

Lady Wood

Forest Plan
2011 – 2030

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MAPS

Map 1 The Lady Wood

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The Lady Wood is a narrow strip of oak dominated woodland on the western edge of the village of Aboyne and close to the Aboyne Academy and Community Centre

1.2 Date of Plan Production

This Plan was produced for Mid Deeside Limited by Irvine Ross of the Ross Partnership and adopted by the board of MDL in ?? 2010

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1.3 Legal Status

The Lady Wood is the property of Mr Marcus Humphrey of Dinnet House. In celebration of Her Majesty the Queen's golden jubilee he placed the Lady Wood in the care of the Mid Deeside Limited, representing the community of Aboyne, on a 99 year rent free lease on condition that the community is willing to take responsibility for the woodland and has the resources to ensure its proper maintenance.

2. DESCRIPTION

2.1 Name of wood

The area of woodland is known as the Lady Wood

2.2 Area Statement

The wood extends to some 3.79 hectares

2.3 Status

The Lady Wood has no statutory designations and is not subject to any Tree Preservation Orders.

In the current Aberdeenshire Local Plan the Lady Wood, and all the woodland along Rhu-Na-Haven Road, is designated as a Protected Area.

This is covered by Policy Env/7 of the Aberdeenshire Local Plan (ALP) which says that development will be refused unless:

a) It is for an essential community facility which cannot be located elsewhere and whose public benefits clearly outweigh the value of the site to the settlement's special character or amenity

OR

b) it would positively impact on the site's or settlement's special character or amenity.

As the Protected Area Status has been approved, it is extremely unlikely that planning consent would be given for any development on the site of the Lady Wood.

2.4 Location

The Lady Wood lies on the south side of the A93 Ballater Road in the village of Aboyne, Aberdeenshire, OS reference NO 516986. The wood is bounded to the north by Ballater Road, the A93 road, to the west by Rhu-na-Haven road, to the south by a range of private gardens and the Aboyne Academy and Community Centre car park, and to the east by Bridgeview Road.

2.5 Surrounding Land Use

The Lady Wood is largely surrounded by other areas of woodland and therefore forms only one part of a larger woodland ecosystem. To the south are the gardens of Barclay Park which are themselves well wooded but also provide areas of open ground. Many residents also provide supplementary feeding for birds and garden ponds and bird baths give essential access to water.

To the east is the mixed coniferous and broadleaved wood in the grounds of St Thomas' Church. To the north lie the gardens of the houses facing Ballater Road and the mixed broadleaved woodland between Ballater Road and Kinnord Drive. The gardens in Kinnord

Drive are also well wooded. To the west are mixed coniferous and broadleaved woods, some of which are managed for timber production.

2.6 History of Land Use

The available historical maps show the site of The Lady Wood as continually carrying woodland from at least 1822. The land was part of Aboyne Castle Estate from around 1440 until it was sold in the 1880s. The land was subsequently purchased in 1944 by the present owner's Grandfather, Sir Malcolm Barclay Harvey of Dinnet. The wood was considerably larger than at present and occupied almost all of the ground between Bridgeview Road, the North Deeside Road and the River Dee, the only open ground being the manse glebe.

The wood is believed to have been replanted, with oak and Scots pine sometime around 1850. Subsequent to this, part of the area was lost in the early 1900s when Rhu-na-Haven Road was built along with the Edwardian houses facing onto the river Dee. Much of the wood was felled in the late 1930s leaving a strip of oak trees on the south side of the Deeside road. The 1959 Ordnance Survey map depicts the land to the south of the retained strip as open moorland. The felled area has been gradually developed for housing over the past 50 years and Aboyne Academy and Community Centre was built at the eastern end of the wood in 1949 and extended in 1974.

2.7 Soils and Geology

The underlying rock is Dalradian limestone but this is deeply buried under layers of coarse fluvio-glacial outwash of mixed, mainly acidic origin. The soil is a well drained, stony forest brown earth.

