

Aberdeenshire Forestry and Woodland Strategy 2016

Call for Views September 2015



1.0 Aberdeenshire Forestry and Woodland Strategy 2016 ‘Call for Views’

- 1.1 Aberdeenshire is home to a rich diversity of forests and woodlands which provide significant economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits. It is important that this resource is sustainably protected, managed and enhanced. To this end Aberdeenshire Council wishes to develop a strategy which will provide a guide for forest and woodland creation and management across Aberdeenshire in forthcoming years.
- 1.2 In order to achieve this, Aberdeenshire Council is seeking views from across the region on the key local and regional issues which affect forestry and woodlands.
- 1.3 Forests and woodlands do not exist in isolation: sustainable management of the forest resource cannot be achieved without integration with other land uses. For this reason, consideration of policy and decision making for other land use types - particularly agriculture, river basin management planning and development planning - is critical in developing a forestry and woodlands strategy which effectively considers the issues relevant across Aberdeenshire.
- 1.4 The development of the strategy is being guided by Forestry Commission Scotland’s document *The Right Tree in the Right Place*¹.

2.0 What will the new Forestry and Woodland Strategy do?

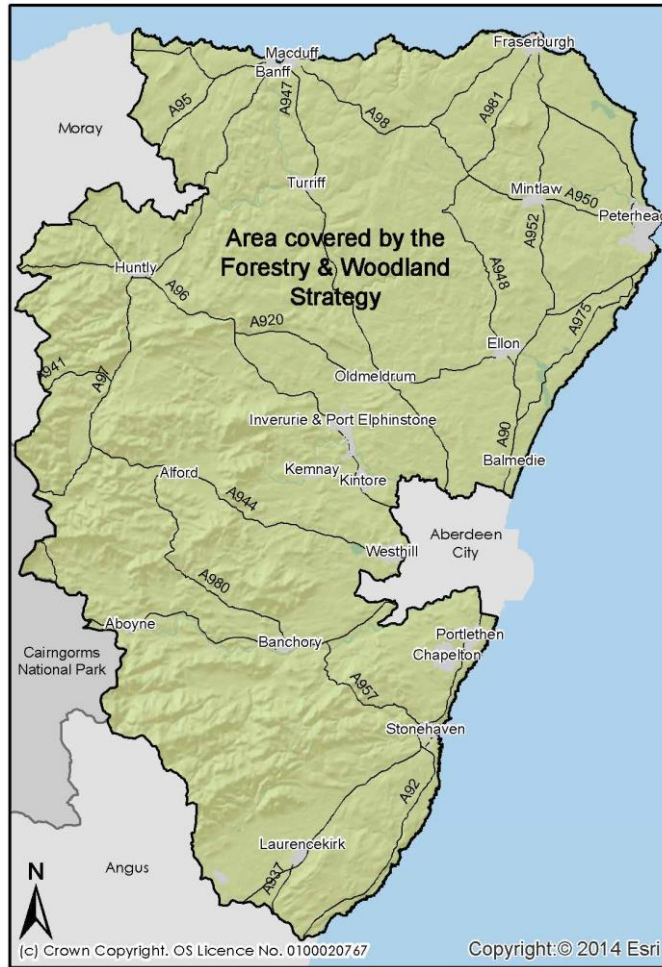
- 2.1 The new strategy will replace the existing Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Forest and Woodland Strategy produced in 2005.
- 2.2 In focusing on integration with other land use types across Aberdeenshire, the strategy will set out priorities for forest and woodlands, and in doing so help to inform the location, design and management of woodlands across the region. It will cover both ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ issues and highlight the benefits of integrating trees and woodlands into built development.
- 2.3 The strategy will include a spatial identification for preferred areas for new woodland creation, helping to target grant support.

3.0 What status will the strategy hold?

- 3.1 Aberdeenshire Council will create the Forestry and Woodland Strategy (FWS) as Supplementary Guidance to the 2016 Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (LDP). This will give it a status within the statutory planning process. Linking the strategy to the LDP means that it will cover the area of Aberdeenshire out with Cairngorms National Park in line with LDP boundaries (See map 1 below for area). The strategies and guidance of Cairngorms National Park will influence woodland issues in these other areas.
- 3.2 The strategy will identify preferred areas for new woodland creation, and be taken into consideration in the allocation of Scottish Rural Development Programme grant awards.

