VOLUME 1

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

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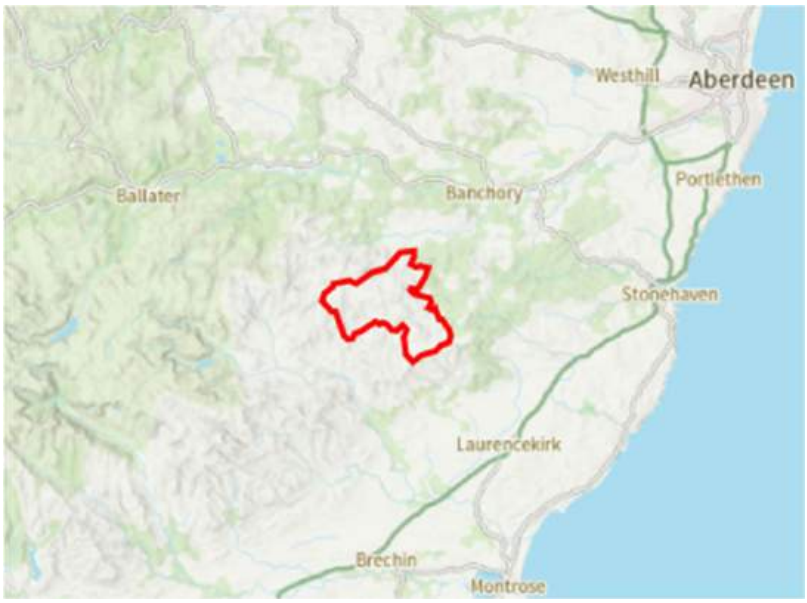
1. Introduction

Glen Dye Moor in Aberdeenshire, see location map below, is the site of a large woodland creation and peatland restoration project. It will help tackle climate change, create rural jobs and ensure the landscape can be enjoyed by future generations. The whole property extends to 6,350 hectares (15,700 acres).



The project will add 2,750 hectares (6795 acres) of new woodlands in the landscape surrounding the hills of Badymicks, Edendocher, and Clachnaben. This will be made up of:

- 690 hectares of new native woodland mainly of downy birch, willow and alder through natural regeneration;
- 1,420 hectares of new native woodland with main species of native Scots pine, birch, rowan, alder, willow and montane scrub species through new planting;
- 640 hectares of new productive woodland through new planting of Scots pine, Sitka spruce and other conifer species.

Including open habitat, the total area of woodland creation is just over 3000 hectares. This will increase woodland cover on the site from 0.4% to 44% on completion.

The project will also see riparian tree cover - woodland planted beside water courses - increase from under 5% to 54% with over 240 hectares of new riparian woodland. Species will include willow, alder, birch aspen and hazel.

Almost 1,800 hectares of degraded peatland will be restored as part of the project.

Around 2 kilometres of new roads will be built on site adding to over 90 kilometres of existing road, track and footpath on the site, which is heavily used for recreational access.

2. The Partnership Behind the Project

Glen Dye Moor is owned by Par Forestry IV L.P., managed by Edinburgh-based asset management company Par Equity, which has been involved in woodland investment for over 13 years. The sole investor in Par Forestry IV L.P is Aviva Investors, the global asset management business of Aviva plc. Aviva Investors is committed to reducing its impact on the environment by reducing and offsetting its carbon emissions by investing in a variety of low-carbon projects, including woodland creation and peatland restoration.

The project is being designed, implemented and managed by Scottish Woodlands Ltd, the UK's largest forest management company.

3. Environmental Impact Assessment

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report is prepared in support of an application by Par Forestry IV LP, for permission under The Forestry (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 for afforestation and new forest road works at Glen Dye Moor.

The EIA is a process of compiling, evaluating and presenting the predicted environmental impacts of a proposal. Under the 2017 regulations, an EIA is required for forestry projects likely to have significant environmental effects and therefore require the consent of Scottish Ministers.