2.8 Elevation Aspect and Topography

The wood lies at an elevation of 140 metres a.s.l. The aspect is open and the land is level at the western end with a slight slope from the main road to the school car park at the eastern end. The wood lies on the floor of the main valley of the River Dee and the DAMS (Detailed Aspect Measurement System) score for the wood is 12 which confirms the area is relatively well sheltered for this part of middle Deeside.

2.9 Vegetation

No formal vegetation survey has been carried out but the wood has some components of the natural ground flora that would be typical of a native oakwood in this location, Great wood rush (*Luzula sylvatica*) is present but limited in extent and blaeberry (*Vaccinium mytillos*) also has a limited spread and is found mainly at the western end of the wood. Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) is present where there is limited overhead shade and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) is common with a clumped distribution. Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) is dominant in more open areas where light reaches the ground.

In the month of May the following native ground flora were recorded:

Blue bugle	<i>Ajuga gaevenensis</i>
Bluebell	<i>Hyacinthoides non-scriptus</i>
Broad-leaved dock	<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>
Chickweed wintergreen	<i>Trientalis europaea</i>
Common nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>
Dead nettle	<i>Lamium spp.</i>
Dog violet	<i>Viola riviniana</i>
Foxglove	<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>
Ground elder	<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i>
Hedge mustard	<i>Sisymbrium officinale</i>
Lesser celandine	<i>Ranunculus ficaria</i>
Ramsons/Wild garlic	<i>Allium ursinum</i>
Rosebay willow-herb	<i>Epilobium angustifolium</i>
Wild raspberry	<i>Rubus idaeus</i>
Wood sorrel	<i>Oxalis acetosella</i>

The shrub and dwarf shrub layers are poorly developed and native shrub species such as hawthorn, blackthorn and hazel are scarce or absent. Garden escapes are frequent and, in parts, to the exclusion of all other plants. Cultivated dead nettle forms extensive carpets in places, flowering currant bushes are also present and in spring there are many snowdrops and daffodils.

Although the ground flora is much affected by human activity, particularly trampling and the presence of garden species, many native ground flora species are still present and form an important part of the habitat value of the woodlands. The ground vegetation is an integral part of the woodland and any future management must take this into account.

Fungi also play an important role in the ecosystem of the wood as mycorrhizal symbionts (mineral/nutrient exchangers with plants), parasites, saprotrophs (dead wood and leaf litter recyclers) and as food for invertebrates and rodents. However a species survey has not been carried out. Lichens (each species an alga and fungus growing in symbiosis) are prevalent on trees in the wood as well.

2.10 Fauna

Mammals :

Red Squirrel is a UK BAP Priority Species and Deeside is one of its strongholds. They are commonly observed in the Lady Wood and the adjoining woodland to the west. Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels project posters have been put up to

encourage the community to report sightings (and sightings of grey squirrels should they appear).

- Bats** Pipistrelle bats (species not confirmed) and long-eared bats (presumably brown long-eared, as range of this species extends north to Scotland) have been recorded in the Lady Wood. They are known to roost in roof spaces of adjacent houses, but may also roost in mature trees in the wood as well as foraging there.
- Badgers** have not been observed on the site and as no evidence of badger setts has been discovered they are considered to be absent.
- Roe deer** are common in the adjacent woods and use the Lady Wood regularly at night however their impact on tree regeneration is slight.
- Rabbits** are observed in the Lady Wood at nights but, as there is little evidence of browsing on regenerating seedlings, their impact is not considered significant.
- Other Common Mammals** such as fox, stoat, weasel are common on Deeside and may occasionally use the Lady Wood. No information is available on small mammals such as voles, shrews and field mice but some species are probably present.

