



THE GRANITE CITY FOREST

Tree and Woodland Strategic Implementation Plan

2022 - 25

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FOREWORD

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1 Introduction & Background

promoting sustainable communities and provide numerous environmental, The trees and woodlands in and around our cities have a vital role to play in economic and social benefits and contribute enormously to the physical health and mental well-being of everyone who lives and works in urban environments. In essence, urban trees and woodland make places work, look and feel better.

As concerns grow about the quality of the urban environment in many towns and cities throughout the world, so does the importance of protecting and expanding our urban green networks including trees and woodland and enhancing their contribution to combatting the effects of climate change.

Aberdeen, the Granite City, is Scotland’s third most populated city with a population of just under 229,000 inhabitants. It is essential to ensure that future proposals for managing and expanding Aberdeen City’s tree and woodland resource (the Granite City Forest) integrate in a positive way with other land uses, the city’s various landscapes, its natural heritage and built environment thereby enhancing its overall asset value to the City.

In the specific context of its contribution to combatting climate change, the Granite City Forest has a vital role to play in contributing to the City’s wider climate change resilience agenda. Every year its trees and woodlands intercept millions of litres of water, remove hundreds of thousands of airborne pollutants and remove or store thousands of tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere.

This **Trees and Woodland Strategic Implementation Plan (TWSIP)** sets out the vision, strategic priorities and an action plan for the future stewardship and expansion of Aberdeen City’s urban, street trees, rural trees and woodlands. It provides a long-term framework for ensuring that their qualities are measurable, recognised, properly valued, protected and permanently enshrined in the environmental fabric of the City.

The TWP focuses strongly on implementation and helping to deliver against the City Council’s other environmental strategies notably Goal 7 of **Aberdeen Adapts** and the ACC Open Space Strategy amongst others.

“ We are in the midst of a climate emergency and planting trees is vital if we are to tackle that emergency head on. ”

Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister, Scottish Government June 2019

2 Legislative and Planning Context

This section of the TWSIP summarises the regulatory, planning, policy and strategic contexts for the sustainable management of trees and woodland at both national and regional levels and their relevance to the TWSIP.

Regulatory, Planning & Policy

At the national level, forestry in Scotland is governed and regulated under the Scottish Government's **Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill (2018)** with Forestry Commission Scotland being replaced by "Scottish Forestry" in 2019 as the new regulatory body.

Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 - determining the future structure of the planning system in Scotland. More specifically in relation to this TWSIP, Section 53 of the Act places a duty on all planning authorities to prepare a forestry and woodland strategy which sets out the planning authority's policies and proposals on the development of forestry and woodlands. Of particular importance is the expansion of woodlands providing multiple benefits to the physical, cultural economic, social and environmental characteristics of the area.

Right Tree in the Right Place: Planning for Forestry and Woodlands - the Scottish Government's provision of additional guidance for local authorities on planning for forestry and woodlands and specifically contains advice on preparing forestry and woodland strategies.

Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019–2029 - providing the national framework and a 50-year vision for the expansion and sustainable management of Scotland's forests and woodland.

Policy on Control of Woodland Removal (2009) - a key element of Scottish Government regulatory control for trees and woodland with direct relevance to the TWSIP setting out the policy direction for decisions on woodland removal in Scotland and subsequent compensatory planting which must be taken into account when preparing development plans and determining planning applications.

Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2017 – outlining at the local level under its Policy NE5 (Trees and Woodlands) the protection afforded to tree and woodland cover stating that *"there is a presumption against all activities and development that will result in the loss of, or damage to, trees and woodlands that contribute to nature conservation, landscape character, local amenity or climate change adaptation and mitigation."*

Aberdeen Adapts - the City's climate change adaptation strategy to enable Aberdeen to become more resilient to the impacts of climate change such as extreme weather. Goal 7 (Healthy Trees and Woodlands) is particularly relevant and states that adaptation will be undertaken by expanding tree coverage, planning green corridors, identifying and prioritising a diverse selection of trees and by maintaining healthy street trees to reduce flood risk in urban areas.

UN Sustainable Development Goals - relevant to delivering SDG 15 (Life on Land) but it is also relevant to SDG 3, 11, 12 and 13.