4. Consultation

All aspects of the project have been through detailed consultation - with community groups, local councils, environmental organisations including the River Dee Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), and Butterfly Conservation Scotland, and expert consultants specialising in wildlife such as golden eagles and merlin. Statutory bodies, including Scottish Forestry, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), NatureScot, Aberdeenshire Council, and Historic Environment Scotland, have also played a vital role in shaping the project.

5. Policy Context

Scottish Government policy on new woodland creation is guided by the Scottish Forestry Strategy 2019–2029, which emphasises sustainable forest management to deliver economic, environmental, and social benefits. A key objective of this strategy is to expand Scotland's forest and woodland area, recognising that this can enrich habitats, enhance landscapes, soak up carbon, and support rural economies. To achieve these goals, the strategy sets ambitious targets for woodland expansion, aiming to increase forest cover from 19% of Scotland's land area currently to 21% by 2032, and 25% by 2050.

To support these targets, the Scottish Government offers financial incentives through the Forestry Grant Scheme, encouraging landowners to establish new woodlands. This scheme provides payments for initial planting, and annual maintenance for the first five years, plus capital grants for infrastructure like fencing and tree protection. This ensures new woodlands are integrated thoughtfully into the rural economy, maximising economic and environmental benefits while contributing to climate change mitigation and promoting biodiversity.

The site is in the area covered by Aberdeenshire Council, which published a Forestry and Woodland Strategy in 2023. Its vision is: that *"the forestry and woodlands of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan area are resilient to the effects of climate change, protect and enhance the environment and local culture, benefit and support the local and national economy and are valued and enjoyed by people, both residents and visitors."*

Woodlands cover 18.7% of the council area, in line with the Scottish average, but below the Scottish Forestry Strategy targets. The strategy does not set its own target for increasing woodland cover, but identifies preferred, potential, sensitive and unsuitable areas for woodland creation. At Glen Dye Moor, the area within the Feughside Local Nature Conservation Site is within the 'sensitive' zone, the remaining lower ground is within the 'preferred' zone. The high ground (where afforestation is not proposed) is within the 'unsuitable' zone.

This proposal contributes to meeting the local woodland strategy objectives through delivery of the opportunities identified through the four themes:

- Climate change & tree health;
- Timber & business development;
- Communities, development, access & health;
- Environment, landscape and historic assets.

6. Peatland Restoration

Glen Dye Moor has some of the most highly degraded peatland in Scotland and the ambition is to restore almost 1,800 hectares (just under 4450 acres) of these valuable habitats. This work has already commenced with two phases of peatland restoration being completed by September 2025, putting more than 370 hectares on the road to recovery. In summer 2025, a restoration project application covering more than 550 hectares over 3 phases was approved. Work started on Phase 3 in mid-September with the aim to complete by the end of 2025. Phases 4 & 5 are scheduled for 2026 & 2027 respectively. A further application for phases 6,7 & 8 covering an additional area of 500+ hectares will be submitted in September 2026 and additional phases (9 and beyond) will address the remainder of the site.

7. The Woodland Creation Process

The project has been planned in great detail and takes a long-term approach to woodland creation. This includes:

Site Preparation and Deer Management: Strategic placement of deer fences will protect newly planted trees from grazing deer, allowing the trees to grow and thrive. A carefully managed deer control programme will maintain balanced deer populations and minimise damage to trees, while following best practices for animal welfare. This deer management will also benefit wider habitats, especially peatland.

Diverse Tree Planting: About a third of the planting area will be commercial conifer species, mainly Scots pine and Sitka spruce, to support timber production. The UK imports more than 80% of the wood it uses and is committed to increasing home-grown wood production recognising the benefits of employment, biodiversity, carbon sequestration and product substitution for higher carbon emitting products like steel and concrete.

The remaining two-thirds of the site will focus on native woodlands: upland birch, suited to local soil and climate conditions; montane scrub, a mix of small trees, shrubs and wild flowers that grow on very high ground; and native Scots pine woodlands, with other broadleaf trees and native shrubs to enhance biodiversity and habitats.

