u> Cut your losses and sell it off as a full</p>	<p>The FCS Landscape architect has been involved in the production of the plan. Visualisations of the proposed planting from three different locations out with the site had been prepared.</p> <p>The views from the track have been considered and the planting designed to maintain these from a proportion of the route.</p>

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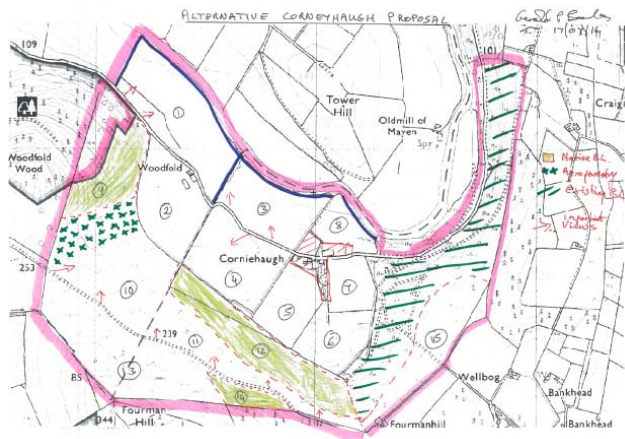
<p>size farm.</p>	
<p>Providing another starter farm can only be a positive for the local community and economy. This gives an opportunity for the establishment of a livestock or arable farm. It will give a balance to the area of adding commercial forestry integrated with agriculture. There is a good balance of areas being planted within the farm, not conflicting with it being better ground retained for the starter farm. The proposed plantings will blend in with the existing landscape. This will be a great farm for the lucky person who is successful in getting the unit.</p>	<p>Pleased with positive comment on plan.</p>
<p>I attended the consultation exercise yesterday at Rothiemay Hall, because of the concerns that have been made to myself by several clients in the immediate area.</p> <p>My client concerns have been wide ranging, so I thought it appropriate to take the time to visit and run through Corneyhaugh to give myself a better understanding of the issues being raised.</p> <p>The questions you posed on your comments sheet were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) How could the draft plan be improved to address the land management objectives of the site? 2) Primary objective – introduction of a starter farm. 3) Secondary Objectives – Manage existing broadleaf woodland; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish new productive broadleaved woodland Establish new riparian woodland Maintain appropriate open habitat 	

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I have drawn up a draft proposal that I believe would be far more appropriate for the site than the current proposals.

Bearing in mind the WEAG recommendations that:

- 1) Land with significant agricultural potential should be "sheltered" from planting.
- 2) Maintaining the critical mass of agricultural land and management routes to link hill grazings with lowland agricultural land, is a key component in planting design and extent.
- 3) Ensuring there is a balance between improved land and hill grazings.
- 4) Starter unit design should reflect assets available.
- 5) Some starter units should accommodate those that have already established enterprises on annual grazings and are looking to improve the resilience and viability of their growing business and help provide a 2nd step on the farming ladder.



It is clear from the Macaulay Land Capability map that the

areas within fields 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, amounting to approximately 74ha are virtually all Grade 3.2 land and should remain in agriculture. The proposed riparian woodlands should not be planted because:

- a) They are likely to have a major shading impact on the Deveron.
- b) The area of good grade 3.2 agricultural land taken out is excessive.

The shading of the river Deveron will be a positive benefit of the riparian planting as detailed in "Keeping Rivers Cool - Getting ready for climate change by creating

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- c) There will be a significant impact on the drainage of the arable land.
- d) A more appropriate route to protecting the water courses would be through a Rural Development scheme which will permit the new tenant to be involved in Pillar 2 support in this Water Priority Catchment, which would also enable all associated burns and stock waterings to be fenced out and piped water supplies installed. Some trees would also be able to be planted in these margins, but at a more appropriate scale than that currently proposed.

The banking area of fields 9, 10, 11 and 12, amounting to approximately 53ha, appears to be graded 4.2 on the Macaulay Land Capability map.

