Tilhill

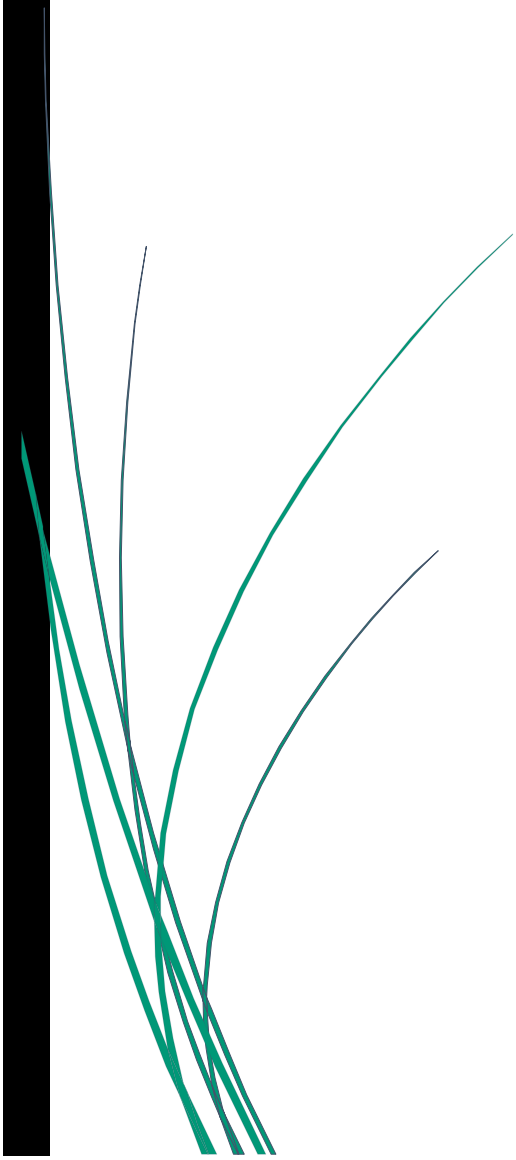
BSWGROUP member of binderholz

Ardhuncart Forest planning

2023 Scoping Report

- *Existing woodland*
- *Riparian potential*
- *Hill woodland potential*

Ardhuncart, Aberdeenshire



Date: **11 November 2023**

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Tilhill Area: North Highland, Huntly Office

Contents

1. Introduction

Following our initial 2021/2 scoping for a native woodland planting on Ardhuncart hill, this report investigates a more integrated woodland and nature restoration approach across the estate, including:

- Management and a future for various types of existing woodland
- Riparian woodland potential, supporting river habitat restoration efforts
- Native woodland creation schemes – Ardhuncart Hill and steeper ground south of the river

This report aims to assess potential projects and then “step back”, to enable the estate to take a more strategic view of priorities, before instructing detailed advancement and development.

We have therefore stopped short of developing costed implementation plans for each project at this stage (other than for initial maintenance work), pending further definition of land packages and likely implementation timelines. This work should however enable an informed consideration of options, to help develop an implementation plan along with other partners currently supporting the estate, notably Allathan Associates and CBEC.

2. Your Objectives for the Property

It is important that we fully understand your objectives. The following list shows your objectives as we understand them now. Please advise us if you disagree or would like to make changes.

1. Develop a landscape scale approach to integrated land use – a more natural ecology, from river to hill.
2. Improve the freshwater ecology of the river.
3. Work constructively with neighbours and the community towards a shared vision for the estate and a new balance between agriculture and other land use.
4. Help financially support works with grant funding and woodland carbon units

3. Existing Woodland

The table below is a summary of existing woodland on the estate and recommendations. It is based on compartments that have previously been managed as woodland. We have used the compartment numbers from previous forest plans before the estate was split up, to enable back-referencing if required. A full compartment listing is provided in Appendix V but previous data was very limited.

There will be no positive cash flows from any of these stands.

Compts	Description	Area (Ha)	Summary recommendations
5	Native broadleaves restocked 2019 with grant support. Understocked	3.44	Weeding (esp broom), beatup, and tube maintenance required
6	Native broadleaves in wetland. Restocked 1980/ 2018	1.86	Beatup (focussed on alder). Tube removal
26	Native broadleaves restocked 2000. Understocked	2.54	Stock fence maintenance, tube removal
23 and 4	Long established upland birchwood with pine and larch block to west	15.71	Ancient woodland characteristics. Deer pressure preventing regeneration. Fence to permit regen, possibly as part of a new woodland creation scheme.
17 and 7	Long established mixed conifers and broadleaves. Some steep ground	11.69	Ecologically valuable mature woodland habitat and visible in landscape. Retain. Conduct a tree safety survey along public road and farm access.
9	Mixed broadleaves and conifer – front section mature. On Lodge drive	1.53	Consider “future proofing” tree stability – remove conifer and any unstable beech. Regenerate to beech. Timber income to subsidise but net cost operation
3	1958 Scots pine plantation	3.62	Under-thinned. Options: fell now and restock along with new woodland creation on hill. OR: retain as seed source for hill woodland and accept will blow down.
27	Shelterbelt with deer damage and gaps.	0.98	Long established – has been clearfelled and restocked last p1990. Deer damage. No reasonable access. No intervention
28	Riparian native broadleaves	1.1	Map additional similar areas.

The compartment listing is slightly incomplete, with minor areas of particularly riparian woodland having not been fully recorded in the past. Examples of this would include the woodland below Ardhuncart farm and the wet woodland below Gardener’s Cottage. In future, it would be worthwhile mapping and including these areas in the estate’s woodland inventory too.

Young, recently restocked areas

Short term maintenance operations are required to enable the existing restocked areas (compartments 5 and 6) to meet stocking standards required by Scottish Forestry. This will involve brush-cutter weeding, replacing lost trees with large beatups and tube maintenance.


Compartment 5

Across all restocked areas (including compartment 26) urgent tube maintenance and (where possible) removal is required. Delayed removal often causes deformation as seen here in compartment 5, the most recently restocked area.

A costing for these maintenance operations is provided separately. Dealing with small woodland restock rehabilitation when delayed is unfortunately expensive.

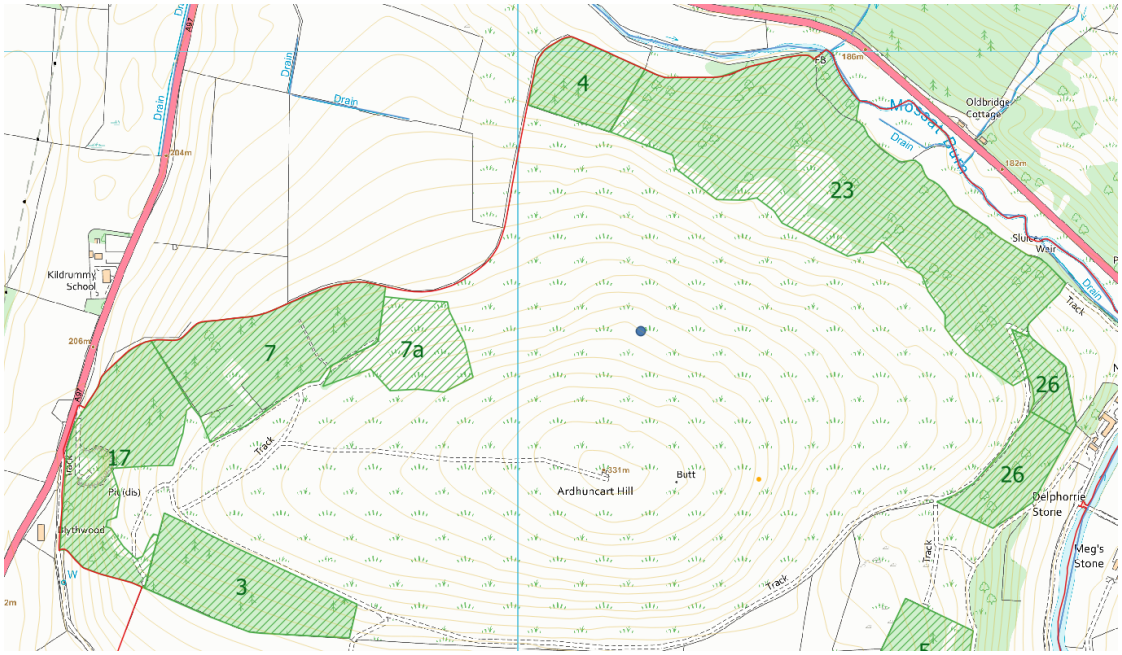
Deer pressure is clearly an issue, with vulnerable species like oak being browsed at tube height. Stock fence maintenance is also recommended as stock are clearly entering compartments 26 and 5.