The TWSIP also cross cuts with the objectives of ACC strategies and Plans including:

Nature Conservation Strategy

Aberdeen Open Space Strategy

Aberdeen City Deer Management Plan

Open Space Strategy

Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Strategy

North East Scotland Biodiversity Action Plan

Granite City Growing: Aberdeen Growing Food Together

Guidance for Sustainable Forest Management

The **UK Forestry Standard (2017)** sets out the criteria and standards for the sustainable management of forests and woodlands in the UK and its accompanying guidelines that set the benchmark for sustainable forestry practice at national and local levels.

3 About the Granite City Forest

The Granite City Forest is an integral element of the City’s “natural capital” comprising the trees and woodlands within the Aberdeen City administrative boundary.

There are approximately 2,410 hectares of woodland distributed across Aberdeen City, representing 13% of its total land area of 18,830 hectares.

Expansion of The Granite City Forest

Between 1988 and 2017 some 300 hectares of new woodland were planted across Aberdeen City of which approximately 40% was carried out by the City Council, including its “Tree for Every Citizen” woodland creation project in 2010. This project comprised the planting of 13 sites of mixed conifer and broadleaved planting distributed across the City and totalled a net planted area of some 84 hectares with over 200,000 trees planted.

Granite City Forest - Key Features	
Area (ha)	2,410 ha of woodland (greater than 0.1ha in size) - 13% of ACC’s total land area of 18,830 hectares. By comparison, Scotland’s woodland cover is 18% off national cover.
Distribution	Widely scattered mosaic of large and smaller scale woodlands, copses and other groups of trees, characterised by a small number of relatively large woodlands.
Composition	Large blocks mainly comprising commercial conifer plantations, other woodland cover being mixed conifer and broadleaved woodland (8%) and the balance of 37% of predominantly broadleaves.
Individual Trees	There are an estimated 115,000 individual street, park and garden and civic trees across the City
Age Ranges	Unbalanced, characterised by the predominance of mature woodland (about 85%) and over 10% over mature. This has significant implications for future forest management at strategic and local levels; concerted action will be needed over the short to medium term to bring the woodland into a more sustainable and resilient age balance.
Key Species	Spruce, larch and Scots pine are the dominant species in conifer plantations, while broadleaved woodland is mainly ash, sycamore, beech, alder, rowan and oak.
Native woodland	Native woodlands account for 514 hectares* - 22% of the total woodland area. Approximately 19% of this area is conifer woodland with 81% comprising mainly upland birchwoods and areas of lowland mixed deciduous woodland, upland mixed ash and upland oakwoods.
Ownership	Woodland ownership is fragmented for the majority of smaller woodlands but dominated by the National Forest Estate (managed by Forestry and Land Scotland) and ACC who together own 35% and 16% of the total tree and woodland resource respectively. Ownership of the remaining woodlands comprises private individuals and estates, business and educational establishments and public sector bodies such as NHS Grampian.

*2014 Native Woodland Survey for Scotland

4 Vision & Strategic Priorities

Given that the productive lifespan of most trees in Scotland generally ranges from 30-150 years, a long-term approach has been taken in this TWSIP to manage and expand the Granite City Forest in order to meet the needs of Aberdeen’s people over the next 50 years to 2070.

Accordingly, an ambitious vision has been adopted - closely reflecting that for Scotland as a whole - that will drive action to deliver more from the Granite City Forest so that:

“By 2070, Aberdeen City will have more trees and woodlands, sustainably managed and better integrated with the City’s other land uses. These will provide a more resilient, adaptable resource with greater natural capital value that supports the local economy, an enhanced environment and healthy communities across the City.”

Strategic Priorities

To support the delivery of this vision four strategic priorities have been identified:

- 1 Promoting the role of our trees and woodlands in mitigating and adapting to climate change.**
- 2 Expanding the Granite City Forest.**
- 3 Protecting our trees and woodlands.**
- 4 Contributing to the City’s green infrastructure and the well-being of our people.**

The vision and strategic priorities strongly accord with Goal 7 of ACC’s **Aberdeen Adapts***.

Sections 5 and 6 of this TWSIP set out the actions proposed to implement these strategic priorities and all actions are underpinned by the principles of sustainable forest management as set out in the **UK Forestry Standard**.