Birds:

A complete species list for the Lady Wood is not available but:

Common garden birds such as blackbird, song and mistle thrushes, sparrow, chaffinch, collared dove and wood pigeon are all present and either breed or feed regularly in the wood

Other woodland birds such as tawny owl, and blackcaps breed regularly in the wood. Great spotted and green woodpeckers and jays nest nearby and regularly forage in the wood. Woodcock are observed flying over the wood at dusk but are not thought to breed there.

Invertebrates :

No systematic information is available on the full spectrum of the invertebrate population of the Lady Wood. However some surveys of the Lepidoptera have been carried out. 7 of the 22 species recorded to date are local and/or scarce or rare in NE Scotland, 3 of which are particularly associated with oak woodland. Irregular recording and incomplete coverage mean that many more species are likely to be present in Lady Wood. The full list of species recorded can be found in Appendix 6

2.11 Hydrology

There are no streams or water courses in the wood. One ditch crosses the wood in a north-south direction just west of the mid point but it rarely carries any water.

2.12 Trees

The woodland is dominated by pedunculate oak trees of around 150 years of age. There are no written records of the establishment of the wood, however the fairly uniform size and growth habit of all the oak trees present in the wood gives a strong indication that the wood was planted. Ring counts from a recently windblown oak gave an approximate planting date of around 1850. Sample measurements of the dominant tree crop are listed below.

Species	Stems/ha	Top Height (m)	Mean DBH (cm)
Oak	140	22.0	42

There is evidence of past gale damage in the woods in a fairly regular distribution of windblown oak stumps, almost all leaning away from the north west. The date of this damage is not known but the direction of the stumps would indicate that it was not in the "Great Gale" of 1953 which was north easterly. Many of the blown stumps now carry coppice re-growth of around 10 metres height and with a diameter of around 10cm. However, as these are growing from a decayed root system, their long term future is doubtful.

The other notable tree species present is Noble Fir (*Abies procera*). There are a few specimens planted along the side of the wood nearest Ballater road of significant size, around 35 metres (100') top height and 90 cm DBH (Diameter at Breast Height).

More coniferous trees are present at the western end of the wood, including Noble fir, Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga taxifolia*) and Norway spruce (*Picea abies*). These grow to around 22 metre (72') top height and are thought to have regenerated from the trees growing on the western side of Rhu-na-Haven Road.

Naturally regenerated silver and downy birch (*Betula pendula* and *B. pubescens*) are present in clumps wherever there are small gaps in the oak canopy. These reach a height of 12 – 18 metres and, as they have never been thinned, tend to be spindly with a small stem diameter for their height. Many of these have suffered stem breakage from heavy snow in past winters.

Young self-seeded trees are present throughout the wood although oak seedlings are rare. At the western end of the wood, beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) seedlings are abundant with heights of 2-3 metres common. Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) seedlings are also frequent at this end of the wood along with some scattered regeneration of Douglas fir and Noble fir. Birch, rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), elder (*Sambucus nigra*), red elder (*Sambucus racemosa*) and holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) are found in smaller numbers throughout the site.

Most of this younger regeneration appears to date from a time after the houses in Barclay Park were built. Presumably the increased human usage of the wood has deterred the presence of roe deer and rabbits.

Although the wood is planted with pedunculate oak, it is closely related to sessile oak, a native Scottish species that would grow naturally on this site. As oak is a native species, the trees and the associated shrub and ground flora support a diverse insect fauna which together support an interesting assemblage of bird species that would not occur in a beech or sycamore wood.

The longevity of the oaks also gives a long term stability to the woodland habitat. The majority of the trees are around 150 years of age and it can be expected that, barring natural catastrophes, the healthy dominant trees in the wood will still be present in another 150 years.

As some of the trees are mature and some are now beginning to decay and lose branches in winter storms, special habitats for hole nesting birds and bats are present which increases the wildlife diversity of the wood.