Sheep access in Cmpt 5

Long established woodland with conservation value

A significant area of Ardhuncart woodland is officially designated as Long Established Plantation Origin (LEPO) on the estate (see Appendix II - Opportunities and Constraints map). This designation can cover a wide range of woodland types on the ground and requires assessment for any ancient woodland or conservation characteristics and habitats. We have provided an initial walk-over assessment as part of this work.

Compartments 7 / 17 and 23 have some important habitat and conservation attributes and it is recommended that these stands are managed with conservation as the main objective.



The upland birchwood above the Mossat burn, on the north flank of Ardhuncart Hill (compartment 23) has some characteristics of ancient semi-natural woodland. It is not designated as ASNW on the Native Woodland Inventory but this isn't definitive. See Appendix VI.

This woodland is likely to have high ecological value and potential, not just as an old upland birchwood in itself, but also in its relationship with the Mossat Burn: its nutrition and future conservation. Improving linkages with the burn is a priority for riparian woodland restoration.


Upland birchwood – Cmpt 23

However, with high deer numbers, sheep access and lack of protection, this woodland is unable to regenerate. It is recommended that should the adjacent hill woodland creation scheme go ahead, this area should be fenced in, to permit recovery.

The **mixed conifer and broadleaf woodland** of Compartments 7 and 17 on the west and northwest flanks of Ardhuncart Hill also has some conservation and landscape value.


Compartment 17

The majority of this area was likely (re)planted with a view to timber production. But even if the estate wished to fell and restock these stands, the very poor timber access and steep ground would mean that income would not cover restocking costs. A conservation objective is we think, the most obvious choice. Windblow will progress and with deer control, regeneration can follow, creating more diverse stand structures and valuable deadwood habitat.

A tree safety survey is recommended along the limited public road frontage and extending up the farm access.

Other mature forest stands

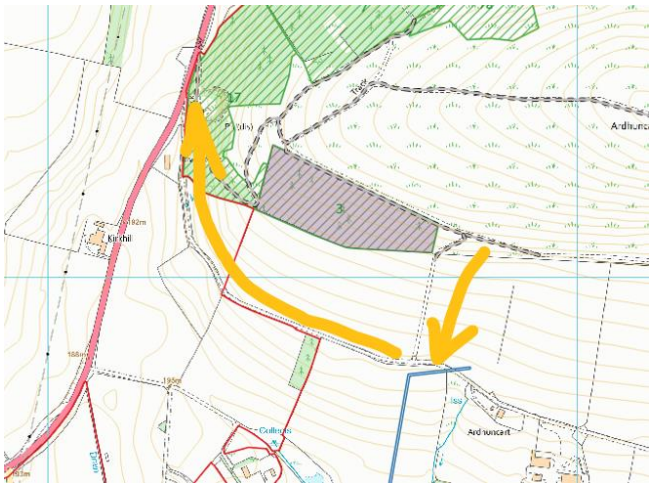
The **Compartment 3 Scots pine** has been thinned in the distant past but is now beyond further thinning which would precipitate terminal windblow. The stand doesn't have any significant native woodland attributes at this stage, due largely to grazing and high stocking. There are significant badger setts in this stand and onto the open hill.

There are two options here: fell now and restock along with new woodland creation on hill. OR: retain as seed source for a hill woodland and accept the stand will blow down.

If felled immediately prior to the new woodland creation exercise on the hill, allowing the area to be fenced into that scheme and utilise the efficiencies of restocking it along with the new planting, a small positive cash flow is likely, providing access costs are minimal.

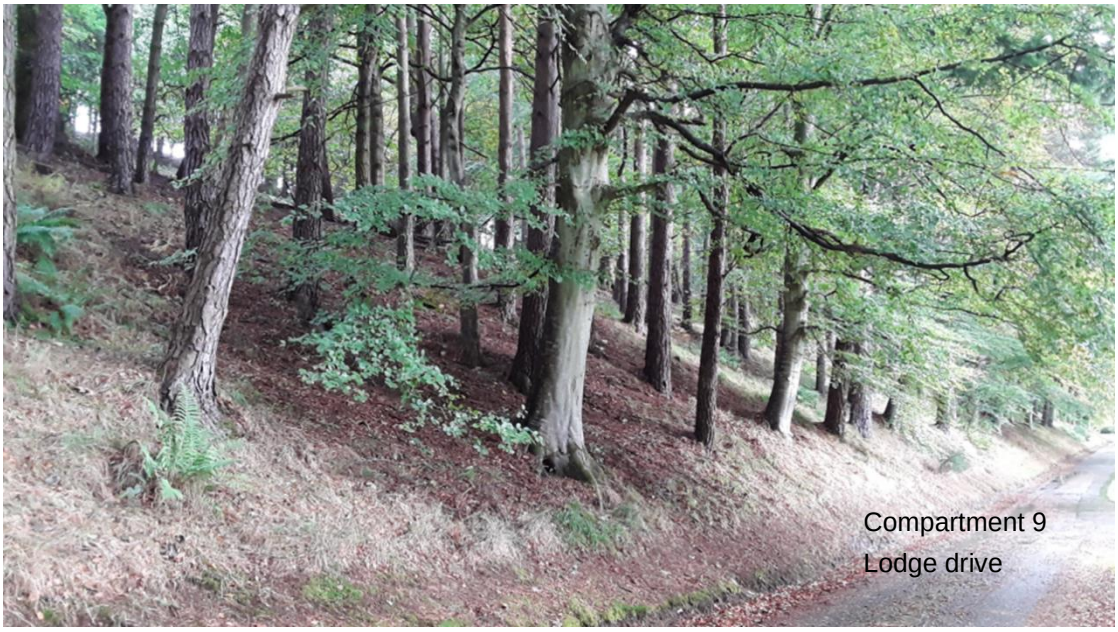
Felling permissions would be required from Scottish Forestry.

However the only realistic extraction route would be through the tenant farmer fields below, with timber stacked in field edges along that road for timber haulage. Any significant expenditure on the road could turn the exercise cash negative. Further investigations would be required to cost this proposal carefully.



The alternative, to retain the stand to develop naturally, is an equally valid option. At some point, the stand will be visibly wind damaged which would need to be accepted.

The **mixed stands on the approach to the Lodge** include some drawn old Scots pine and mature beech – some of which are likely to become increasingly unstable. The estate are currently considering arboricultural interventions for individual trees considered a safety risk. We recommend consideration of a more significant forestry operation: removing conifer and


Compartment 9
Lodge drive

any unstable beech on the front face, at the same time as felling the spruce above the track that bisects this block. Individual trees may be retained on the face, to help regenerate that bank to beech. Timber income would help subsidise the operation but with restocking, this would be a net cost operation. Harvesting and haulage would cause some damage to the access road and tracks so if this option is pursued, it is recommended to be timed before any access upgrades. Felling permissions would again be required from Scottish Forestry.