Aberdeen Adapts* Goal 7 – Healthy Trees and Woodlands

Monitoring, management and strategic plans for Aberdeen’s trees and woodlands have made sure tree health is maintained and growth is protected. Expanding city tree coverage, with the right tree in the right place, has helped to keep Aberdeen resilient and liveable.



5 Achieving the Vision

Priority 1

Promoting the role of our trees and woodland in mitigating and adapting to climate change Trees and woodlands help mitigate the impact of climate change by absorbing substantial amounts of carbon. It is estimated that in 2016, about 12 million tonnes of CO₂ was removed from the atmosphere by Scotland’s trees and woodlands.

Under the UK Climate Projections all of Scotland seven cities are predicted to experience wetter and milder winters, warmer and drier summers with longer growing seasons, more extreme weather events, and increased risk of flooding and soil degradation causing decline in quality of habitat and biodiversity. Of course, climate projections and impacts are relevant beyond cities

This will be achieved by:

- Establishing an objective and measurable basis for assessing and monitoring the contribution of the Granite City’s trees and forests to climate change resilience through nationally recognised iTreeEco Survey methodology.
- Integrating the role, management and expansion of the Granite City Forest in reducing flood risk, provision of shade and shelter and absorbing pollution.
- As part of its on-going tree and woodland stewardship and expansion, ensure that restocking and new planting proposals incorporate mixed ages and species choice that will increase resilience against the effects of climate change and tree pests and diseases.
- Where appropriate seeking Woodland Carbon Code certification for new ACC-owned woodland creation schemes to demonstrate how much carbon they capture.
- Seeking carbon credit funding for WCC certified woodlands.
- Establishing more “Climate Change Parks” in Aberdeen City.

Aberdeen Adapts Goal 7 – Action Areas

2.9 Encourage tree health surveillance and the sustainable management of city trees and woodlands.

2.10 Expand city tree coverage, with resilient species selection at appropriate locations.

2.11 Explore the role of trees and woodlands to reduce flood risk and provide shade and shelter in urban areas.

Priority 2

Expanding the Granite City Forest

The planting of trees is recognised as an important tool for reducing greenhouse gas emissions as well as helping to protect soils and alleviating flood risk as identified in **Aberdeen Adapts**. The Granite City Forest has the potential to increase its contribution to this national total of capture and delivery of other benefits to help reduce the impact of climate change thereby better equipping Aberdeen City to become more resilient to these changes and thereby help deliver Goal 7 of Aberdeen Adapts.

The ambition of this Plan is to contribute to the Scottish Government’s national targets for woodland expansion (15,000 hectares per year by 2025) by doubling the 300 hectares of new woodland in the Granite City Forest carried out between 1988 and 2017 to **600** hectares over the next 25 years with a further **300** hectares by 2070. This would increase Aberdeen City’s woodland cover from its current 13% of total land area to approximately 21% to match the current national coverage.

Woodland creation and other tree planting proposals that are appropriate in scale and design, and that meet the requirements of the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) will be encouraged. In practice, such expansion will comprise a mosaic of species appropriate to individual sites and that:

- fit well with existing land uses, including agriculture in the peri-urban and rural hinterlands;

- respect other objectives for the land (such as open and other green space) and landscape character, and
- deliver the range of ecosystem services that future generations of the City will value.
- encourage a focus on broad-leaved woodland planting over an increase in commercial forestry.

This will be achieved by:

- Working with partners to implement a phased City-wide woodland creation programme.
- Targeting urban planting in areas of highest social deprivation.
- Integrating new planting in peri-urban areas with existing and changes in land use.
- Incorporating new tree and woodland planting into new development Master Plans within the City.
- Embedding the requirements of the UKFS into the criteria used by ACC when assessing woodland creation and management proposals through the consultation process.

Priority 3

Protecting our trees and woodlands

The City's native and ancient woodlands are recognised as a vital part of its biodiversity and natural heritage. As part of this Plan's commitment to promote the sustainable forest management of the Granite City Forest, there is a presumption that wherever possible native and ancient woodlands, and plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) will be protected.