I suggest a more appropriate course of action is:

- a) Plant approximately 8.5ha native broadleaves in parcel 9.
- b) Establish pilot area of approximately 7ha of agroforestry at the north end of parcel 10, keeping the entire area of 10 and 11 available for summer grazing for the starter farm, total area approximately 30ha, including the agroforestry area.
- c) Plant approximately 14ha of Native Broadleaves on the slopes above the arable fields. The planting area beside the footpath will be kept well back to maintain the outstanding views across the Deveron valley.

The area south of the footpath, fields 13 and 14, amounts to approximately 20ha. This is mostly grade 4.1 and 4.2, with a small area of Grade 5.3 and 6.2.

I suggest that:

riparian shade" produced by the environment agency in 2012. See comment above regarding field drainage as there is currently no evidence for this.

- a) The area 13 remains unplanted with the open skyline being maintained.
- b) The area 14 be planted with Native Broadleaves, below the adjoining coniferous plantation on the adjoining land holding.

The area to the east of the existing broadleaf woodland, at field 15, approximately 12ha, is Graded 3.2 on the Macaulay Land Capability map. I suggest that this area continue to be grazed as per the current proposals, with a grazing corridor maintained to link with field 11.

The above proposals would ensure that:

- 1) The grade 3 land is maintained in agriculture.
- 2) The grassland linkages between the flood plain, arable land, slopes and hill grazings is maintained.
- 3) There will be a balance between available productive arable land, available buildings at Woodfold for stock and hill grazings.
- 4) The size of the starter unit would make better use of the steadings available.
- 5) The starter unit will provide an opportunity for a "next step on the ladder" applicant, with significant opportunities to be responsible for Pillar 2 work to reduce the impact of agricultural and forestry operations on the Deveron Priority Catchment.
- 6) My design is looking to ensure that the outstanding landscape is not despoiled and the critical viewing points are maintained and even enhanced.
- 7) My design is also looking to minimise the detrimental impact of overshading significant areas of land and river on the northern side of the plantings.
- 8) The overall impact would increase the viability of the starter unit, providing approximately 74ha of arable land, 12ha good grassland at field 15, reasonable sloping grazings and agroforestry grazing of

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<p>approximately 30ha and 17ha of reasonably productive hill grazings.</p> <p>9) The tree planting would be restricted to Native Broadleaf, because it is highly unlikely that on the north facing slopes that productive broadleaf woodland would ever produce a harvestable crop. The total area for planting would be approximately 32.5ha, including the Agroforestry area. Together with the 38.5ha of existing valuable broadleaf woodland, the total area in trees would be approximately 71ha.</p> <p>These proposals could provide an exemplar of how the creation of new woodlands can work with agricultural production, and also conform to the Green House Gas project ISO 14064-2 standards which specifies the principles and requirements to be met.</p>	<p>We have taken these comments into consideration as we have developed the plans and sought to modify the plans where possible, but were unable to accommodate all of the points made while achieving our objectives for this site.</p>
<p>We are generally against planting trees in this lovely unspoiled scenic area of the Deveron valley. There are <u>enough</u> trees already and we don't see any sense in planting even more! It should be left as it is.... If the proposal is pushed through as we fear it will, we would ask that the planting is as minimal as possible. For instance we ask ourselves if it is necessary to plant these dense commercial broadleaf areas? We are also worried that the existing natural woodland along the road will be ruined. If it has to be 'managed' as you call it – it should be done with the greatest care and certainly without <u>machines!!</u></p>	<p>Management of the existing woodland will be undertaken in a sensitive manner with reference to its semi-natural character. As stated in section 4.2.1 Existing woodland - "Any thinning would be limited to the well-drained ground and extraction will be undertaken with sensitive small scale machinery. Limited ground disturbance from extraction would stimulate regeneration but compaction and rutting will be avoided."</p>
<p>This comes in two parts, whether it is the best use of the land and whether the plan will achieve its purposes.</p> <p>The site has been an agricultural unit, producing suckler calves to the beef industry.</p> <p>The proposal is to reduce the current area of good [Land Capability 3(2)] agricultural land by about</p>	

50% to 49ha, the available hill grazing [4(1) and 4(2)] by about 75% to 16ha, retaining the grade 6 and 5 open land with, at best, a potential sheep grazing of one ewe to 5 ha. A portion of grade 3(2) on the eastern skyline will be left open, but this appears inaccessible to the proposed starter unit due to the decision to sell the access tracks elsewhere.