Linkages, expanding around existing woodland

Under cmpt 5 – above Delphorrie

Two minor linkages are put forward as options, linking and re-establishing woodland remnants between the Lodge and the hill above Delphorrie. Similar to other native remnants, the area above Delphorrie, between and below compartments 5 and 26, is effectively dying and shrinking through grazing by sheep and deer.

Bracken and broom are taking hold on this slope, so any woodland establishment would be expensive. Power lines would obviously affect the net plantable area.

4. Hill Schemes - woodland creation

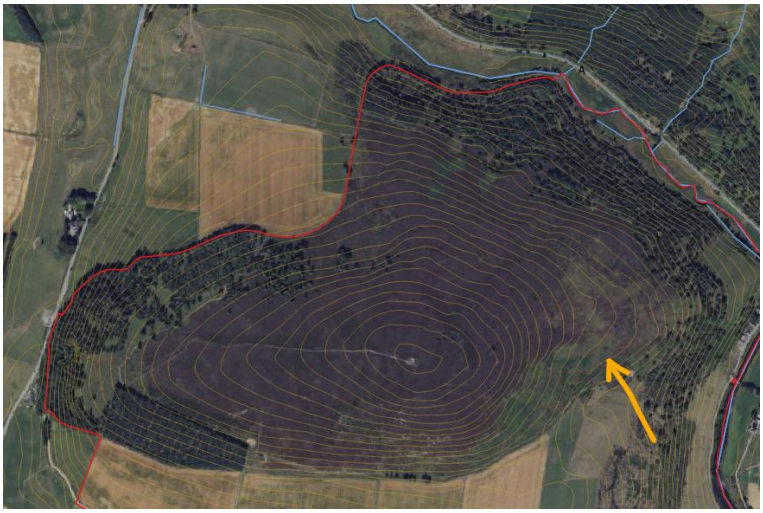
All woodland creation designs (linkages, hill schemes and riparian) – Appendix I - are indicative at present and more detailed design would be required, including species distribution and open ground areas, for formal scheme submissions.

Ardhuncart Hill

Ardhuncart Hill was likely open native woodland up to the mid 19th century (see OS first edition – Appendix VI). Deer grazing and grouse moor management likely prevented regeneration and the woodland effectively died back to the north, west and east flanks. That decline of woodland continues, again largely as a result of deer grazing.

Today, the hill is largely rank heather and as such is of little value for commercial grazing.

The SE flank of the hill (arrowed below) is slightly better ground but is now increasingly inundated by bracken, broom and gorse, meaning that the quality of the grazing even here, is declining.



This native woodland proposal was first discussed in 2021/2. The scheme proposed was for a mixed native woodland of native pine and birch – attempting to restore the likely previous historic forest cover: National Vegetation Classification (NVC) type W18: Scots pine with heather.

Tilhill carried out a preliminary ecological walk-over on the hill for in June 2023. Two breeding bird surveys were undertaken between late April and early June 2023 (see separate reports). Significant areas of open ground and scrub habitats, along with existing old trees would be retained as part of the final design. The net plantable area is therefore likely to be less than the 63Ha originally proposed and more likely around 55 Ha.

No significant further design development of this proposal has been taken forward here, pending clarity on working with the current farming tenant and likely revised planting scheme boundaries. The rationale for the scheme remains sound and likely supported by Scottish Forestry. Tilhill remain enthusiastic about delivering this scheme.

Deer fencing and control would be required for success here. The original proposal was to establish the hill entirely by planting but as discussed earlier, fencing in the existing woodland remnants to the NE would make natural regeneration an option in a buffer around the existing forest edge, say roughly 10ha of around a total 60ha net forest area scheme.

Browsed off pine regen on Ardhuncart Hill, by Cmpt 4

The costing previously provided for this scheme remains a guide but would now need to be revisited in light of inflation and revised areas. It is also likely that additional weeding costs for two years post-planting would be factored in now, should the SE weedier flank be included in the scheme.

South of the river proposal – under Drumgoudrum Hill

This is a new native woodland proposal, south of the river. These fields have been recently used for barley production or grazing. They are steep and seasonally wet, graded as 4.2 on the land capability scale. Road access is poor, involving a long shared public road access that would be unsuitable for timber haulage without significant investment. Commercial timber production would then likely only be viable should a permanent timber access agreement be secured with Brux – possibly involving extraction through their Drumgoudrum Hill commercial plantation above. To us, this appears likely inappropriate.

View across the river to Drumgoudrum Hill

On the southern fields

For this exercise, a commercial option has been discounted, recommending a native woodland development instead as more suitable, providing:

- Nature restoration – ecological benefit
- Improving the visually detached hilltop woodland view – landscape benefit
- Reduced hill run-off and improved hydrology
- Carbon income

The soils here are good brown earths and suitable for a more diverse native woodland NVC type than on the Ardhuncart hill:

W11 Oak-birch with bluebell/wild hyacinth

W17 Oak-birch with bilberry/blaeberry(Upland)

The major tree species in both communities would be downy birch and sessile oak, with minor components including pedunculate oak, silver birch and aspen, along with shrub species including hazel, juniper and hawthorn.

Some initial thought has gone into landscape design, particularly as viewed from the Lodge, with potential to use species changes and open ground to provide some appropriately scaled visual interest. The old replanted shelterbelt of Compartment 27 has no reasonable access for removal and replanting and would simply be subsumed into the new planting area, providing a developing deadwood resource.

The main areas in this indicative design amount to around 25Ha. If the eventual scheme was to be reduced, the southern two fields are probably better ground and less steep for agriculture.

Although Scottish Forestry would generally support a well-designed scheme on land of this grade, evaluation of the impact on existing agricultural enterprises and consultation with RPID and the SNFU would be required.

5. Riparian woodland creation

There is significant potential to use riparian woodland plantings here to help deliver all the well-known benefits of riparian woodlands for freshwater and terrestrial ecology and to contribute to flood water storage and a more naturalised hydrology.

Woodland creation projects on the hills would also help reduce and slow run-off.

The indicative design presented here is an initial concept only, informed by:

- Existing field flooding and bank erosion – areas currently compromised for agriculture
- Avoiding drier agricultural field land take
- Potential for significant habitat improvements through watercourse restoration such as on the Auld Water and Templeton Bog
- Potential for some larger, practically fenceable areas with interior habitat, as well as thinner edge plantings
- Early discussions with CBEC
- Forestry grant scheme riparian target areas (derived from their priority analysis)

CBEC's proposals are likely to seek to increase the frequency and depth of flooding events onto the identified flood plain and to try to retain water there for longer. Riparian woodland will likely help with these objectives but in this flood plain area, will need to be carefully placed, following their design.

It is recommended that these initial design ideas are revisited following CBEC's report and redeveloped as an iterative process, along with any engineering proposals.

In addition to opportunities around the main stem of the river, restoration of the Auld Water and Templeton Bog present significant opportunities. The Auld Water has been extensively canalised and compromised. Taken together with developing the flood plain from the main stem, these linked areas offer a great opportunity, not only for flood storage but also a significant area of wet woodland habitat.

The Auld Water

The Mossat Burn has also been identified by Jim Kerr of the Don board as a priority for action. There are of course space restrictions here, due to the road and also powerlines but there are some strategically important opportunities here too. (See earlier comments on the birch woodland above the burn).

Developing woodland on flood plains is technically challenging and costly, particularly where protection against deer browsing is a key consideration. Fencing is undesirable at the river's

edge and fencing across areas prone to flooding requires careful design and often high maintenance effort.

Fences catching debris during spate conditions can create a wall of resistance and loss of the fence line. Good design can help. Individual tree tubes again can be vulnerable in flood areas and are also not the complete solution to protection for vulnerable species, if deer management is inadequate. Alder is thankfully not very palatable to deer but willows and aspen certainly are.

Wet woodland (NVC W7 (W1, W2, W3)) is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitat.