Another key aspect of the protection of the Granite City Forest will be maintaining a sustainable balance between the City's increasing deer population and protecting young woodland and other habitats.

This will be achieved by:

- Protecting and enhancing the condition of the City's native woodlands and other woodlands of specific biodiversity value.
- Establishing a rolling programme for regularly updating and sharing tree and woodland baseline inventory and condition data across the City to monitor the condition of its trees and woodland.
- Continuing to implement ACC's city-wide Deer Management Plan and work with neighboring landowners and local Deer Management Groups (DMG) to address deer management issues on a collaborative basis.
- Ensuring that the Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal is embedded within the City's planning guidance on Trees and Development.
- Promote the more extensive use of TPO's to protect privately owned woodlands and ensure appropriate management takes place.

Priority 4

Contributing to green infrastructure and the well-being of our people

The important role that trees and woodlands play in enhancing the quality of life for people living and working in our towns and cities is recognised. Together with other open green spaces the Granite City Forest provides vital greenspace for people to enjoy and use, enhancing their physical and mental well-being. Expansion of these green networks provides a landscape framework for sustainable urban development.

There is also a growing demand within Aberdeen City from a diverse range of groups, including social enterprises, schools (through “natural classrooms”) and companies for using woodlands for environmental education, leisure activities and work-related training opportunities linked, for example, to corporate social responsibility and community service programmes.

This will be achieved by:

- Encouraging planting which enhances green corridors and woodland connectivity within the City’s open space network through careful planning using knowledge of existing sites of interest.
- Contributing to health and well-being through links to the health sector and other city-wide initiatives.
- Providing opportunities for new and improved public access and recreational facilities within Granite City woodlands.
- Providing outdoor education and learning, social and corporate responsibility experiences within the Granite City Forest.
- Promoting new street trees and urban tree planting through development opportunities.
- Maintaining constructive and proactive engagement with communities on tree and woodland related issues.
- Developing a tree warden scheme.
- Encouraging and promoting community management and involvement in community woodlands.
- Increasing awareness and enjoyment of biodiversity.

6 Action Plan

Period 2022-25 is set out in the Table below.

Our Action Plan for implementing the TWSIP’s strategic priorities over the 5-year

For each of the strategic priority and associated actions (set out in Section 5) there are performance indicators and measures to help monitor progress, together with proposed “lead” and “support” delivery partners.

Strategic Priority & Actions	Performance Indicator / Measure	Partners*	
		Lead	Support
Priority 1 - Promoting the role of our trees and woodland in mitigating and adapting to climate change			
Carry out an iTreeEco Survey of the City’s tree and woodland resource to objectively measure, set a baseline and monitor the benefits of the Granite City Forest in combatting climate change and establish the Forest’s on-going capital asset value.	iTreeEco Survey.	ACC	
Integrate the role, management and expansion of the Granite City Forest in reducing flood risk, provision of shade and shelter and absorbing pollution.	No. of new woodland creation schemes approved that comply with UKFS.	ACC (ES)	SF
As part of its on-going tree and woodland stewardship and expansion programme, ensure that restocking and new planting proposals incorporate mixed ages and species choice that will increase resilience against the effects of climate change and tree pests and diseases.	No of Felling Permissions that include restocking conditions / new woodland creation schemes approved.	ACC (ES)	SF
Seek Woodland Carbon Code (WCC) certification for new ACC-owned woodland creation schemes to demonstrate how much carbon they capture, where appropriate.	No. of ha of new woodland certified.	ACC (ES)	
Seek carbon credit funding for WCC certified woodlands.	££ carbon credit income secured.	ACC (ES)	
Establish more “Climate Change Parks” in Aberdeen City.	No. of additional Climate Change Parks.	ACC (ES) (CS)	
Priority 2 - Expanding the Granite City Forest			
Work with partners to implement a phased City-wide woodland creation programme.	Potential planting areas identified. No. Schemes implemented. Hectares planted.	ACC (ES)	SF; WT; DCP
Embed the requirements of the UKFS into the criteria used by ACC when assessing woodland creation and management proposals through the consultation process.	No. Schemes approved as part of statutory consultation process.	ACC (ES & EP)	SF; Other Statutory Agencies
Target urban planting in areas of highest social deprivation. Where appropriate to include community orchards and edible crop trees.			
Integrate new planting in peri-urban areas with existing and changes in land use.			
Incorporate new tree and woodland planting into new development Master Plans within the City.			