The land taken out of agricultural use is to be planted sporadically with deciduous, largely native, trees, giving a Parkland effect. To achieve this, a much larger area of land than that which is to be planted is to be fenced off to prevent animals, wild or domestic, from damaging the trees.

The longer term intent is that the ground below and among the trees is to be restored to grazing.

The purpose of the whole scheme is threefold:

1. to capture and store carbon
2. to improve public enjoyment
3. to improve wildlife habitat

For a short period of time a piece of research carried out on feed-lots in the USA was held to demonstrate that cattle were one of the most serious causes of greenhouse gas release into the atmosphere. More recent research, in this country, has shown beef production using suckler cows on hill grazing is, at worst, carbon-neutral.

Based on what is still limited knowledge of climate change (that knowledge is still growing), the Forestry Commission was ordered to organise the planting of a quarter of Scotland in trees. Since then there has been a realisation that two other major influences have to be taken into account in addition to acknowledging the new research. These are the rapid increase in world population and the much more varied effect of climate change than that which we naively predicted a few years ago. Erratic and unpredictable crop failures due to flood and drought are causing concern over the ability to feed this growing population.

The woodland planting will not be in a 'Parkland' style. All areas will be planted with productivity as an important objective except the area specifically highlighted for wider spacing that will create a more natural moorland and woodland interface and also provide a section along the track used for recreation with 'glimpse' views of the Deveron valley.

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Ensuring a future supply of food is becoming an issue all governments need to address. Countries with much deeper pockets and greater forethought than ours are already working to ensure the countries that are net exporters of food are tied into supplying them.

This means this country, with shortfall in self-sufficiency in excess of 30%, has to optimise its home production. Agricultural land is easily converted to forestry, but the reverse is very laborious, energy- (therefore carbon-) expensive and it takes decades for the soil structure to return to a state which allows optimum production.

What one person enjoys is very different from what gives pleasure to another. Should this site appeal to those who see it regularly or to those who never come near it? The Forestry Commission has advertised in the less-read local press that local people may come to open meetings. Eventually it managed to contact most of the immediate neighbours. It has a statutory obligation to notify certain national organisations and local authorities. A local organisation has visited all the rural properties immediately around the site to ask what the occupants want. The report on the first open consultation meeting reported the resulting 254 signatures of those who were opposed to woodland expansion here. The report did not mention the 2 who wanted woodland expansion, the 2 who were not bothered or the 2 who did not want to respond.

The enjoyment of Corniehaugh for over 90% of those who know the site is as a view from the B9117, particularly from grid references 3572/8478 and 3564/8483. A smaller group enjoy it from the road which passes through the property as do an even smaller group of enthusiasts who walk across the Queen's Road or the top of Fourman Hill.

Section 2.4 and appendix 3 provides figures for the amount of agricultural production lost due to the proposed area being planted. The Principal Agricultural Officer for Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspections view is that there would be no significant impact on the critical mass of the local agricultural industry.

Improving wildlife habitat is an aim that is really not possible to assess objectively. We all have our own opinions about what wildlife should be encouraged. Every habitat has its own wildlife. Which birds are we to improve the habitat for – the corncrake, the skylark, the crow, the buzzard or the cross-bill? Land-fill is the ideal habitat for increasing seagull numbers. Planting trees will change the wildlife habitat, improving it for the flora and fauna which need woodland, but will destroy the habitat for the creatures which need open spaces.