This proposal would impact largely fields graded as 3.2 on the Land Capability Scale – land not normally supported by Scottish Forestry for woodland creation due to agricultural value.

Significant areas of the target fields here in Ardhuncart are however prone to repeated flooding and some bank erosion, providing a strong argument that riparian woodland and other flood alleviation measures, should in fact benefit remaining, consolidated agricultural fields and loss of actual productive ground would be small.

Nevertheless, as with the other woodland creation ideas here, perceived loss of quality agricultural land will very likely generate a negative response from the farming community. Minor field fringe plantings might be met with agreement but working at greater scale, will require good consultation and active promotion of wider benefits. Even with effort, a larger scale scheme, will have detractors.

6. Summary of possible new woodland projects

Project	Est. area (Ha)
Ardhuncart Hill	55
Southern hill scheme	25
Riparian	30
Linkages	5
Total	115

All schemes are likely to be eligible for registration under the Woodland Carbon Code although no carbon calculations have been carried out for this exercise, beyond those for the original hill scheme in 2021/2

As previously stated, the designs on which these figures are based are indicative at this stage. The final scheme areas will be influenced by further survey, the CBEC report and consultation with stakeholders.

7. Practical delivery issues

Deer

Underlying much of the potential future ecological and practical forest management of the estate, is the challenge of deer management, especially Red Deer, but also Roe Deer. Although Roe Deer have been present in the area in quite large numbers over the last 30 years, Red Deer have spread in and are now present in extremely large numbers, perhaps something like 20 per square km. To reduce browsing of pallateable tree species to reasonable levels, foresters often seek numbers under 10 per square km and for natural regeneration to really succeed, under 5.

The Howe of Alford Deer Management Group has ceased to operate. New landowners in the area with a different perspective and new staff, might lead a revival of a new forum.

Only large-scale coordinated and continuing culling (with deer fencing where possible in the shorter term) will allow native broadleaves and Scots pine to succeed. Not all areas of small scale riparian planting can be fenced and fences (particularly in flood plains) have limited lives and require maintenance. Regardless of which woodland projects move ahead and at what pace on the estate, deer management will always be an underlying key to success in any nature restoration effort.

Recent work by public and private ownerships in the Cairngorm Connect area have led to a growing acceptance that reducing deer numbers is likely the most significant single ecological improvement that land managers can deliver. This is underlined in the Scottish Government's current consultation on Scotland's Strategic Framework for Biodiversity.

Landuse change, community and consultation

As indicated earlier, land use change (from agriculture to forestry) in this area of Aberdeenshire is a significant issue for the agricultural community. A recently proposed scheme at Rhynie has been the pivot for most recent local debate and resistance.

Stakeholders have already raised concerns about the potential hill planting scheme. Whilst riparian planting might be considered a "win-win" at some scales, the extent of riparian planting and naturalising of the flood plain will also be contentious for those generally hostile to loss of agricultural land.

Scottish Forestry (SF) are of course very much aware of these tensions and whilst very supportive of what the estate (and its neighbours) might be trying to achieve here, a full consultation exercise will be required as part of any grant scheme application process.

Surveys

Our in-house ecologist has already conducted initial surveys on the main hill. Surveys would also be required in all other areas proposed for new woodland creation. See our separate ecology survey reports for details.

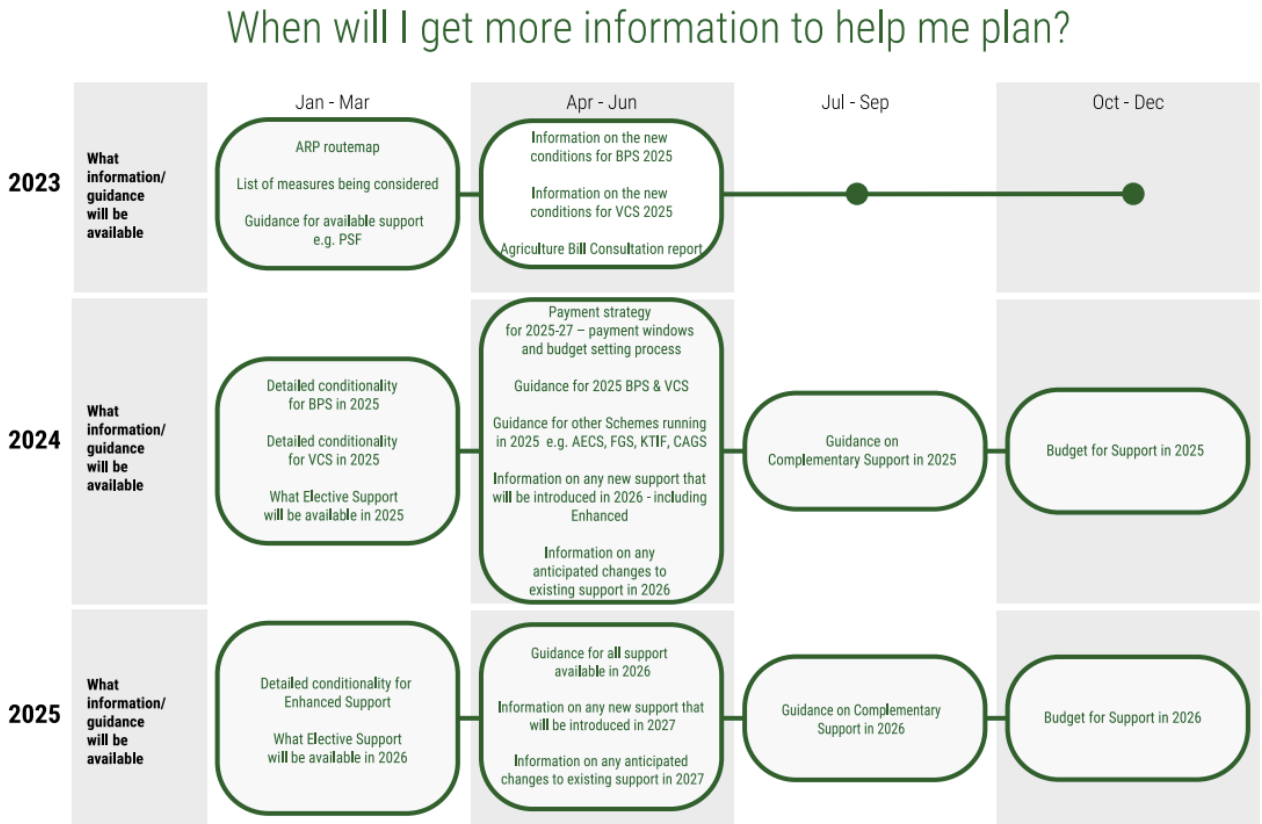
8. Component projects, scheduling and next steps

Combined or separate projects

Tackling all woodland elements and projects in a single effort may be desirable in offering economies of scale for management and delivery but there may also be advantages in some disaggregation:

- The estate may have higher and lower priorities: Schemes that would benefit from early starts and those that might be less time critical.
- Tenants and the broader farming community will likely have doubts about future financial support for agriculture and their own options. This will become increasingly clear over the next two years as shown in the route map graphic below. Current uncertainty may be bolstering opposition to land use change in the short term.
- Whilst being open about a medium-term vision and aspiration with stakeholders, consultees might find it easier to consider and live through incremental change, rather than an “all at once” approach.
- Operationally, managing a more incremental approach could, in some cases, deliver better value and outcomes – particularly where more complex and multidisciplinary projects are concerned, such as floodplain engineering and riparian woodland creation. A designer once said to me: “every design is a prototype”. Incremental approaches allow for testing, learning and improvements.