2.12.1 Condition of the Trees

Most of the trees are healthy and in good condition. However the occasional evidence of storm damage appears after a severe weather event. A number of the young thickets of birch trees have over time been bent over and snapped by heavy snow. Snow damage is also evident on some of the oak trees. Most damage is relatively minor such as the breaking of small branches. However occasional larger branches break and some are left hanging in the tree canopy and liable to fall down in a period of high winds. This creates a hazard to anyone walking through the wood at the time. Some trees have had large branches broken in the past, creating cavities and weaknesses in the wood which will deteriorate as the wood decays.

The wood was inspected in 2002 and again in the spring of 2009. All necessary remedial felling or limb removal in the interest of public safety was carried out after the inspections.

2.12.2 Non-Native trees :

The majority of the young self-seeded trees in the wood are not of native species. As already noted beech regeneration is abundant along with smaller numbers of sycamore and mixed conifers. Oak seedlings are so few in numbers that the wood is unlikely to sustain itself as an oakwood with the current level of competing species.

If left unchecked, the non-native trees will, in time, dominate the wood and exclude many of the native trees. This will cause a long term change in character of the wood. Beech and conifers cast a dense shade which will cause the loss of much of the present ground vegetation and the ground in the wood is likely in future to carry only early spring flowering plants, mosses and leaf litter.

Beech and sycamore also support fewer insect species and lower numbers overall than oak. An increase in non-native trees at the expense of oak with the resulting reduction in insect

populations will adversely affect the abundance and diversity of birds foraging and nesting in the wood. Beech is also more prone to rot and decay at an earlier age than oak and the long term stability of the woods would be reduced.

2.13 Archaeology

There are no known features of archaeological interest in the Lady Wood.

2.14 Landscape

The Lady Wood offers an important contribution to the western approach to Aboyne. It provides a visual link between the wooded countryside around the village and the Ballater road which is lined by houses with large gardens containing many fine trees. It is vital to maintain this wooded aspect as trees are very prominent in the village of Aboyne. The Lady Wood also screens the main road from the residential development in Barclay Park and also provides important sound moderation from the noise of the traffic.

2.15 Footpaths

The paths through the woodland offer a good alternative to walking on the pavement beside the busy A93 for those who wish to access the riverside walks from the village or those wishing for a short walk amongst trees. The woodland path avoids the road spray and is safer for younger children than the roadside pavement.

The paths are a primary route to school for pupils and their continued use should be encouraged. They are also used by Aboyne Academy pupils

There is one formal, lit footpath running north/south across the wood from Barclay Park, leading to the Ballater Road. It is surfaced with gravel and was resurfaced in 2004.

Otherwise up until 2004 there only existed a loose pattern of informal paths and desire lines in the Lady Wood. Although the paths were frequently used as a route to school and to the community centre they were muddy in winter and had a rough surface caused by erosion and protruding tree roots.

In 2004 the current network of footpaths was built with the aid of grant assistance from Scottish Natural Heritage. The work was planned and supervised by the Upper Deeside Access Trust (now transformed into the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust). These are passable by people who have slight disabilities. However they are not of a standard for wheelchair access and are slightly too narrow for two people to walk abreast, one assisting the other.

Although Aboyne Academy staff regularly collect litter at the eastern end of the wood near the Academy, there is no formal arrangement for litter collection in the remainder. Most of the litter collection is presently done by public spirited members of the public.

2.16 Visual and Educational amenity

This oak woodland is on the door step of Aboyne Academy and Aboyne Primary School giving pupils the opportunity to get outside in pleasant surroundings in their break times. The wood is an important resource for use in environmental education as part of the Curriculum for Excellence which encourages active outdoor learning. Its value is increased by the fact that it can be accessed very easily without having to use road transport.

If the paths were to be made accessible for all needs, the ASENT base at Aboyne Academy could make good use of the woodland for all its pupils.

Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service uses the wood from time to time to support some of the schools' curricular work, as a venue for public events and on guided walk routes.

3. EVALUATION

3.1 Constraints and Opportunities Analysis

Archaeological Impact

Factor	Constraint	Opportunity
There are no known sites of Archaeological interest in the Lady Wood	There are known archaeological sites nearby	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain lookout for any signs of archaeological remains during all forestry operations.