¹ [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/fcfc129.pdf/\\$FILE/fcfc129.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/fcfc129.pdf/$FILE/fcfc129.pdf)

Map 1: Area covered by Aberdeenshire Forestry and Woodland Strategy



3.3 As supplementary guidance, the strategy will be subject to review every 5 years in line with the LDP review process. However, the strategy should look to the future, 20 years hence and more, bearing in mind the long term nature of forestry and woodland issues.

4.0 Woodland coverage in Aberdeenshire

4.1 The forestry industry and the woodlands of Aberdeenshire are a significant and important resource. Forestry Commission Scotland datasets² suggest a figure of 91225.84 ha of woodland in the LDP area. This is 18.7% of the total LDP land area and similar to the Scottish national average (~ 18%). Woodland cover is greatest in the catchments of the Dee, Don and Deveron, with less woodland cover in the more intensive agricultural areas of Buchan and the Mearns.

4.2 The data available suggests that total woodland coverage has been relatively stable in the last 20 years, with localised losses and gains balancing out the headline figures.

² National Forest Inventory 2013 combined with the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland

- 4.3 Most woodlands in the region are predominately composed of commercial conifer species. Approximately 60% of the woodlands are in private ownership with 40% being publicly owned. A relatively high proportion, in comparison with the rest of Scotland, are made up of Scots Pine. However, Sitka Spruce is also a significant crop. Other commercial conifer species are present; of note is that Larch species are not as threatened by disease currently as they are in western parts of Scotland although tree health and disease is still a significant concern in the region.
- 4.4 Extensive areas of native woodland predominate on Deeside and Donside. Of particular importance in these areas is native Scots Pine woodland or 'Caledonian Forest'. Native woodlands are highly valuable assets providing habitat for a range of nationally and internationally important species.
- 4.5 Woodlands in the region are significant recreational and amenity resource. Although small scale currently, community woodland ownership is increasing. Trees and woodland are important elements in urban landscapes, providing habitat, amenity as well as other 'services' such as air quality benefits and cooling.

5.0 Key themes for the Forestry and Woodland Strategy

- 5.1 The issues considered within the Aberdeenshire Forestry and Woodland Strategy will be structured around the following four themes:
- Climate Change and Tree Health
 - Timber and Business Development
 - Community Development, Access and Health
 - Natural, Cultural and Historic Assets
- 5.2 These themes are broad and the strategy will not cover every aspect of relevance in relation to them. The aim is to focus on the key forestry and woodland issues and opportunities which the strategy can make a contribution to addressing. It is recognised that the themes are not mutually exclusive; issues will overlap between them.

6.0 How can you contribute?

- 6.1 Sections 7 to 10 below consider each of the four themes identified above in turn. Section 11 outlines our proposed approach to the mapping of preferred areas for new woodland creation. The sections briefly highlight issues which may be relevant to consider in the formation of the strategy, followed by a number of questions. We welcome responses to these questions, views on the issues that you consider to be most important within Aberdeenshire and any other relevant comments. A response form is provided with this document which you are encouraged to use.
- 6.2 Your responses will shape the strategy we produce. We will produce a report collating responses and identifying how we will respond and take account of them. This is the first consultation phase for the strategy. We will carry out a further consultation on a draft of the strategy in early 2016.

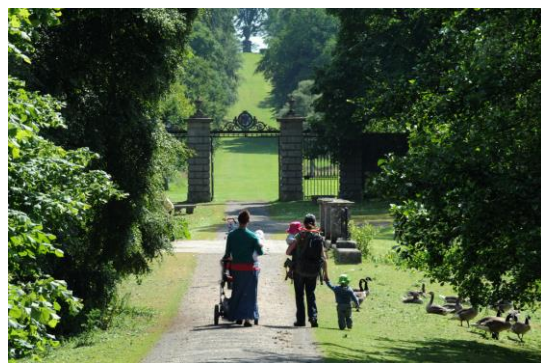
6.3 The deadline for responses is **14th October 2015**

Please send responses to:

forestry&woodland@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

or

**Forestry and Woodland Strategy
Planning and Building Standards
Aberdeenshire Council
Woodhill House
Westburn Road
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7.0 Theme 1: Climate Change and Tree Health