Agricultural Reform Route Map



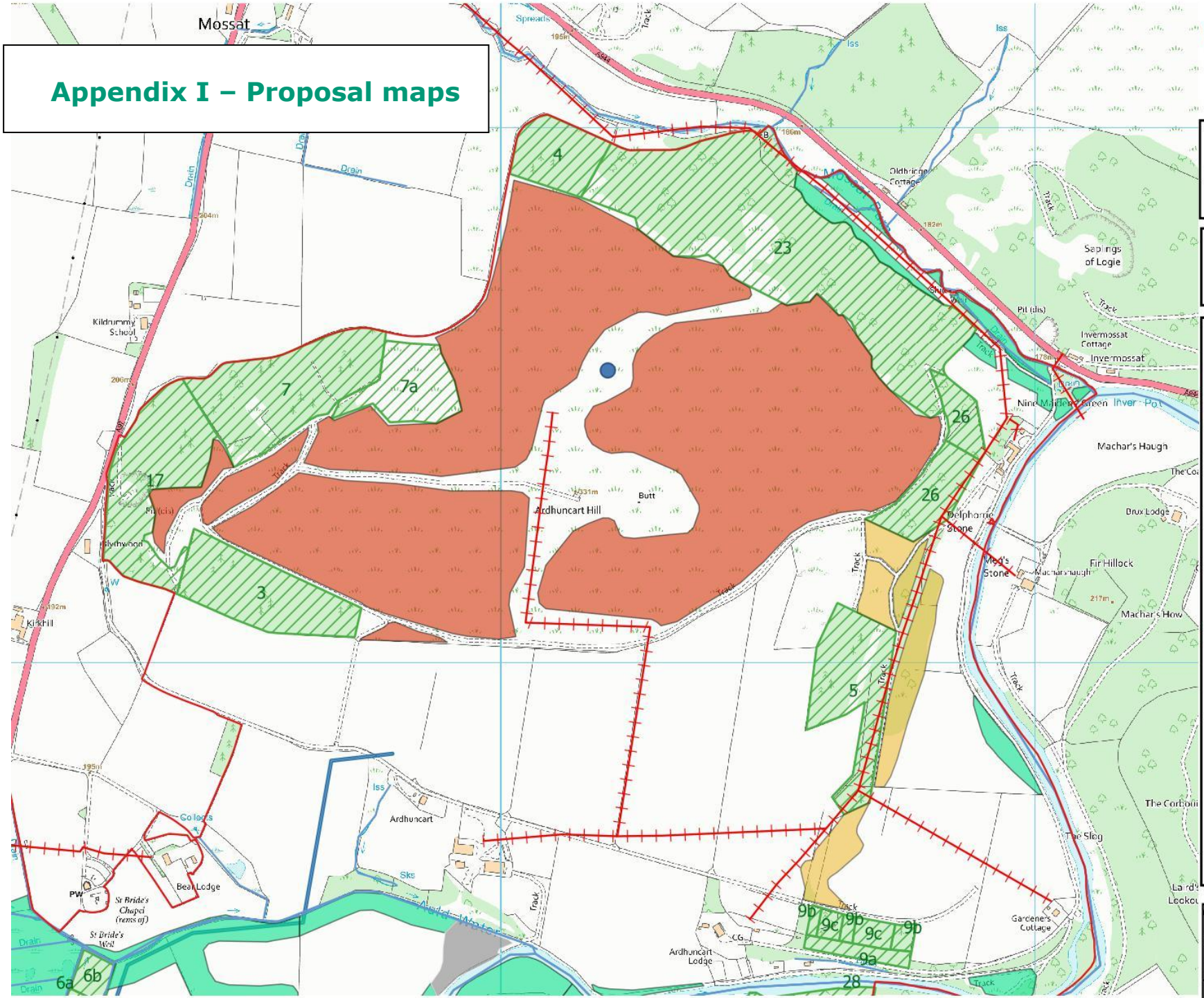
Considerations in prioritising and scheduling projects

1. Maintenance work in **existing woodland** is not dependant on any other workstream or party and could be enacted as soon as possible
2. **Deer management** and working with neighbours is likewise an independent work stream and should begin now.
3. **Agri support** directions should become increasingly clear through 2024
4. **Land** outside the Webster tenancy will be available for other use from 2025
5. **Forestry Grant Scheme** projects often take 12 or more months from design to grant contracts being granted (see below).
6. Any **watercourse engineering work** would precede implementation of riparian woodland establishment. CBEC to advise on design, approvals and timescales

Possible next steps

1. Deer control – discussions with neighbours / select culling tenant
2. Existing woodland maintenance – Spring and summer 2024
3. Hydrological design with CBEC; revision and refining of the riparian woodland project
4. Ongoing discussions with farming tenant prior to more detailed woodland project design and costing.

Appendix I – Proposal maps



Ardhuncart
Outline proposal map - North

Date : 10/11/23
Scale:1:9,000 @A4

Legend

- Existing Woodland Compts
- New woodland potential
- Hill: Native pine+bi
- Linkages
- Riparian
- OH Powerline
- Spring
- Estate boundary

N

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Ardhuncart Outline proposal map - South

