

### **3. Part C – Analysis**

#### **3.1 *Policy Framework***

##### 3.1.1 Planning Policies

A wide range of national, regional and local planning policies are relevant to the management of Strathnairn Community Woodlands as they identify current best practices to be followed, and have a bearing on the support that the woodland management activities are likely to attract.

National Forestry Policy/Scottish Forestry Strategy (2006);  
Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy (2006);  
Woods for Nature-Biodiversity Action Plan (2008-11);  
Scottish Natural Heritage – Species location maps;  
Species action plans;  
Habitat action plans for Highlands;  
Code of Deer Management;  
Core Path Network for Inverness includes School and Milton Woods;  
Inverness and Nairn Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

##### 3.1.2 Designations

There are no formal conservation designations relating to either wood.

#### **3.2 *Constraints***

##### 3.2.1 Constraints – both sites

The following constraints affect both sites:

- Scottish Water mains on the roadside at both woods;
- Close proximity to local tourist route.

##### 3.2.2 Constraints – School Wood

The following constraints affect School Wood:

- School Wood is adjacent to Farr School and is regularly used as an open air classroom and a safe route to school from the wood car park;
- School Wood is regularly used by the general public;
- Neighbours include a number of residential properties;
- Some archaeological features exist in School Wood (Map 3a).

##### 3.2.3 Constraints – Milton Wood

The following constraints affect Milton Wood:

- 11kv overhead power line crosses Milton Wood;
- The River Nairn is a salmonid river;
- Significant archaeological features exist in Milton Wood (Map 3b);
- Milton Wood is regularly used by the general public;
- Wind risk models for British forests gives a wind-throw hazard of 2/4;
- Significant wind-throw has occurred in the spruce areas.

#### **3.3 *Community Land Unit Evaluation***

As part of a 5 year review by the Community Land Unit which contributed significant funds to purchase the woods an Independent Evaluation of Strathnairn Community Woodlands was completed in 2009 and looked at the management structure, achievements, economic, social, conservation and environmental impact on the surrounding area.

The full evaluation is available on request, but the key findings were:

- i) The management is effective and has a wide range of skills;
- ii) There is wide evidence of enthusiastic support in the community and from individuals for the project;
- iii) The project has maintained its local support since 2001;
- iv) Major improvements in infrastructure have been made;
- v) The woodlands are now widely used for informal recreation as well as an educational resource by the local primary school and ranger service for a number of community and training events;
- vi) Engaging and linking with the community / people to develop a real sense of “community ownership” has taken place;
- vii) During the five year period funding in excess of £239K was gained via grant aid, timber sales, local fund raising, events and donations;
- viii) The majority of the funding was spent locally (Strathnairn) via local suppliers and contractors;
- ix) The project is run on a sound financial basis and short to medium term funding for overheads is in place;
- x) A large amount of volunteer work and time has been spent by a number of local people to gain the achievements made to date;
- xi) Overall the Evaluation concluded that to date the woodlands project as originally planned at outset in 2001 had delivered the aims and objectives it set out to do.

### **3.4 Landscape Assessment**

#### 3.4.1 Strathnairn

Strathnairn is located in Highland Council Landscape Character Zone G – uplands East of the Great Glen with medium sensitivity. Both woods lie in the wide river plain and form part of a complex mosaic of mixed native and coniferous woodlands, low rolling hills, agricultural grazing and rough moorland classified as “Farmed Straths”. The flat aspect means the woodlands do not have a high visual impact from public viewpoint locations (see Map 4).

#### 3.4.2 School Wood

Entirely Scots pine with mixed broadleaves along its edges School Wood will be thinned and managed under continuous cover in the long term with care taken to maintain the roadside diversity and to manage roadside tree safety issues sensitively. Landscape impact is low.

#### 3.4.3 Milton Wood

The newly established riparian area in Milton Wood is regenerating prolifically and starting to blend in well with the birch and alder woodland extending along the River Nairn. The bulk of the visible woodland is thinned Scots pine. Areas of Spruce and Douglas fir at the South end and on the steep embankment slopes going down to the riparian area are becoming unstable. Small scale felling will be required and will create opportunities to improve roadside landscaping in the vicinity of the power line and to establish continuous cover woodland to improve the long term amenity and conservation in the vicinity. Milton Wood is mostly set back from the B851 and visual impact will be low.

### **3.5 Archaeology Assessment**

#### 3.5.1 Survey Conclusions

The survey conducted in 2002 concluded that no prehistoric features were located in either wood. Some features, particularly turf dykes, the enclosure within School Wood, and possibly the farmstead within Milton Wood, which are not marked on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map would appear to date to pre-improvement settlement and land division. The rest of the features, most

of which are recorded on the 1874 map, would appear to be mid 19<sup>th</sup> century estate improvements.

### 3.5.2 Survey Recommendations<sup>2</sup>

Recommendations for future management strategy were:

- i) "Manual clearing of trees from around the farmstead in Milton and leaving it clear";
- ii) "Birchbank should be protected from accidental damage during forestry work".