- 7.1 Human induced climate change is having an impact on North East Scotland. Rises in average temperatures, reductions in snow-fall and changes in rainfall patterns are being observed. Projections suggest that these changes will continue and increase, in particular it is predicted that winters will be milder and wetter, summers warmer and drier and there will be an increase in the intensity and frequency of 'severe' weather events (heavy rainfall, storms etc.).
- 7.2 Climate change will present challenges for many aspects of society and the environment, not least our forestry and woodlands. The long-term nature of forestry and woodland planning in particular means that the effects of a changing climate need to be considered both in the management of existing woodlands and the creation of new ones. Location, species choice, management/felling regime and biodiversity benefits all require consideration in this context.
- 7.3 Forestry and woodlands provide valuable opportunities for society to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change by storing carbon, providing fuel, reducing water-runoff and allowing species movement, for example.
- 7.4 A particular focus for the forestry industry is tree health and disease. Various significant health and disease risk are present in Scotland which require vigilance and good management. It is suggested that climate change is likely to exacerbate these disease issues.
- 7.5 The Forestry and Woodland Strategy provides a significant opportunity. It should express how we would like woodland planners and managers to take account of the effects of climate change so as to minimise the impacts in rural and urban areas and to make the most of the potential for us to adapt to its effects.

Question 1: What are the key threats to the forestry industry and woodlands in Aberdeenshire resulting from climate change? Are there any potential opportunities?

Question 2: How can we make forestry and woodlands more resilient in the face of climate change?

Question 3: What are the key things the strategy can do to reduce and mitigate tree health and disease risks and impacts?

8.0 Theme 2: Timber and Business Development

8.1 Aberdeenshire's forestry and woodlands are a highly important resource for the area providing jobs and contributing to the economy. The strategy is an opportunity to encourage and support the forestry industry so as to secure its long term future.

8.2 We would like to hear from you what are the key challenges facing forestry and woodland related businesses. There are challenges that the strategy could focus on, for example;

- A timber forecast volume that is increasing in the short to medium term putting pressure on road infrastructure.
- A forecasted dip in timber production in the medium to long term.
- Potential changes to commercial tree species suitability resulting from climate change.
- Skills shortages and an ageing workforce.
- The adjustment of the industry to continually changing timber prices on the world market.

8.3 There are also significant opportunities that the strategy could help to secure and maximise. For example:

- An expanding and diversifying domestic timber market.
- The 'good news story' of a locally grown renewable resource with environmental and social benefits.
- The commitment from Scottish Government to expand woodland cover.

Question 4: The Scottish Government objective is to expand woodland cover in Scotland. In Aberdeenshire:

- *what areas and types of land use would be appropriate for new woodland?*
- *what areas are inappropriate for woodland planting?*
- *how can woodlands be better integrated with existing land use?*

Question 5: What are the key challenges facing forestry and woodland related businesses? What could the strategy do to aid business development?

9.0 Theme 3: Community Development, Access and Health

- 9.1 Forestry and woodlands provide a wide range of benefits to society. They are one of the most important places for recreation in Aberdeenshire, providing space for a range of pursuits and activities with the associated health benefits this brings.
- 9.2 Forestry and woodlands can be an opportunity for community development, with management and ownership in community hands providing both income and a nucleus for community cohesion.
- 9.3 The planning of built development has an important role to play in securing and developing a forestry and woodland resource for the future. Planning needs to take account of the value of the existing resource and also seek opportunities to integrate trees and woodlands into developments.

Question 6: How could forestry and woodlands further contribute to community development in Aberdeenshire?

Question 7: What are the key issues and opportunities in relation to woodlands and Development Management (planning of built development) that the strategy should aim to address?

Question 8: What are the key opportunities to manage, promote and encourage the recreational opportunities, and associated health benefits, of Aberdeenshire's forestry and woodlands?

10.0 Theme 4: Natural , Cultural and Historic Assets

- 10.1 Forestry and woodlands provide multiple benefits to society. These benefits can be described as 'ecosystem services' and the delivery of these services is dependent on the location and management of woodlands, amongst other factors. Woodland managers tend to be well aware of these multiple benefits and integrate recreational access, environmental protection, historic environment protection and biodiversity conservation with their management activities for example.
- 10.2 The strategy provides an opportunity to highlight and increase the delivery of these multiple benefits while also protecting existing assets from inappropriate woodland management and planting.

Question 9: What are the key forestry and woodland issues and opportunities in Aberdeenshire would you highlight in relation to environmental quality, landscape and the historic environment? How can the strategy contribute to the protection and improvement of these assets?