Date : 10/11/23

Scale: 1:9,000 @A4

Legend

- Existing Woodland Compts

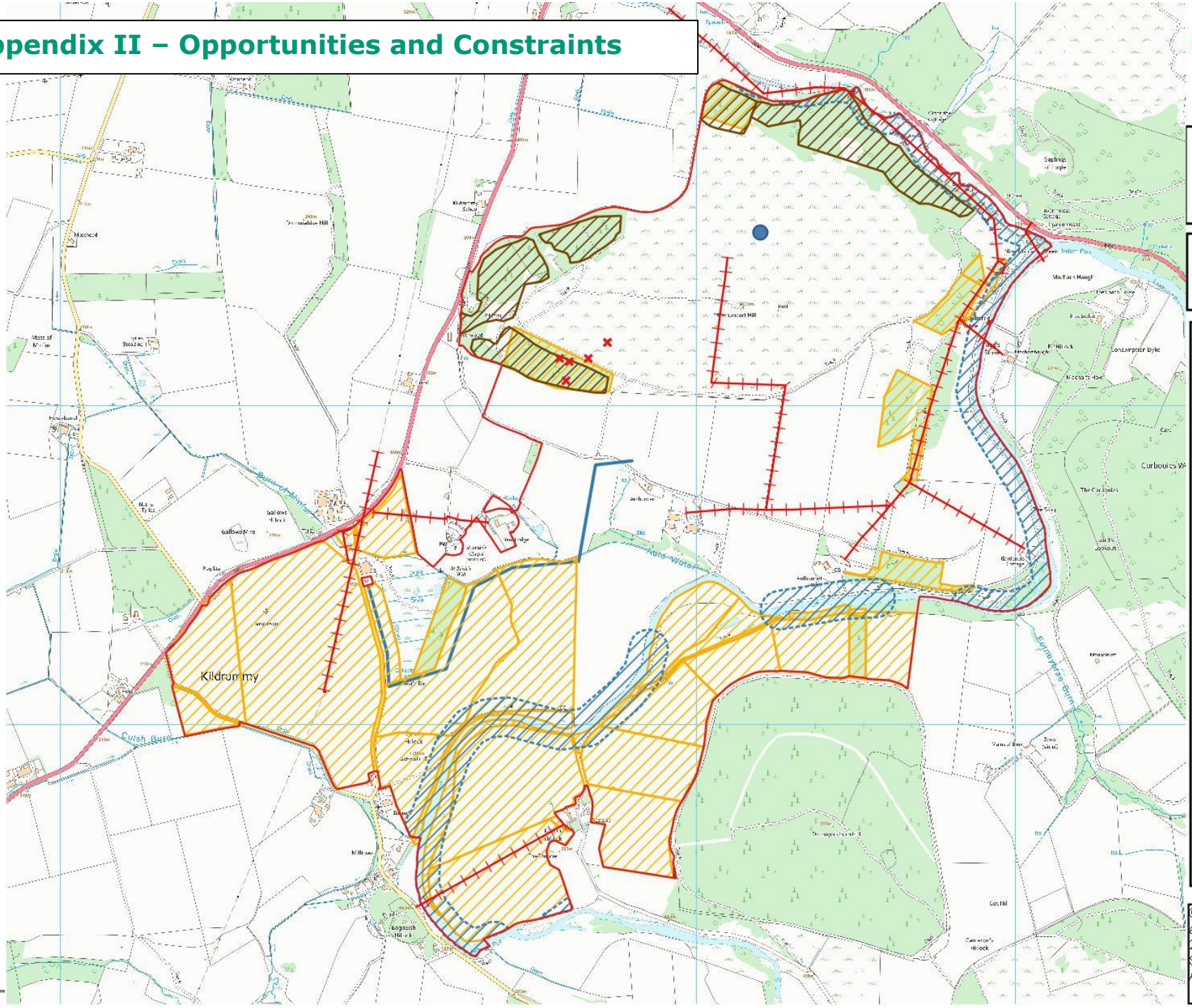
New woodland potential

- Linkages
- Flood control draft
- Riparian woodland
- Native broadleaves

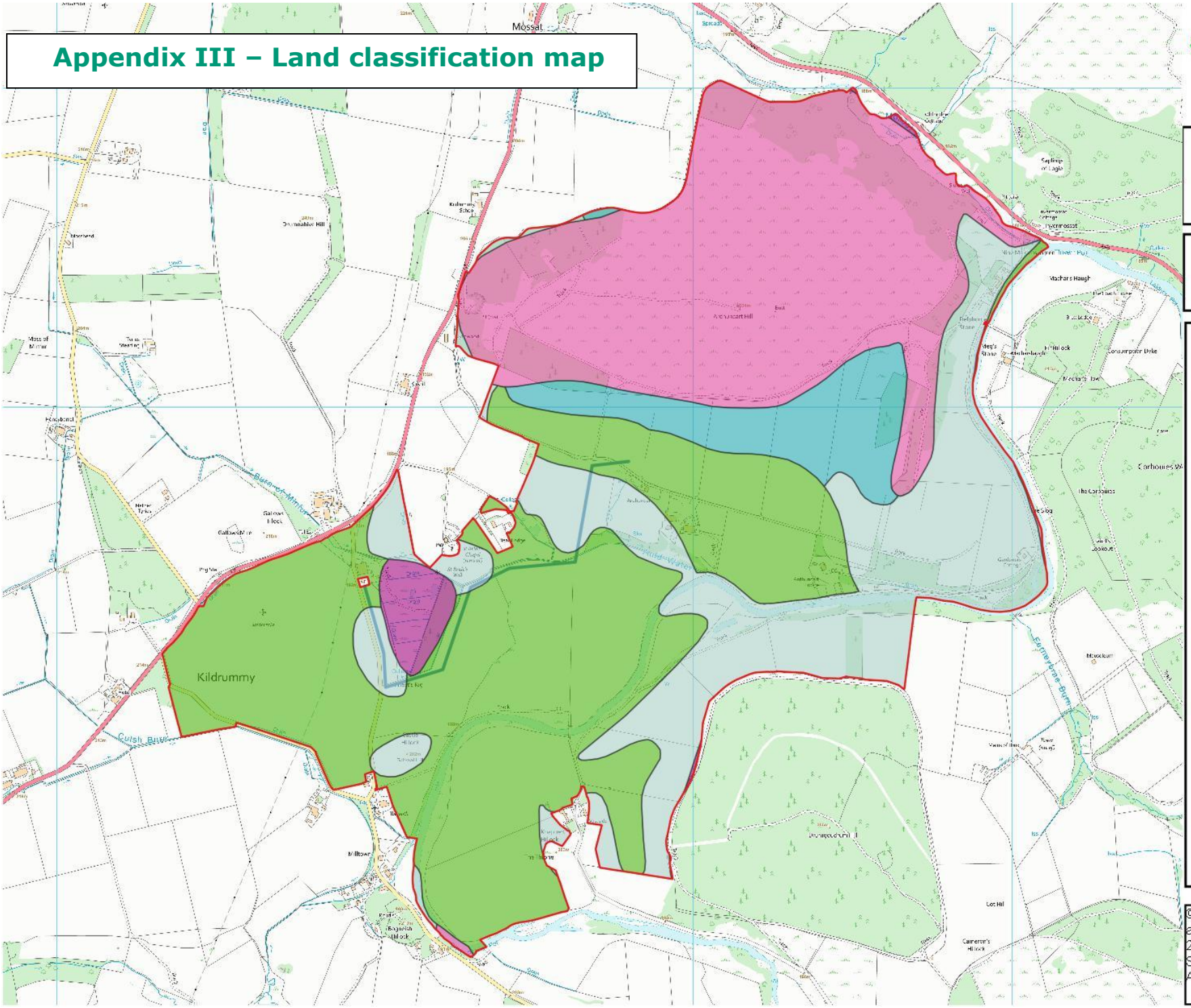
- OH Powerline
- Estate boundary

N

Appendix II – Opportunities and Constraints



Appendix III – Land classification map



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Ardhuncart
Land Classification
map