Natural regeneration of trees - birch, willow and alder - will also be encouraged. Fragments of native woodland and individual 'veteran trees' remain at Glen Dye Moor, and by providing space for these trees to expand, local genetic diversity is preserved.

Roads and car parks: Carefully planned extensions to access roads will be constructed to allow woodland management, recreational access, and future timber harvesting, while minimising environmental impact. The Spital car park will be improved to provide enhanced access for recreation.

Long-Term Woodland Maintenance: Regular surveys will identify and replace dead or damaged trees to ensure the best possible tree growth and overall woodland establishment. Weed control, which might include application of pesticide and/or hand weeding, will be implemented to reduce vegetation competition with newly planted trees, promoting healthy growth. Alternatives to pesticides will be used where possible to achieve woodland establishment.

Pest and Disease Management: Monitoring and management will address any potential pest or disease outbreaks, safeguarding the health of the new woodlands.

8. Environmental Impact and Mitigation

A comprehensive EIA has been conducted to assess the project's potential effects on the environment. The scope of the EIA was informed by the Scoping Opinion issued by Scottish Forestry in February 2025. The EIA process involved detailed surveys including archaeology, species, habitats, peatland and soil surveys and detailed assessments of impacts to a number of key environmental and social factors:

The River Dee Special Area of Conservation (SAC): The River Dee SAC is an important conservation area, home to otters, freshwater pearl mussels and Atlantic Salmon. A portion of the River Dee SAC lies within the project boundary and might be affected by proposed operations, including cultivation, planting, natural regeneration, fence construction, forestry track construction and related activities.

The EIA considers potential impacts on habitat, breeding site damage or disturbance, and any changes to water courses and water quality.

A key conservation priority of the River Dee SAC is the enhancement of riparian woodlands to provide shade which cools water, and leaf litter that encourages invertebrates. The project will increase riparian woodland cover within the project area from under 5% to 54%, by planting willow, alder, birch, aspen and hazel. The total areas of riparian planting will be around 240 hectares (just under 600 acres).

Protected bird species: The EIA considers the impact of the proposals on golden eagles, merlin, curlew, lapwing, golden plover, oystercatcher, common sandpiper, snipe, and black grouse - species identified by a breeding bird survey. Impacts resulting from disturbance, habitat change, loss of foraging and breeding ground, deer fencing and cumulative effects resulting from the adjacent Glen Dye Windfarm have been considered.

Large Heath butterfly: An isolated colony of Large Heath butterfly has been identified. The prime habitat for Large Heath is of peatland and wet heath, with a specific combination of Hare's-tail Cottongrass and Cross-leaved Heath providing food for both caterpillars and adults. This specific habitat is excluded from this planting proposal by default, due to its poor ecological suitability for planting, but the impacts of tree seeding, changes to habitat, isolation and disturbance to the colony have been assessed.

Deer: Red deer and roe deer are present on site with seasonal migration onto neighbouring land occurring regularly. The EIA focuses specifically on how the proposed development (including fencing and deer management) could affect the local deer population through changes and/or loss of habitat, potential entrapment inside the deer fence and changes to existing movements of deer from and between neighbouring land.

Access and Recreation: Glen Dye Moor is popular with many different recreational users. Comments received during the consultation process include potential physical barriers to access, and loss of access due to damage. New deer fencing could restrict movement, but multi-user gates, and clear signage, can minimise this. Potential damage to trails from machinery is considered, with planned track repairs and a low-impact approach reducing risks. Usage of the site is not expected to increase significantly above current levels, but positive impacts such as track improvements, new signage, and enhanced accessibility for recreational users may make the site more accessible and attractive to a range of alternative users.