* ACC (ES) = Aberdeen City Council (Environmental Services); ACC (EP) = Aberdeen City Council (Environmental Planning); ACC (CS) = Aberdeen City Council (Countryside Services); SF = Scottish Forestry; UKWAS = UK Woodland Assurance Standard; DCP = Deeside Catchment Project; WT = Woodland Trust; OWLNEG = Outdoor Woodland Learning North East Group; NHS(G) = National Health Service (Grampian); DMG = Deer Management Group.

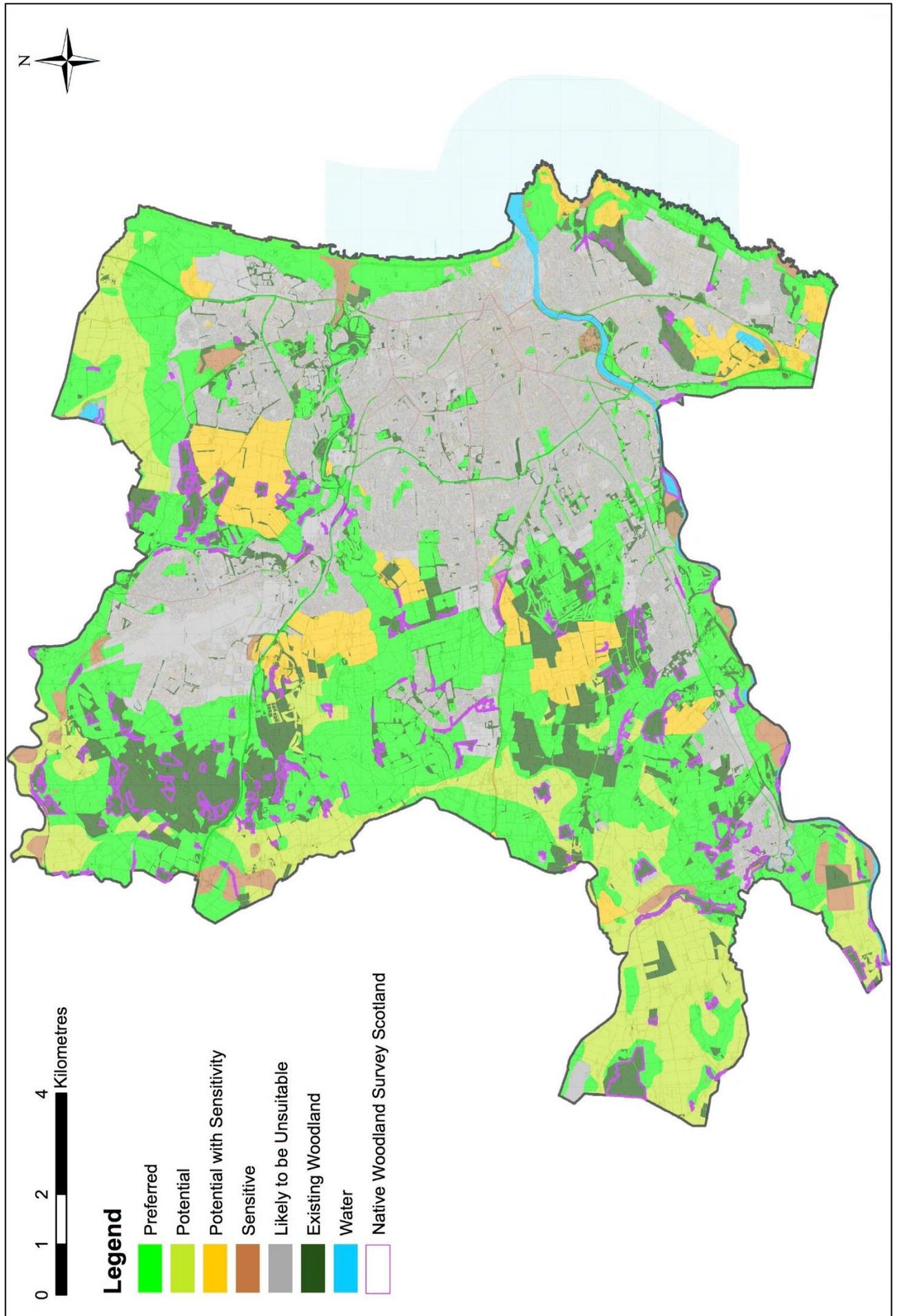
Strategic Priority & Actions	Performance Indicator / Measure	Partners*	
		Lead	Support
Priority 3 - Protecting our trees and woodlands			
Protect and enhance the condition of the City's native woodlands and other woodlands of specific biodiversity value. This to include the control of invasive species which restrict the natural regeneration of woodlands.	No. of hectares of native woodlands restored. No. of hectares of PAWS brought back into native condition.	ACC (ES)	SF
Establish a rolling programme for regularly updating and sharing tree and woodland baseline inventory and condition data across the City to monitor the condition of its trees and woodland.	Results of iTree Eco Survey analysed and disseminated. Protocol established for regular updating of iTree Eco Survey.	ACC (ES)	
Continue to implement ACC's city-wide Deer Management Plan and work with neighbouring landowners and local Deer Management Groups (DMG) to address deer management issues on a collaborative basis.	Regular deer management reports; Deer Mgt Plan reviews; Participation in local DMGs.	ACC (ES & CS);	Local DMG
Embed the Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal within the City's Master Planning and its Planning Guidance on Trees and Development.	Ha. of woodland removed. Ha. of compensatory planting carried out.	ACC (EP)	
Priority 4 - Contributing to green infrastructure and the well-being of our people			
Contribute and enhance green corridors and woodland connectivity within the City's open space network.	No. actions directly linked to Open Space Strategy.	ACC (ES & EP)	
Contribute to health and well-being through links to the health sector and other city-wide initiatives (such as Health Walks & Branching Out). Creating new orchards and foraging opportunities.	Regular liaison with NHS(G) established. No. of tree / woodland-related management activities carried out. No. of Branching Out events. No. of Health Walks.	ACC (ES & CS)	NHS Grampian
Provide opportunities for new and improved public access and recreational facilities within Granite City woodlands.	Projects implemented. No of new access facilities implemented. Length of Core Path network.	ACC (ES & CS)	SF
Provide outdoor education and learning, social and corporate responsibility experiences within the Granite City Forest.	No of Forest School programmes carried out in Granite City Forest woodlands.	ACC (CS)	Local schools; OWLNEG; local businesses.