Date : 10/11/23
Scale: 1:15,000 @A4

Legend

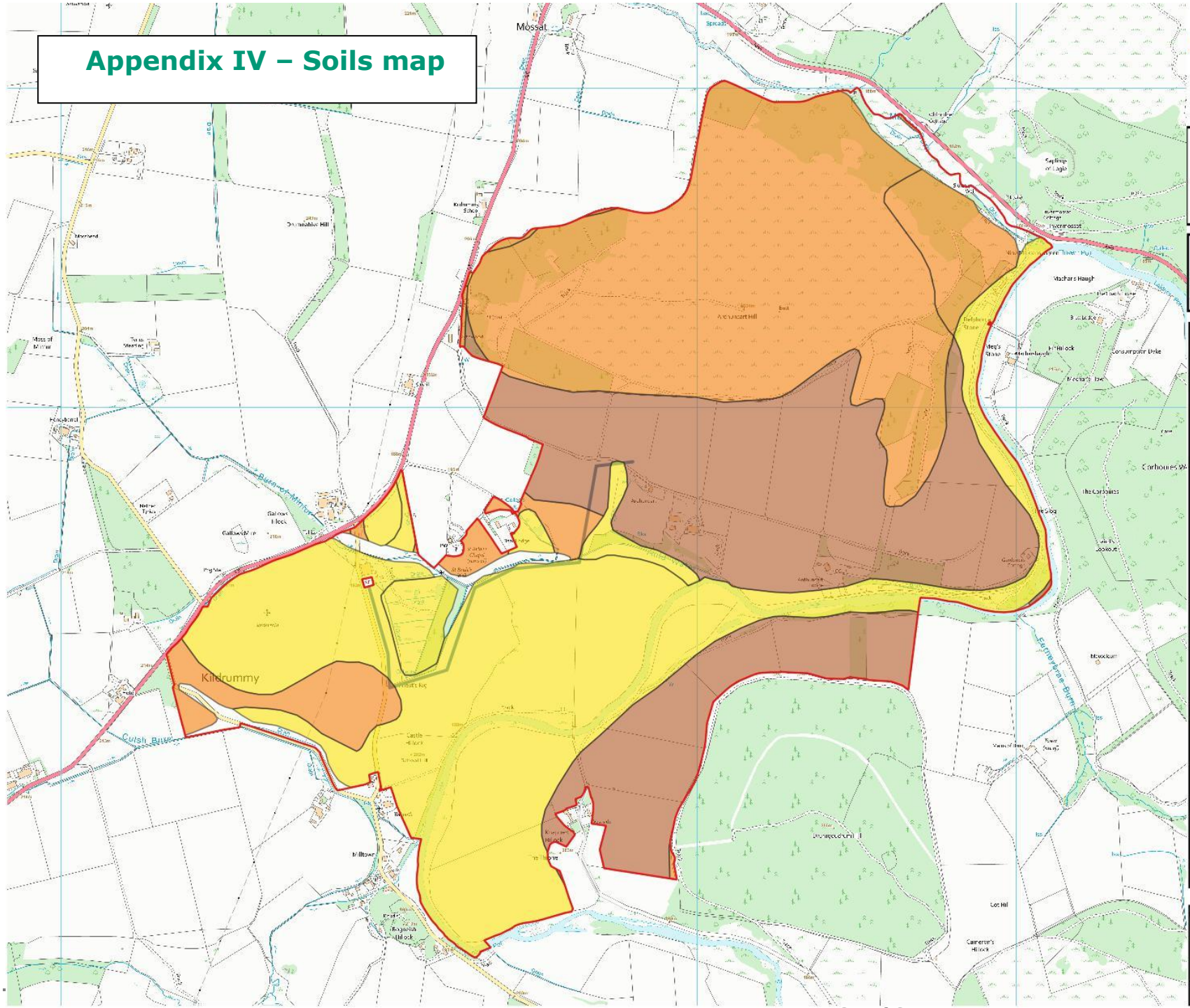
Land Classification for Agriculture

- 3.2
- 4.1
- 4.2
- 5.2
- 5.3
- 6.2

Estate boundary

N

Appendix IV – Soils map



Tilhill

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Ardhuncart
Soils map

Date : 10/11/23
Scale: 1:15,000 @A4

Legend

Hutton 25K
Soils

- Mineral podzols
- Alluvial soils
- Brown soils
- Mineral gleys
- Peaty gleys
- Peaty podzols

Estate boundary

N

Appendix V - Compartment listing – existing woodland

Cmpt	Species	P year	Area	Comments
5	MB	2019	3.44	Restocked under 2019 WIG. Understocked
6a	MB	2018	1.35	poor stocking
6b	MB	1980	0.51	poor stocking
26	MB	2000	2.54	poor stocking
23	MB	1960	13.86	LEPO Upland birch
4	MC	1959	1.85	LEPO SP and larch
17	MC/MB	1920	4.52	LEPO larch, SP, DF, Be, Steep
7	MC	1959	4.95	LEPO Larch and SP
7a	SP/OG	1959	2.22	Open
9a	SP/Be	1900	0.53	on drive to house
9b	SS	1965	0.41	
9c	MB	1990	0.59	
3	SP	1958	3.62	LEPO uniform plantation
27	NS	1990	0.98	shelter belt
28	MB	1989	1.1	riparian
			42.47	

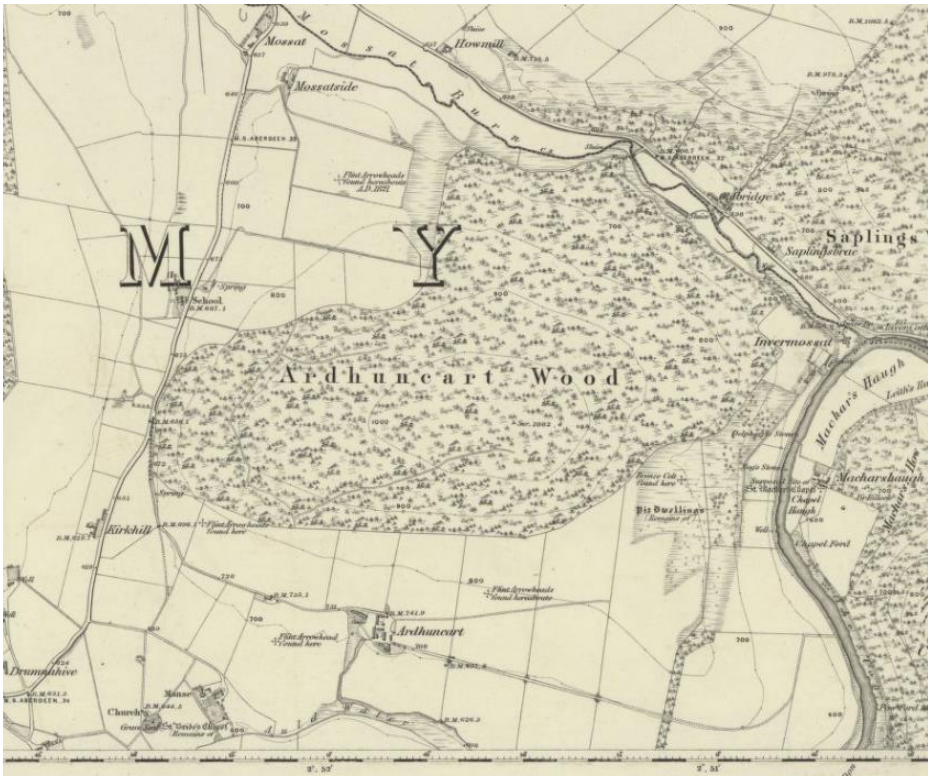
Appendix VI - Historical context and Archaeology

OS first edition maps (1856-1891) are often used as a reference point for old or ancient woodland now lost. These maps do suggest some area of old woodland loss, particularly on the hilltop.

The extent and character of an “Ardhuncart Wood” at the turn of the last century is unclear. Further research may provide greater insight. We might however consider a likely patchwork of open and wooded habitats over the hill.

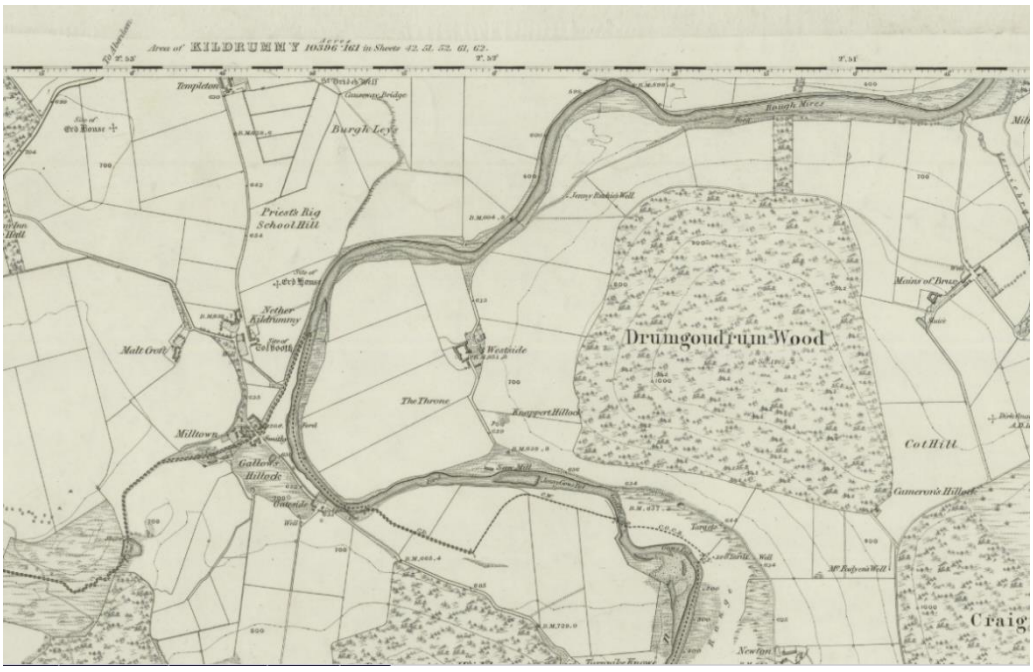
Some of the remaining existing woodland here is also designated as LEPO (Long Established, Plantation Origin).This designation is interpreted here as plantation from OS first edition maps and continuously wooded since. Some (not all) of these sites have developed semi-natural characteristics. Other areas, such as the Ardhuncart hilltop, have been since deforested and not regenerated due to deer grazing.