The potential of the plan to achieve its purpose

CARBON CAPTURE

Whether food is produced on this land or elsewhere, it has to be produced. Moving it does not delete it. Trees are capable of sequestering and storing carbon. Destroying what is an efficient, carbon-neutral food producing unit requires a very significant benefit from what is put in its place. According to the proposal the timber to be planted will be valuable when it is felled. This is contrary to local experience which has found the returns for deciduous trees, even when grown in commercially planted stands, have not made up for the loss of the income which would have come from the land if kept in agricultural use. If felled for firewood, the predicted use, the stored carbon is obviously released, negating much of the storage value.

PUBLIC ENJOYMENT

Altering a landscape which is almost universally loved by those who know it as a view to look at and as a point from which to enjoy sweeping views of a truly mixed landscape, does not achieve this. What is there now was summed up by the driver of a foreign lorry on the B9117 who said it is "The most beautiful view in Scotland".

The parkland proposal would change it, perhaps achieving the accolade of a pretty view. The Commission's own report highlights the attraction of the peek-a-boo nature of the Deveron Valley. This vista is one of the most striking examples because of the suddenly open view. Breaking it up as proposed would, in the words of an SAC consultant, be "aesthetically criminal".

WILDLIFE HABITAT

Those who know the view from the top of this land know the variety of landscape and the heavy emphasis on trees, both commercial and native conifer and deciduous trees. At best this scheme will change the immediate habitat to suit a different type of wildlife. The most damaging effect will be on the surrounding areas of open land where the predators which patrol open land will be out of balance with the remaining population of small ground-nesting bird and mammal species.

In the ecological survey commissioned for this scheme it is made clear that the land fenced out to allow the trees to establish themselves will be irrevocably changed, making its eventual return to valuable grazing land (which the plan says is the intention) not viable. This land will achieve nothing higher than a reservoir of noxious weeds perpetually seeding into the farmland.

Conclusion

The plan will not improve this site and will not even achieve the aims set out in it. Taking into account the nature of the site and its surrounding area, the best use for this land remains as an agricultural unit.

It is incredibly difficult to believe that a government body would use the opinion of one agricultural consultant, who thinks the maximum size for a starter unit is 50 hectares, to justify the taking of grade 3 land out of agricultural production to create parkland. This grade of land

is in short supply in Scotland at a time when there are plenty of warnings that growing enough food to feed the population will be a serious challenge in the near future. The grade 3 land should not be planted, nor should its productive potential be impaired by overshadowing from adjacent trees.

Any plan should also include the measures the Commission intends to take for the repair and maintenance, particularly in respect of drainage and weed control, required to ensure the good husbandry of its agricultural property.

Addenda

1. Riparian planting to reduce diffuse pollution:
The Deveron is a river which rises sharply with a substantial current when flooding. A four metre vertical rise is regularly recorded at this point. Observation of the opposite bank shows how the presence of trees, in which debris catches during flooding, causes eddies which undercut the bank, exposing roots which repeat the process, pulling the bank away. Where trees are not present the bank is held together by the permanent grass with debris passing over it. Further, the fields all have tiled and stone drains. Trees planted above these will choke them with roots and block access to repair them. Fields behind will fail to drain, with the consequent poaching creating a far greater risk of diffuse pollution. The Commission's representatives have pointed out SEPA's requirement that the plan needs to address the risk of diffuse pollution. All indications at the presentation were that a standard response, which takes no account of the actual risk, because the risk has not been assessed for the site, is what has been adopted in the plan. Recent flooding events have shown all too clearly that standard responses have been wrong when applied without proper risk assessment for each circumstance.

2. Caution needs to be taken in placing trees on the 4(2) land on the steeper brae. The plan

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suggests this will keep the hill water off the fields below. There is an existing ditch system which, when properly maintained, achieves this. No maintenance has been done since the previous owners left. With the brae being steep and north-facing, any trees above the grade 3(2) fields need to be planted far enough back from the field boundary to allow the sun to reach and dry the ground in the fields.