### 3.5.3 Opportunities

In Milton Wood the ruined farmstead with associated structures, the croft cottage, the mill lade associated with a former water mill and various dykes and tracks will benefit from protection and maintenance. Forest operations will also create opportunities to improve access to some of these features to allow the rich local cultural history and archaeology to be integrated into access planning with improved interpretation and information sharing.

## 3.6 *Ecological assessment*

### 3.6.1 Overall impact

Overall, the proposed operations will have a positive impact on the ecology of the woods. The thinning and felling operations will enhance the biodiversity by restructuring the even age classes and increasing light levels to enhance development of ground flora. The effects of deer will need to be monitored and reviewed, and all operations will take place outside the bird nesting season.

### 3.6.2 Restocking / Regeneration

Restocking / regeneration and new planting plans will increase the woodland area, will favour native species suited to site, and will create opportunities to introduce species e.g. oak where ecologically appropriate. However, care will also be needed to protect red squirrel habitat through acceptance of low levels of Norway spruce regeneration.

### 3.6.3 Improvements

The continued removal of invasive non-natives and management of the open / wetland habitats will also have a positive effect on the long-term ecology of the woodlands.

## 3.7 *Herbivore assessment*

### 3.7.1 Rabbits

New rabbit fencing and fence maintenance has virtually eliminated grazing by rabbits and sheep. External population control resulted in a major reduction in the rabbit population in 2011.

### 3.7.2 Cattle

Occasionally cattle can cross the river when water levels are low but neighbour relations are good and regeneration plentiful so this has not been a major problem.

### 3.7.3 Roe Deer

Roe deer are common in the Strathnairn area and are found in both woods. Regeneration is prolific in Milton Wood and around the edges of School Wood and showing only low levels of deer impact although pellet groups are relatively easy to find. Neighbouring landowners have not expressed any problems regarding deer populations in the local area. Restocking of felled spruce areas will require monitoring for deer impact and changes in the deer population will

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<sup>2</sup> This is consistent with Forestry and Archaeology Guidelines

need to be monitored as the shelter provided by the restocking in the riparian area grows towards the thicket stage. Monitoring will take place annually and will start prior to felling, in accordance with Code of Practice on Deer Management (Jan 2012). A formal Deer Management Plan is currently being compiled in consultation with Scottish Natural Heritage. The current draft attached as Appendix 8.

#### 3.7.4 Sika/Red Deer

Sika deer have not been observed in SCW. Monitoring will identify if any are present.

### **3.8 Social impact assessment**

#### 3.8.1 General

- i) Both woods are widely used by local residents and visitors from Inverness. Walking and dog walking are the main informal activities but there continues to be a variety of organised social and educational activities carried out in the woods throughout the year by both locals and visitors. Information could be gathered on numbers and frequency of visitors to the woods to aid future planning and potential fund raising;
- ii) Opportunities exist to increase local knowledge and awareness of the biodiversity and to use the woods as a study area with participation by the local community to gather information on insects, bats and squirrels etc. Activities could be undertaken by experts as training exercises with participants from the public. The development of links with local schools will continue to be encouraged by partnership working;
- iii) Continue working to promote responsible use of the woods and cabin and to discourage motorised vehicles, fly tipping etc. Incidents are infrequent.

#### 3.8.2 School Wood

- i) The wood has a large car park, a small picnic area, a woodland cabin / classroom and a path network which links to a wider network of paths along the River Farnack and to the public road at Tordarroch. The car park is widely used by the public, and Farr School operates a walking bus daily between the car park and the school as well as regular educational activities. The picnic area and car park are heavily used as part of the "Safe Routes to Schools" initiative and ways of sharing the costs of long term maintenance will need to be explored. School Wood will continue to be a popular venue for Highland Council Ranger Service activities open to the wider public. The management and development of the Woodland Cabin needs to be extended to get maximum use of the facility and to provide for ongoing maintenance. Where residents have direct access from gardens existing fencing maintenance also needs to be addressed.
- ii) The proposals for School Wood reflect the need to strike a balance between aspirations to use and improve facilities while avoiding any potential negative impacts from overdevelopment or felling. Felling work in School Wood will be restricted to low impact selective thinning to encourage more regeneration and diversity while other 'furniture' installations will be limited to the continued enhancement of interpretation at viewpoints and the incorporation of more seating and rest points at carefully chosen locations to encourage all ability usage.

#### 3.8.3 Milton Wood

- i) Has a small car park, an extensive path network and is also used regularly by the wider public and local residents for both informal walking and more organised activities. It is also a regular venue for Highland Council Ranger Service activities. There has been significant wind-blow in the wetter spruce areas and path safety and maintenance has required regular assessment and remedial action.

- ii) The felling and thinning proposals will address safety concerns arising from the increasing risk of wind-throw beside paths and neighbouring properties. The proposals will also establish internal viewpoints from the top of the embankment out to the surrounding countryside to make the walks more varied and interesting.
  
- iii) The field area will be integrated into the woodland by being planted with native broadleaves, with a short access path being added to link the wood and the road. Re-alignment of the track across the field and the broadleaf planting will ensure neighbouring properties are well screened from this path. As a courtesy, all neighbouring residents will be notified prior to operations being carried out, in order to ensure public safety and to minimise disruption as far as reasonably possible.