Question 10: How can the strategy contribute to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity?

11.0 Mapping Preferred Areas for Woodland Creation

- 11.1 A map/maps of preferred areas for new woodland creation will form part of the strategy. Based on an identification of the significant constraints for, and opportunities of, new woodland creation, it is proposed that the map/maps will identify preferred, potential, sensitive and unsuitable areas – a classification based on *The Right Tree in the Right Place* guidance.
- 11.2 It is hoped that the map will be informative in **strategic level land use planning**. It is **not** the intention that the maps would be used at a more local/site based scale as a more focussed and specific assessment of the constraints and opportunities will still be required.
- 11.3 One of the key roles for the map will be in the Scottish Rural Development Programme new woodland creation grant award process. Woodland creation proposals which fall within the preferred areas can gain additional point in the scoring of the application as part of the competitive assessment process and receive an additional 10% funding uplift. The maps will be one element of the overall grant award decision making, and will not override any of the other environmental and economic factors that also form part of the application process.
- 11.4 It is currently proposed that a single map of preferred areas for new woodland is created. This **indicative** map would be produced for the whole LDP region. Information used in producing the map would have relevance for all woodland types at this regional scale. A suggested alternative to the one map approach is to create two maps, which split 'productive' and 'non-productive' woodland types, as there may be some differences applicable at the regional level – for example the locations of agreed timber transport routes or in relation to landscape impacts.

11.5 In order to create the map/maps of preferred areas for new woodland creation, a geographic information systems (GIS) based approach will be used. Relevant spatial information will be layered to create the preferred, potential, sensitive and unsuitable categories. The ‘constraint’ and ‘opportunity’ layers identified for use are listed in the tables below. Where applicable, there are links for further information on the layers used. Maps generated using the data **are shown in Appendix 1**. The layers selected are considered to consist of robust data that are applicable at the regional level.

Constraint Layer	Data
Existing woodland	National Forest Inventory 2014
	Native Woodland Survey of Scotland
Urban area and proposed development	Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (ALDP) Settlement Boundaries
	ALDP Housing Land Allocations 2016 to 2023
Timber transport	Agreed timber transport routes
Prime agricultural land	Macaulay Land Capability for Agriculture (classes 1, 2 and 3.1) ³
Cultural heritage	Scheduled Ancient Monuments (with 20m buffer)
	Historic Battlefields
	Aberdeenshire Designed Landscapes and Gardens
Carbon rich soils	Carbon rich soils (James Hutton Institute soil carbon data categories 5 and 6) ⁴
Natural heritage	National Nature Reserves
	RAMSAR sites
	Sites of Special Scientific Interest
	Special Areas of Conservation
	Special Protection Areas
	Local Nature Conservation Sites

Opportunity layer	Data
Within 2km of settlement	Settlements with 2km buffer
Woodland habitat networks	Potential Native Woodland Networks (target areas)
Natural Flood Management ⁵	SEPA Natural Flood Management opportunities for run-off reduction
	SEPA Natural Flood Management opportunities for floodplain storage

Question 11: Do you agree with the preferred single map approach to the identification of preferred areas for new woodland planting? If not, please explain why.

Question 12: Are there any significant omissions in list of identified constraints and opportunities? Should any of the identified layers not be used?