Visual Impact

Factor	Constraint	Opportunity
The Lady Wood is visible from the A93 North Deeside Road		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Follow guidelines in UK Forestry Standard• Regenerate where possible using low impact silvicultural systems• Follow guidelines in UK Forestry Standard

Ecological Impact

Factor	Constraint	Opportunity
Removal of beech regeneration	Will involve some chainsaw felling Possible disturbance of wildlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Carry out felling outside of breeding season• Follow guidance in FCS Guidance Note 33 Forest Operations and Red Squirrels in Scottish Forests.• Maintain vigilance for the presence of grey squirrels and take appropriate steps to trap them if they should arrive.
Replacement of non-native trees after felling	Choice of replacement species	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Replant with native oak of local provenance in clearings where little natural regeneration is occurring and with shrub

Factor	Constraint	Opportunity
		species such as hazel, hawthorn in clearings and on margins
Habitat for hole nesting birds and bats	Trees beside footpaths and boundaries should be inspected at regular intervals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain mature trees for as long as is consistent with public safety
Habitat for deadwood invertebrates	Continuity of deadwood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain all standing dead timber consistent with public safety
Open Space	Areas of open space within the woodland are currently limited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow for 10- 20% open space in the wood
Non-native ground flora	Removal of all non-native ground flora would be potentially damaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> maintain watch for any invasive species such as Japanese knotweed or rhododendron.

Social Impact

Factor	Constraint	Opportunity
High levels of recreational visitors	Need to manage access during tree management operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide adequate warning of proposed operations Signpost alternative routes where practicable Erect and maintain adequate signage during period of operations
Access for the disabled	Facilities for disabled visitors are inadequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MDL will investigate the cost and possible sources of funding to upgrade the path to be wheelchair accessible Signs and information should be accessible to the disabled Seats/Perches should be provided to assist those who walk with difficulty
Signage	Existing signage is very limited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide threshold boards to inform visitors of all abilities provisions and interpret oak wood ecology

Condition of footpaths		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A programme of regular trimming of path side vegetation should be implemented to keep the path passable for baby buggies and for companions walking with disabled users.
Linkages to other paths/cycle routes including proposed Deeside Way	Impact on proposed core path network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDL will explore possible footpath/cycle links from the Lady Wood to the Deeside Way and other local routes.
The use of the wood for educational purposes	The wood is currently used by both schools for environmental education and by Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service to support curricular work and also for public events/guided walks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDL will maintain liaison with the schools and with the Aberdeenshire Council Countryside Ranger Service
Dog Fouling	there have been regular complaints about dog fouling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDL will approach Aberdeenshire Council to request dog litter bins at the entrances to the wood

4. MANAGEMENT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

4.1 Aims

The management aims are to:

Maintain the Lady Wood as a native oak wood

Maintain the diverse structure and wildlife habitat of the woodland

Maintain the amenity of the wood and the recreational value of the path network

Provide an educational resource for the schools and the community

4.2 Objectives

4.2.1 Primary Objectives

1. To fulfil all legal and contractual obligations committed to within the plan period
2. To provide access to the wood for people of all abilities
3. To replace dead and fallen oak trees with oak seedlings of local genetic origin.
4. To maintain habitats for wildlife, including 15-20% of open ground.
5. To encourage the natural regeneration of native trees and shrubs in suitable gaps in the wood
6. To involve the schools and the community in all woodland management activities.

4.2.2 Secondary Objectives :

7. To establish monitoring systems that will record the establishment of tree and shrub regeneration and the impact of management activities.
8. To continue to provide for public access and recreation by the maintenance of paths and the removal of litter
9. To improve the quality of experience of the visiting public by the provision of interpretative information on the natural history of the wood

5. PRESCRIPTIONS

The prescription are set out by activities with the Objectives set against each one.