*ACC (ES) = Aberdeen City Council (Environmental Services); ACC (EP) = Aberdeen City Council (Environmental Planning); ACC (CS) = Aberdeen City Council (Countryside Services); SF = Scottish Forestry; UKWAS = UK Woodland Assurance Standard; DCP = Deeside Catchment Project; WT = Woodland Trust; OWLNEG = Outdoor Woodland Learning North East Group; NHS(G) = National Health Service (Grampian); DMG = Deer Management Group.

Spatial guidance for woodland expansion

As part of this TWSIP, we have developed GIS-based spatial guidance guidelines which are intended to enable, rather than constrain, woodland expansion. Accordingly, the TWSIP - like other neighbouring local authority tree and woodland strategies - has assigned and mapped (see Map overleaf) land within the Aberdeen City local authority boundary to the following broad categories, namely - **“Preferred”, “Potential”, “Potential with Sensitivities”, “Sensitive” and “Unlikely to be Suitable”**. These categories are in line with recommendations in the Scottish Government's *“The Right Tree in the Right Place”* which sets out the criteria that Forestry and Woodland Strategies should follow. The detailed definitions for the above categories are as provided in Appendix I.

This guidance will also be used by Scottish Forestry as an important tool for helping it to more closely target enhanced funding for new woodland creation under the Scottish Government's Forestry Grant Scheme.



7 Monitoring & Review

An important aspect of the TWSIP moving forward will be monitoring progress of the implementation of its priorities and actions through public and private sector partners working collaboratively where appropriate, together with contributions from other relevant stakeholders.