³ We are using the 1:50000 scale map of Land Capability for Agriculture

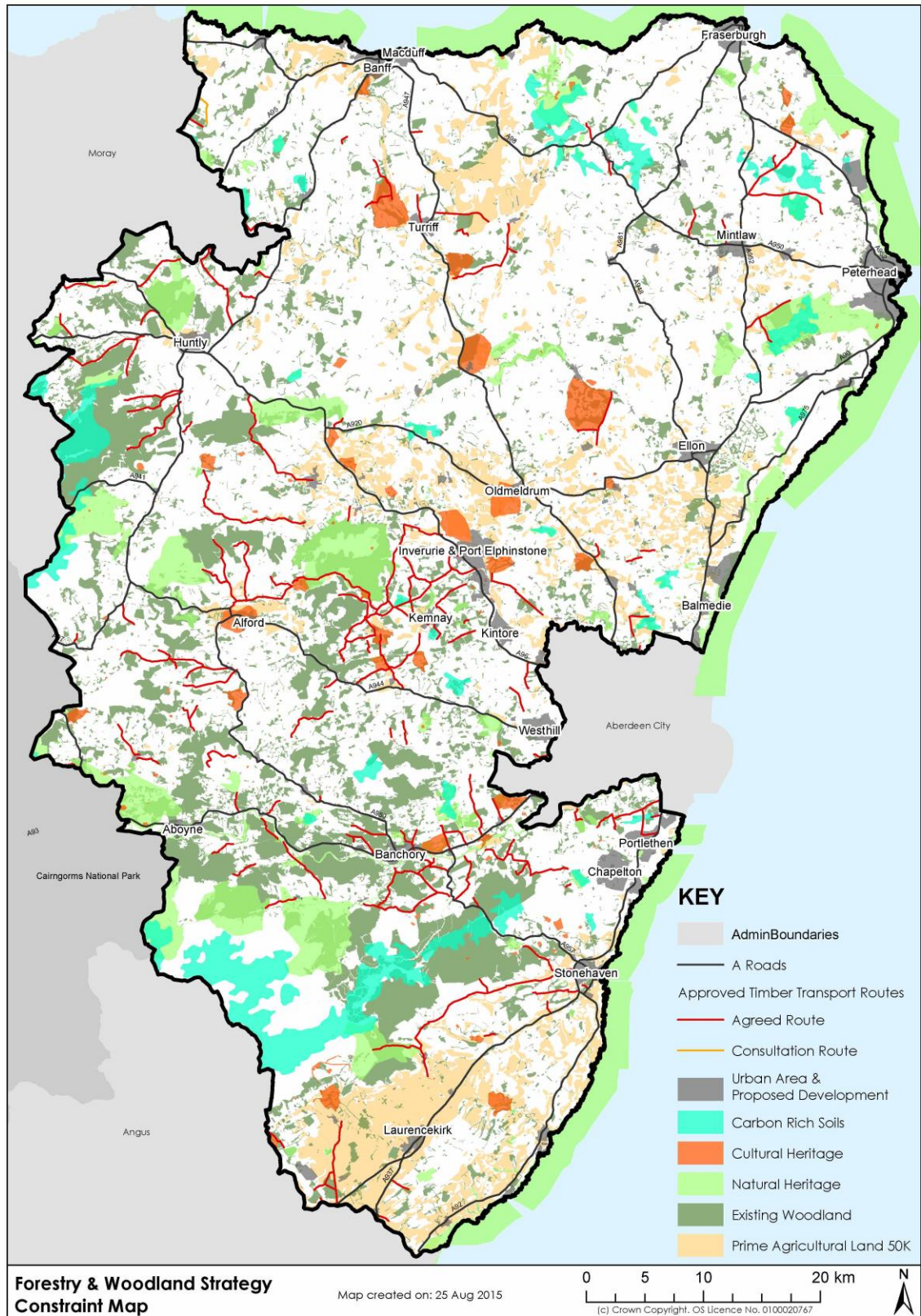
⁴ We are awaiting the new SNH map on [Soil carbon, peat soils and priority habitats](#) to be approved and made available and hope to integrate it into the analysis in place of this older JHI data.