5.1 Tree Management

Primary Objective 2 – To provide access to the wood for people of all abilities

As reported in section 2.12.1 trees have suffered winter storm damage at irregular intervals over the years. The woodlands will therefore be inspected every 3 years by a suitably qualified surveyor. Where necessary, in the interests of public safety, dangerous trees or branches should be removed and to improve the visual amenity the storm broken younger trees should be cleared.

This work must be carried out by competent contractors with the appropriate skills and qualifications for the jobs involved. It is not necessary in every case to fell the trees to ground level. Dead trees can instead be reduced to a height of 3-4 metres to provided wildlife habitat where this would not create a hazard to the public.

The larger pieces of timber will be left on site to provide dead wood habitat for invertebrates, the smaller branches and brushwood will be chipped on site and the chips used to surface some of the minor paths.

5.2 Natural Regeneration

Primary Objective 5 – To encourage the natural regeneration of native trees and shrubs in suitable gaps in the wood

As mentioned in Section 2.12.2, there is significant regeneration of non-native tree species which will in time come to dominate the wood. It is therefore proposed that all non-native trees with a stem size less than 10cm in diameter at ground level should be removed.

The larger trees will be removed by the contractors engaged in the tree management works. The smaller trees can be removed by cutting with hand saws, loppers and secateurs. Small seedlings can be uprooted by hand.

This latter task could be done by volunteers under the direction of an Aberdeenshire Council Ranger or other competent person to ensure that only the non-native species are removed and the desirable species such as birch, rowan and holly are left undisturbed.

The removal of the non-native species will provide space and light for the natural regeneration of more native species trees.

It can be expected that beech and sycamore will also continue to regenerate in the Lady Wood so long as mature trees are nearby to provide a source of seed. The task of uprooting non-native trees will therefore have to be repeated at intervals of around every 5 years.

5.3 Tree Planting

Primary Objective 3 – To replace dead and fallen oak trees with oak seedlings of local genetic origin

It is anticipated that the numbers of trees that will need to be planted will be small, perhaps 10 – 20 trees per year. In some years the production of acorns is very sparse due to poor weather so the planting programme will have to adapt to the available seed supply.

To achieve the objective of planting oak seedlings of local genetic origin it will be necessary to organise the collection of acorns from local native oak trees. These are few in number and scattered but some can be found on Craig Damh in Glen Tanar and on Dinnet National Nature Reserve. The permission of the landowners will have to be obtained but this is not expected to be a major hurdle.

Growing the oak seedlings to plantable size can be done by volunteers in any domestic garden that is protected from rabbits and other grazing animals.

Tree planting can be done by the school pupils under the direction of an Aberdeenshire Council Ranger or other competent person. Cutting back competing vegetation in the summer needs to be done with sharp tools and can be done by adult volunteers or by contractors.

Planting should be carried out in small openings in the wood where decayed or storm damaged trees have been cleared. As natural regeneration is severely checked by the growth of bracken, planting can be done in patches of bracken without any loss of opportunity for native trees to regenerate naturally.

In addition to oak trees, native shrub species such as hazel and hawthorn should also be planted in small numbers to create a shrub layer in the wood. Planting of shrubs should be concentrated on the margins of the wood and near small clearings where the light is greater.

5.4 Wildlife Habitat

Primary Objective 4 - To maintain habitats for wildlife, including 15-20% of open ground.

The bird population of the wood includes a wide range of species some of which depend on cavities in trees for nesting spaces. Whilst there are a number of natural cavities in the older trees the habitat can be improved by the provision of nesting boxes to replace and supplement those previously erected.

These should be constructed in a variety of sizes, the smaller ones for birds such as warblers up to boxes large enough for tawny owls. Bat Boxes can also be provided to create roosting habitat for bats.

Mid Deeside Ltd
Lady Wood

Scale 1:2 500 12/04/2010

Concept Map