3. Maintenance is also required at the western end of the brae, where no control of the bracken has been done since the property changed hands. According to the staff at the recent meeting, no action on their plan is likely within another three years, by which time this area will be of no value for grazing. In fact the Eastern end of the brae, largely free of bracken and being adjacent to the permanent 3(2) grassland is better suited for the hill-grazing block. Livestock access to the hill has been, and should continue to be, through these fields because the fields above the steading at Woodfold are suited to crop silage and barley.

4. Approximately one and a half million pounds of publicly owned money has already been sunk into this project to the embarrassment of all concerned. Some irrevocable steps have already been taken. A practical scheme which makes the best use of the land in view of restrictions imposed as a result of the purchase by the Forestry Commission, and its ongoing obligations, is needed. A plan that addresses the issues has been prepared by Gerald Banks. It benefits from a simplicity which will save the Forestry Commission a great deal of expense. The caveat is that his plan's area of proposed tree planting will still result in change from both local preference and the best use of this piece of land.

We have taken the comments in this response into consideration as we developed the plan and sought to modify the plan where possible, but were unable to accommodate all of the points made while achieving our objectives for this site.

Whilst being pleased about the plans for the starter farm, I do not think you go quite far enough in providing rough grazing for the starter farm.

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<p>Also from a visual point of view I do not think there should be any conifers on the Fourman Hill. Thus providing a break in the existing coniferous plantations on either side of Corniehaugh.</p> <p>I think one of the main objectives should be to preserve the landscape of this special part of the Deveron valley. On your map you do not mention any conifers, but I think there is a block of mixed conifers and broadleaf right in the centre of the area. I would prefer the summer grazing for the starter farm to extend across more – also so that the grazing area was not entirely bracken.</p> <p>I do not like the conifer and broadleaf (mixed) right in the middle of the landscape. I think that more of that area should be kept as summer grazing in the starter farm. Your plans shows the grazing on what is, at the moment, bracken covered area. I think the farm should have more and better grazing.</p>	<p>The broadleaf and conifer mixed woodland will be a predominanatly broadleaf woodland with a maximum of 15% conifers in the mixture.</p>
<p>I welcome the idea of keeping the greater part of the best farmland at Corniehaugh as a starter-farm. To plant good farmland with trees would be undesirable economically and would be, besides, highly detrimental to the scenic value of this part of the Deveron Valley. The new plan shows that thought has been given to these considerations. However, I do not see the point of planting a high proportion of the rough grazing on the slopes of the Fourman Hill (below the track known as the Queen’s Road, with the superb views) with a low density mixture of conifers and broadleaves. This can hardly be a money-making exercise; and on the other hand it would detract from the viability of the starter-farm, which would be greater (as I understand it) if more and greater quality rough grazing were included with the farm. (To be clear, I would certainly not favour higher density planting as it would destroy the view from the track.)</p> <p>I can see that a great deal of thought has gone into many aspects of this plan, balancing a variety of different interests, but I do question the</p>	<p>The balance between open land and woodland planting is based on the recommendations of the Principal Agricultural Officer in terms of the starter farm and the FES landscape architect interms of landscaping.</p>

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<p>purpose of the low-density planting to replace the rough grazing, and urge you to reconsider it.</p>	
<p>Background The Scottish Tenant Farmers Association welcomes the opportunity to comment on Forestry Commission Scotland's forest design plan for Corniehaugh farm. STFA represents tenant farmers throughout Scotland and has been active in promoting the development of the starter farm initiative. STFA also sat on the Woodland Expansion Advisory Group and is a signatory to the final recommendations.</p> <p>STFA is pleased that FCS has reconsidered its plans for Corniehaugh and seems committed to ensure that the most productive land on Corniehaugh remains in agriculture. Beef farming is the mainstay of the North East and despite the FCS' assurance that the cessation of cattle production on Corniehaugh will have little effect on the local economy STFA remains of the view that any further erosion of the cattle herd and agricultural activity in this area will have a negative impact. STFA is also pleased that the FCS has heeded the opposition of the local community to blanket planting in such a scenic river valley and has sought their views.</p> <p>STFA notes that the primary objective for the land at Corniehaugh and Woodfold is the establishment of a starter farm and the secondary objectives relate to: Managing existing broadleaved woodlands to provide a diverse income from the land; Establishing new productive broadleaved woodlands to benefit income diversity, reduce water runoff, extend habitat networks and to sequester carbon; Establishing new riparian broadleaved</p>	