⁵ Licencing issues prevent us from showing this data on the map in Appendix 1

Appendix 1: Maps of Opportunities and Constraints for New Woodland Creation

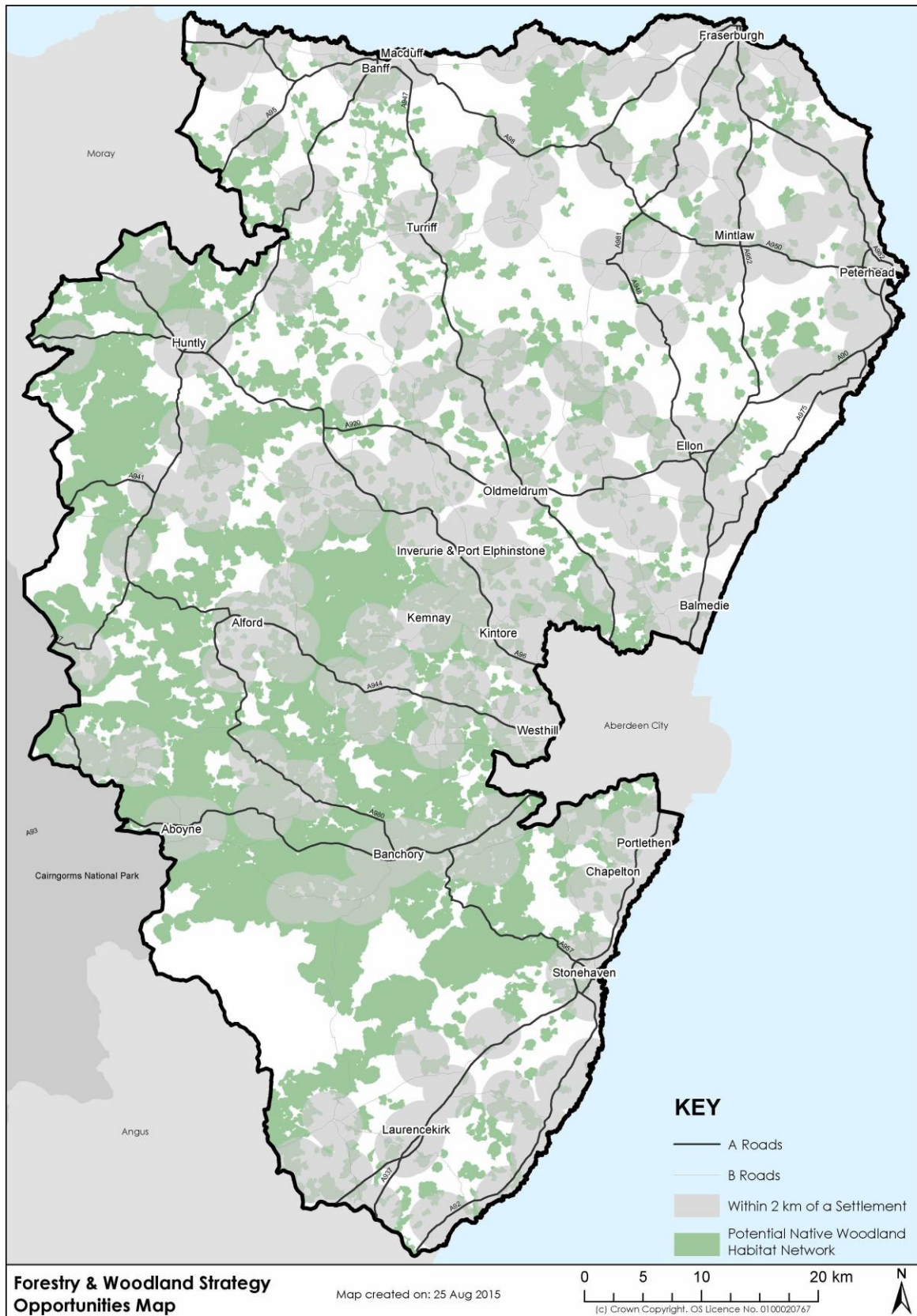
Map 1: New woodland creation constraints

- Refer to the tables on page 7 for the data that makes up each of the amalgamated layers shown in the map



Map 2: New Woodland Creation Opportunities

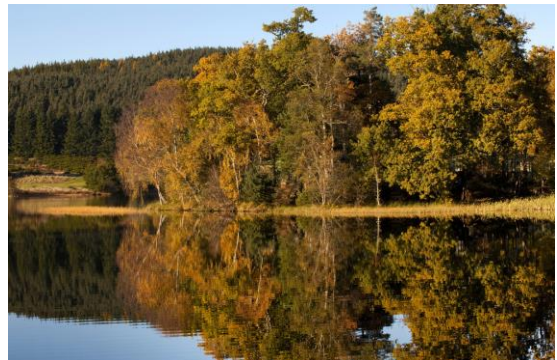
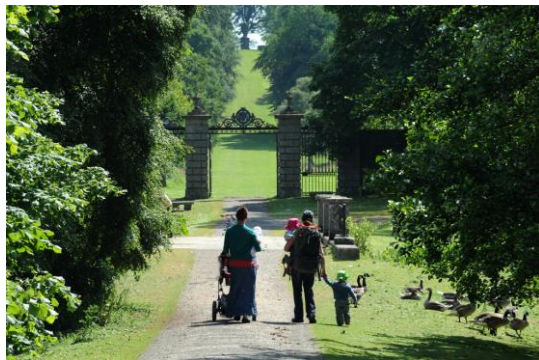
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For more information and for responses to the consultation contact:

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