Landscape: Glen Dye Moor has a distinctive landscape with the granite tor of Clachnaben visible from long distances. The area has a Special Landscape Area designation (for the Forest of Birse) from Aberdeenshire Council. An analysis of the proposals and their impact has been considered through an independent Landscape Visual Impact Assessment. This will help inform the new woodland design to ensure the proposals complement the existing landscape character of the area and do not detract from any special quality features.

The Glen Dye Moor New Woodland Creation project is not expected to cause significant negative environmental impacts, according to assessments. However, curlews were identified as facing a potential risk. As a result, there will be rigorous monitoring to address the knowledge gap surrounding curlew interactions with native woodland creation and natural regeneration. This monitoring is welcomed by specialists to give them the baseline and future knowledgebase for these types of development.

9. Ongoing Monitoring and Adaptive Management

Ecological Monitoring: Comprehensive ecological monitoring will track the development of the new woodlands, assessing factors such as tree growth, biodiversity (including the Large Heath butterfly), and habitat quality.

Adaptive Management Strategies: Future management of the site will use data from ongoing monitoring to allow for adjustments, as needed, to ensure its long-term success.

Curlew monitoring: Specific monitoring measures will be embedded throughout the project to understand how the curlew populations interact with the new woodland creation.

Careful Ground Cultivation: To minimise soil disturbance and erosion, cultivation techniques will be carefully selected and implemented. This will include less intensive cultivation methods and avoiding cultivation on steep slopes. The timing of cultivation will be planned to avoid periods of heavy rainfall, reducing the risk of run-off and sediment moving around the site. Areas with sensitive soil types or archaeological features will be avoided or cultivated with minimal disturbance.

Appropriate Tree Species Selection: Species will be chosen based on site conditions, including soil type, aspect, and elevation, to ensure the best possible growth and minimise risks of disease or pest outbreaks. Native tree species will be prioritised in areas designated for biodiversity enhancement, while commercial species will be selected for areas suitable for timber production. Species diversity will be promoted to enhance resilience to climate change and disease.

Woodland Design and Shape: The edges of new woodland will be designed to link well into open habitats. Creating open spaces and corridors will provide wildlife with habitats, and the opportunity to move around. Planting and design in sensitive areas, such as riparian zones, and peatlands (see below), will be carried out appropriately to minimise impacts on sensitive areas.

Riparian Woodland Management: Riparian zones (areas alongside watercourses) will be managed to enhance water quality and provide habitat for aquatic species. Buffer zones will be established alongside watercourses, where tree planting and management will be carefully controlled to minimise erosion and sedimentation. Native tree species will be prioritised in riparian zones to provide shade and stabilise riverbanks.

Peatland Protection: Deep peat areas will be avoided for planting, and any work near peatlands will be conducted with extreme care to prevent disturbance. Where possible, peatland restoration will be used to improve the condition of degraded peat areas. Drainage will be carefully managed to avoid drying out peatlands. The peatland restoration works on the wider property will have beneficial impacts on water quality and in reducing water flow from the site.

Wildlife Protection: Buffer zones will be placed around active bird nest sites, and work will be timed to avoid sensitive breeding seasons. Deer management will be carried out in accordance with animal

welfare, and to protect the new trees. Habitat for priority species such as the Large Heath butterfly, will be protected and enhanced.

Archaeological Protection: All known archaeological sites will be protected through careful planning and implementation of work. Archaeological 'walkover' surveys have been conducted, and further finds will be reported and dealt with in accordance with best practice.

Landscape and Visual Impact: The shape and design of the new woodlands will be integrated with the surrounding landscape to minimise visual impact. Existing features, such as prominent hills and viewpoints, have been considered in the design process, while roads and fencing have been designed to reduce visual intrusion.

Best Practice: All forestry operations will adhere to the UK Forestry Standard and other relevant best practice guidelines. Regular monitoring and evaluation will ensure mitigation measures are effective, and management strategies will be adapted as needed. These detailed measures demonstrate the project's commitment to responsible environmental stewardship and its goal of creating a sustainable future for Glen Dye Moor.