woodland that will mitigate the effects of diffuse pollution into the river Deveron while retaining access for fishing interests ; Maintaining open space on the hill tops, to reflect the visual prominence of the hill, maintain hill grazing options and views from the access route and also extend the holdings habitat diversity.

Whilst appreciating FCS' intention to establish an integrated farming/forestry unit STFA would like to ensure that the agricultural potential of the unit is not adversely affected by the planned tree planting.

Starter Farm

STFA notes that FCS' original objection to developing a starter farm on Corniehaugh on the grounds that it was too large, have been overcome by restricting the amount of land available. We note that 9ha of grade 3(2) land, 17ha of permanent pasture and 46ha of rough grazing are being withheld and would question the wisdom of planting grade 3(2) land and productive permanent pasture with trees restricting future agricultural options. STFA would welcome the addition of additional ground to the starter unit over a period of time and would suggest that the future tenant of should be selected with a view to the holding progressing to a full-time unit over a period of time.

Much of the planned tree planting is of limited commercial value and carbon sequestration and mitigation of climate change would seem to be its prime purpose. We would argue that permanent pasture is a valuable carbon sump and grazing management would be an equally effective means of meeting climate change objectives

whilst retaining the agricultural potential of the holding and *“contributing to the local and national agricultural and wider economy by providing home grown food for “Scotland’s table”.*

Whilst we understand the thinking behind planting of trees along water courses and the river’s edge we would be concerned that this would interfere with field drainage.

Conclusion

STFA remains of the view that Corniehaugh and Woodfold Farms should never have been purchased for tree planting. We consider that the agricultural activity should remain the prime focus of the holding and trees planting should be complementary to the agricultural activity. It has been suggested that the holding be released back on to the market, however we consider that retaining the ownership of the farm as a tenanted unit would represent public value for money and provide an opportunity for a new entrant farmer.

STFA is broadly in support of the FCS intentions for Corniehaugh and looks forward to the conclusion of this consultation and the speedy appointment of an agricultural tenant.

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THE MARNOCH & DEVERON VALLEY PROTECTION GROUP
August 2014

This is an initial response from the Marnoch and Deveron Valley Protection Group to the latest plans for Corniehaugh Farm; these were outlined at the last public consultation session, held in Rothiemay on 16th July. We understand that those plans will now be submitted to the Conservancy for approval as they stand and thereafter, a period of one month will be available for comment from consultees and members of the public.

Notwithstanding the Group's preferred option for leaving the farm in its current form with minimal intervention, we would like to make the following comments on the current plans:

1. From the scenic point of view, this exception part of the Deveron valley is mainly enjoyed by the public from the B9117. In particular when travelling from Rothiemay to Bridge of Marnoch along a fairly straight stretch of road between Incheorsie and the Mains of Mayen. From here the view of the western side of the Corniehaugh 'basin' is sheltered from sight by the Woodfold Wood; it includes the 16ha of summer grazing, marked 10 on the attached map. The current plans indicate this open area would allow an uninterrupted view from the river to summit of the Fourman hill. Unfortunately the break in the planting would not be appreciated from the main access point across the river, as it would be hidden by Woodfold from there. Conversely the elevated view from the Queen's road through the opening would also be restricted by the same landform to the West - it would block the vista up river. The Deveron would only be seen downstream from the historic pathway. Using this part of the existing rough grazing to achieve open landscape objectives may be the option least likely to succeed.
2. Due to the non-maintenance of the farm over the past three years, the area retained for summer grazing had been overtaken by bracken; it is therefore the least productive part of the rough grazing to keep, other than the summit.
3. The panoramic view from the Queen's road which runs along the side of the Foreman Hill is exceptional and acknowledged as such by the FC's landscape expert and by the Reporter to the Scottish Ministers who refused an appeal for a nearby wind turbine in June 2014. The route is also designated as a Core Path by Moray council. The proposed band of broadleaf and conifer woodland covering two thirds of the existing rough grazing below the path would block out much of the view down to the river and the country beyond. The central portion of the Corniehaugh basin needs to be kept open so that the sweeping impact of the open views to and from the summit of the Foreman can be maintained. This would also retain the best rough grazing.
4. The view from the minor road which passes through Corniehaugh Farm and by Woodfold on the South side of the river would be impeded by a band of trees along the waterside fields. The rationale for this planting is that tree shadow would cool the water of the river and restrict polluted run-off from the adjacent fields. However as the immediate riverbank is not in the ownership of the Commission, these trees would encroach on the best arable land of the farm and at the warmest time of the year when the sun is at its highest would have to attain a considerable size before any shadow reached the river. Further more, while it is acknowledged that SEPA classes the Deveron as a Diffuse Pollution Priority, the major problems have been associated with particular areas of the river. If Corniehaugh has not been identified as a 'hotspot' for pollution and is unlikely to become one as a 'starter unit' under part-time management, it is not necessary to plant trees along the river.
5. The report suggests a starter farm of 49 ha, although the previous plan provided a larger unit of 69h. One of the reasons for planting on some of the grade 3.2 land is to keep the agricultural unit to this 'optimum' size. Using good arable ground for trees in order to restrict the size of the farm is not a convincing argument. It is understood at the time of writing that the prospective new owners of Corniehaugh farmhouse and buildings have horses and had wanted to acquire more land. Would it not be possible to rent fields (marked 7 & 8) on a short-term tenancy until such time as the future of the starter unit is clear. This would keep the initial farm within the suggested parameters while leaving the possibility of expanding it into a 'second stage' farm a later date with very little difficulty. It would also benefit income diversity, alternative land use and utilize the farm's arable assets to best advantage.
6. An expressed aim of the report is to "benefit income diversity for the landholding through new broadleaf and conifer woodlands." The experience of at least one local estate is that new woodland generates very little money and that much more income would have accrued from renting the ground.
7. Another aim is to extend habitat diversity. The farm already provides a diverse habitat for many species and as the enclosed map show, there is no shortage of woodland in the area - planting more trees will not increase habitat diversity, it will just increase the existing numbers of woodland wildlife. On the other hand, it would cut down the area of open habitat for ground nesting birds and predators. It has been noticeable in the local area that the numbers of oystercatchers, peewit and curlews have dwindled - reducing habitat would not help the situation. Nor would 'temporary' fencing out of newly planted areas; as the "vegetation report" (Appendix 5) states the longer this period lasts "the greater the risk of losing

We have taken these comments into consideration as we have developed the plan and sought to modify the plan where possible, but were unable to accommodate all of the points made while achieving our objectives for this site.

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smaller plants and causing a noticeable reduction in the diversity and conservation interest of ground flora."

Earlier this year the Marnoch and Deveron Valley Protection Group wrote to Bob Mackenzie and Richard Lochhead asking the Forestry Commission and the Scottish Government "to recognise the existing landscape, agricultural and amenity value of the farms by leaving them unplanted". 254 people signed this petition. To put the result in context, of those questioned in the immediate area between Rothiemay and the Bridge of Marnoch, only two wanted to see woodland expansion at Corniehaugh - two were not bothered and two declined to take part.

We suggest that the best solution for Corniehaugh would be to retain the land as a follow-on farm from a starter unit. This would help second stage young farmers and satisfy aspirations to maintain the outstanding character of the landscape; it would also reflect the value of the assets available, both in terms of agriculture and amenity and acknowledge the voice of local people who know and appreciate the area as part of daily life.