OS First Edition map



Compare this with the OS Second edition from 1902:

Going back to the first edition further south, it's clear that this landscape has been highly modified (and fragmented in habitat terms) for three centuries or more, particularly in farming up to the riverside:



Why are some Ardhuncart remnants not designated as Ancient Woodland?

In Scotland, Ancient Woodland is defined as land that is currently wooded and has been continually wooded, at least since 1750. The Ancient Woodland Inventory was derived from the Roy maps (c1750) and the OS 1st edition (c1860). It is not definitive and should be used with care. Naturescot say:

> *When evaluating woods it is important to:*
>
> *a) Examine the site on the ground, looking for archaeological, biological and other indicators of antiquity and of its current biodiversity value*
>
> *b) Examine old maps; the OS 1st edition and Roy maps. Woods not shown on the AWI, but present on the historic maps, are likely to be ancient and should be treated as such unless evidence is available to the contrary.*

Interpretation of the Roy maps is not straightforward. This is Ardhuncart section:

Archaeology

There are a number of minor sites listed on Camore

Probably the main one to note here is the possible site identified in the 2018 HES aerial survey:

No o

Site Name Kildrummy

Classification Four Poster Stone Circle, Pit(S) (Period Unknown), Ring Ditch(S), Roundhouse(S) (Prehistoric)(Possible), Souterrain(S) (Iron Age), Sunken Floored Building (Medieval)(Possible)

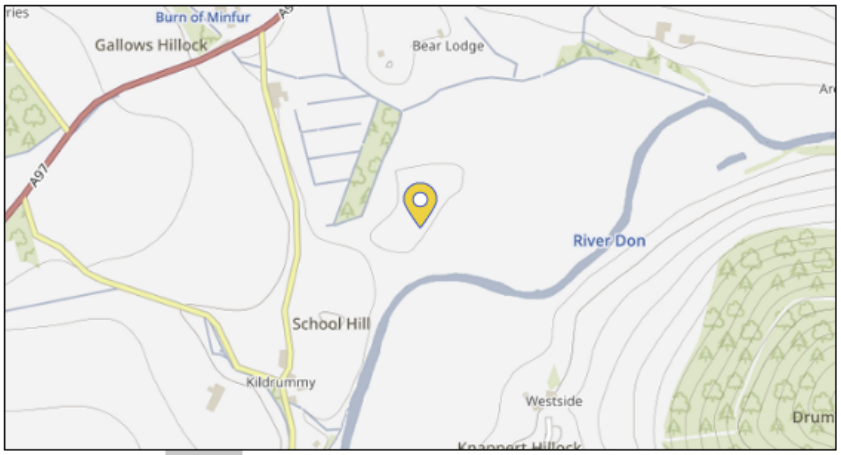
Canmore ID 361233

Site Number NJ41NE 173

NGR NJ 4732 1715

Datum OSGB36 - NGR

Permalink http://canmore.org.uk/site/361233



Whilst entries in Camore and the Aberdeenshire Historic Environment Record should be reviewed for operational planning, none of the current entries are likely to significantly influence plans considered here.

Appendix VII - Grant aid

Grant aid is available from a range of government sources for new works and projects. At this point, grant schemes for riparian work in particular, are surprisingly disjointed – between agriculture, forestry and nature agencies. Whilst the estate might benefit from grant aid from different funds for different activities, woodland creation, including riparian woodland, will generally not be funded by other schemes if it is eligible for the Forestry Grant Scheme.

Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS)

New woodland creation (native hill schemes)

We previously scoped out the Ardhuncart Hill proposal with these options and the same would apply to a new native scheme to the south of the river. Native woodland creation grants (Native Broadleaves/ Upland Birch/ Scots pine) make a significant contribution to the planting costs and in addition, capital grants also significantly contribute to fencing (@ £7.60/m).

Grant rates have not yet been increased to reflect inflation on establishment costs. Currently then, grant might only cover some 50% of total establishment project cost over the six year life of the projects. The value of carbon units are of course not included in that assumption.

We have not re-costed either the previous hill scheme or provided a new costing for the south of river scheme at this point but can provide those figures should the client wish to investigate further.

New riparian woodland creation

To qualify for an uplift on standard rates for being within the **target areas for riparian woodland creation** would require over 50% of a whole woodland creation proposal being within the target area. If less than 50% is within that riparian corridor target area, then none of the application area benefits from the higher rates.

If a riparian scheme was submitted as a standalone scheme and not applied for in the same year as one or both of the separate hill planting schemes, an application could be tailored to qualify for the higher rates. However, that would perhaps only make sense operationally if the riparian work was naturally proceeding along a different timeline from either hill proposals.

As an indication: of the maximum 33Ha identified in the indicative woodland creation design for this project as “riparian”, some 45% is currently within the FGS riparian target area, so getting that up to 50% should be possible through trimming out some non-target area.

What’s it worth? The total grant aid per hectare for native broadleaves (initial planting plus 5 years of maintenance grant) is £3,200/ Ha outside the target area and £3,600 in the target area. So for a 25 Ha riparian scheme, the total uplift would be £10,000. It’s not a “game changer” then and a larger single application for all woodland creation could deliver similar value through economies of scale. But if splitting the schemes was desirable because elements were moving at quite different paces, the target area uplift might yet be helpful.

Sustainable Management of Forests – Native Woodland

These options might be useful for fencing in and regenerating existing native birch woodland remnants. An annual grant of £25 per hectare per year for up to five years is barely worth applying for for deer control and monitoring. However a scheme might also be eligible for Woodland Improvement Grant (Habitats and Species option) to support fencing (@ £9.50/m) to permit natural regeneration. This would be useful to cover the extra costs of expanding a hill scheme fence to include native woodland remnants or fence in other smaller remnants separately to regenerate on the east side of the hill.

Forestry Cooperation grant

Grant support of £250 per day is available for up to 40 days to support the cost of a project co-ordinator, to work between neighbouring land owners, aiming to deliver a coordinated effort of woodland creation – say riparian woodland. However, for schemes over 10ha, the guidance requires a minimum of four participating owners, which would seem highly unlikely in this case. Early enquires with Scottish Forestry have not completely ruled out an application in this area with a smaller number of owners. It may then be worth enquiring further, should neighbours show an interest but success is probably unlikely.

Nature Restoration Fund (NRF)

This Naturescot administered fund has a priority for freshwater restoration, including restoration of natural flows in rural catchments. The NRF will not fund tree (including riparian) planting schemes for which FGS funding is available. CBEC will likely be better placed to advise on actions that may qualify for an NRF application.

The NRF is proving increasingly popular and application bids may not always succeed.

Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS)

The Agri-Environment Climate Scheme promotes land management practices for managing natural heritage, improving water quality, managing flood risk and mitigating and adapting to climate change. These options may be useful for the broader riparian work such as engineered log jams and bank protection but not for riparian woodland. Steve Mackison may be better placed to advise on these options.

Appendix VIII - Indicative Forestry Grant Scheme process

The following schedule is provided as a real-world likely timeline for a forestry project, from design to putting trees in the ground. No work can begin on site until grant contracts are issued and signed.

Schemes that meet significant opposition from stakeholders may be further delayed. How the estate might wish to deal with the consultation process and how much time to afford is an open question. A statutory minimum one month period for responses is required but Scottish Forestry would be looking for evidence of significant engagement with the farming community where significant change was proposed.

	Mar	April	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April
Surveys + site design														
Stakeholder Consultation														
Redesign + resolve issues														
FGS Grant appln and approval														
Contingency/ EIA														
Register for Carbon Code														
Ground prep, fencing etc														
Planting														
Claim grant														

Note that for any forestry projects involving **tree felling** (beyond 5m3 per quarter), a Felling Permission process is required, also involving a month on a public register. In practice, this process regularly takes 2 to 3 months for approval.