10. Alternatives Considered

The project has been shaped by detailed consideration of various alternatives, ensuring a balanced approach that maximises environmental benefits while minimising potential impacts. This process involved exploring different options for each key aspect of the project.

The 'Do Nothing' Alternative: A fundamental alternative considered was the "do nothing" option, with no new woodland creation. This assessment of this option highlighted missed opportunities for climate change mitigation, biodiversity enhancement, employment, timber production and landscape improvement that the project aims to deliver.

Species Composition: The mix of tree species was carefully examined, considering factors such as timber production, habitat creation, and resilience to climate change. The final design reflects a balance of environmental and economic factors, with approximately one-third commercial species (Scots pine and Sitka spruce) and two-thirds native species (birch, native Scots pine with mixed broadleaf and montane scrub).

Road Design: Alternative road layouts were explored to minimise environmental impact and ensure efficient access for future management. Considerations included avoiding sensitive habitats, reducing soil disturbance, and minimising visual impact. The chosen road design is both functional and follows best practices for environmental protection.

Fencing Design: Different designs were considered to balance the need for deer protection with landscape integration and access. Options included variations in materials and height, and alignment, with the final design chosen to minimise visual intrusion and allow for wildlife movement where appropriate.

Cultivation Methods: Alternative ground preparation and cultivation methods were considered to minimise soil disturbance and promote successful tree establishment. Options ranged from intensive soil preparation to minimal intervention, with the chosen methods reflecting a balance between effectiveness and environmental sensitivity.

Peatland: The presence of peatland meant alternatives regarding peatland restoration and avoidance of planting on deep peat were considered. The final design includes mitigations to avoid negative impacts on peatlands, and where possible, to enhance peatland condition.

By evaluating these alternatives in a rigorous way, a plan has been developed to deliver significant environmental benefits while minimising potential negative impacts. This comprehensive approach demonstrates a commitment to sustainable land management and responsible stewardship of Glen Dye Moor.

11. Summary

The EIA for the Proposed Development has been carried out in accordance with regulatory requirements and guidance on good practice. The findings of the surveys undertaken, in addition to extensive consultation, have informed the design process.

A number of alternatives have been considered as the proposals developed, including a 'no action' alternative, changes to the species composition, and changes to road and fencing design, and to the cultivation methods for planting.

Where potentially significant impacts - such as on curlews - were identified, specific actions have been put in place. These potentially significant impacts were also considered within a wider biodiversity assessment, then combined with other findings - with the conclusion that there will be a net environmental gain from the proposals.

This will depend on implementing "embedded mitigations". The proposals would not be implemented without these mitigations, which are a fundamental part of the proposals. They include general good practice in forestry in appropriate ground cultivation, and choice of trees suited to the site, design and shape of woodland planting. All these practices are informed by good practice guides, as well as the UK Forestry Standard. Within forestry it is common to have good practices designed to enhance, improve or maintain the environment as well as balance environmental, social and economic needs. This creates sustainable future forest environments, with a long-term high standard of environmental protection.

The project includes a number of proposals to deliver substantial environmental benefits. Forest cover will increase from 0.4% to 44%, with a huge increase in riparian woodland cover - helping improve conditions for aquatic wildlife such as salmon.

Overall, this EIA shows that the design process, adherence to best practice, and additional site-specific measures means that any potential environmental effects associated with the establishment of woodland and roads can be avoided or minimised.

12. Future Steps

Following the EIA, the project will apply for a forestry grant and seek planning permission for improvements to the Spital car park. Work will commence after all necessary approvals are obtained, with the first five years being the most intensive. Ongoing engagement with the community will be maintained, and project updates will be available at glendyemoor.com

This project seeks to deliver environmental benefits through woodland expansion - while balancing environmental, social and economic considerations to secure the long-term sustainability of Glen Dye Moor. Put simply, tree planting and peatland restoration will make this property more attractive for future generations of people, and better for nature.