Such progress can be fed into periodic reviews in order to keep the TWSIP relevant, responsive and consistent with Scottish Government and Aberdeen City Council policies and strategies over its lifetime.

The overall TWSIP will therefore be reviewed on a five yearly cycle but with annual reports on the status of the Action Plan's performance indicators / measures.

APPENDIX I

Definitions of Spatial Mapping Criteria

Definitions of Spatial Mapping Criteria

These categories are broadly in line with recommendations in the Scottish Government's "*The Right Tree in the Right Place*" which sets out the criteria that Forestry and Woodland Strategies should follow. The definitions for the above categories are as follows:

Preferred - land that offers the most scope to accommodate future expansion of a range of woodland types, and hence deliver on a wide range of objectives. Within preferred areas known sensitivities are generally limited, and it should be possible to address any particular site specific issues within well designed proposals that meet the UK Forestry Standard and associated guidelines.

Potential – agricultural land that offers potential to accommodate expansion of a range of woodland types and that is categorised under the 1:50,000 scale Land Use Capability for Agriculture (LCA) Classes 3.2 and above. In line with WEAG recommendations (see Page 11), it is assumed that LCA Classes 1,2 and 3.1 would not normally be suitable for woodland expansion.

Potential with Sensitivities - land that offers potential to accommodate expansion of woodland types that will meet specific environmental or cultural heritage objectives but where at least one other significant sensitivity exists. The design of planting schemes will require careful consideration as to how any sensitivities can be addressed.

Sensitive - land where the nature or combination of sensitivities may limit the scope to accommodate woodland expansion. Limited expansion is only likely to be possible where woodland expansion would be predominantly of a type that delivers biodiversity, landscape and /or amenity proposals and are of a scale and character that can be accommodated without significant negative impacts, and/or where it would positively enhance features of interest.

Likely to be Unsuitable - areas assessed as being physically unsuitable for the growth or management of trees or that comprise built up areas, or that are areas where peat depth is greater than 50cms.

APPENDIX II

Spatial Mapping Data Layers

The Table below sets out how the Spatial Map has been generated using datasets to map the various individual “constraint types” which have then been allocated as “Potential,” “Potential with Sensitivities”, “Sensitive” and “Likely to be Unsuitable” using GIS layering. “Preferred” areas are identified as all those areas outwith these categories.

CONSTRAINT TYPE	INFORMATION / SOURCE DATA LAYER	HOW SHOWN ON MAP
Main water bodies	SOIL LCF (Land Capability for Forestry)	Water
Existing Woodland	National Forest Inventory 2015	Existing woodland
Agricultural Land	Land Capability for Agriculture (1:50,000) Class 3.2 land and above	Potential, but can be upgraded to Preferred by Opportunity Layers (see below)
	Land Capability for Agriculture (1:50,000) Classes 1,2 and 3.1	Sensitive
	Carbon Rich Soils (Category 5) (PEAT_SCOTLAND)	Potential with Sensitivity
Cultural Heritage	Gardens and Designed Landscapes	Sensitive
	Scheduled Monuments (with 20m buffer)	
Natural Heritage Sites / Environmental Designations	Local Nature Reserves	Sensitive
	Local Nature Conservation Sites	Sensitive
	National Nature Reserves	Sensitive
	Wetlands of National Importance (RAMSAR)	Sensitive
	Special Areas of Conservation	Sensitive
	Sites of Special Scientific Interest	Sensitive
	Special Protection Areas	Sensitive
Carbon rich soils (Where site survey indicates peat depth is >50cms)	ACC Local Development Plan Urban Areas	Likely to be Unsuitable
Urban (built up) areas	ACC Local Development Plan Urban Areas	Likely to be Unsuitable
Opportunity Type		
Planting within urban areas /adjacent to settlements qualifying for WIAT	WIAT (within 1km of settlements with 2,000 population) and WIAT Priority Areas (as for WIAT areas but prioritised due to SMD indices)	Upgrades LCA Class 3.2 and above to Preferred
Woodland Habitat Networks	??m buffer around existing woodland	Upgrades LCA Class 3.2 and above to Preferred
Flood and Water Catchment Management	SEPA “Woodland and Water” priority water catchments	Upgrades River Dee SAC to Potential with Sensitivity

