

# **Gauchhill Wood Community Wildlife Site**

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## **Management Plan 2014 - 2019**

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for Aberdeenshire Council  
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# Gauchhill Wood Community Wildlife Site

## Management Plan 2014 -2019

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## 1. Introduction to Gauchhill Wood Community Wildlife site

### 1.1 Location

Gauchhill community wildlife site is an 8.4 ha woodland located at the southern end of Kintore adjacent to the A96.

The woodland is bounded by the A96 to the west and a road and new housing along the north-west edge. To the south are open fields but these are scheduled for new housing development while the fields to the east are destined to become a town park. The woodland will soon become an island surrounded on 3 sides by urban development with a trunk road on the fourth side.

Figure 1 – The location of Gauchhill Wood Community Wildlife Site



### 1.2 Designations

Gauchhill Wood does not have any statutory designations. The wood is protected in the local plan and the adjacent land to the east is reserved for a town park. There is a core path around the woodland.

### 1.3 Ownership and management

Ownership. Aberdeenshire Council own and manage Gauchhill Wood. The Council acquired the woodland in 2006 as consequence of the nearby housing development. A separate

planning application for houses to the south included the proposal for a town park adjacent to the wood.

Management. The wood has not been actively managed for many years. The Council intended to start work a few years ago and contracted Scottish Native Woodlands to prepare a management plan (2009 -2014) for Gauchhill Woodland. The intention was to use the plan to apply for a grant to manage the woods but for various reasons this did not happen. With the increasing pressure from development around the woods it is now felt that the woodland should be managed more pro-actively.

## **1.4 Structure of this management plan**

There are three sections in this management plan

- Managing biodiversity
- Management for people
- Management of the property

Each section contains management proposals which are repeated in a table of projects at the end of each section.

There are annotated aerial photos showing the wood and proposed developments around it, the woodland biodiversity and the proposed visitor facilities.

Appendix 1 lists the projects and gives timing (when), who leads and delivers the projects and an indication of cost (how much). Appendix 2 is a pro-forma to help with reporting progress.

## 2. Gauchhill Wood Community Wildlife Site Managing Biodiversity

*Aim – Managing biodiversity*

*To manage Gauchhill Wood community wildlife site to conserve the natural mixed pine/birch woodland and its wildlife paying special attention to the resident population of red squirrels.*

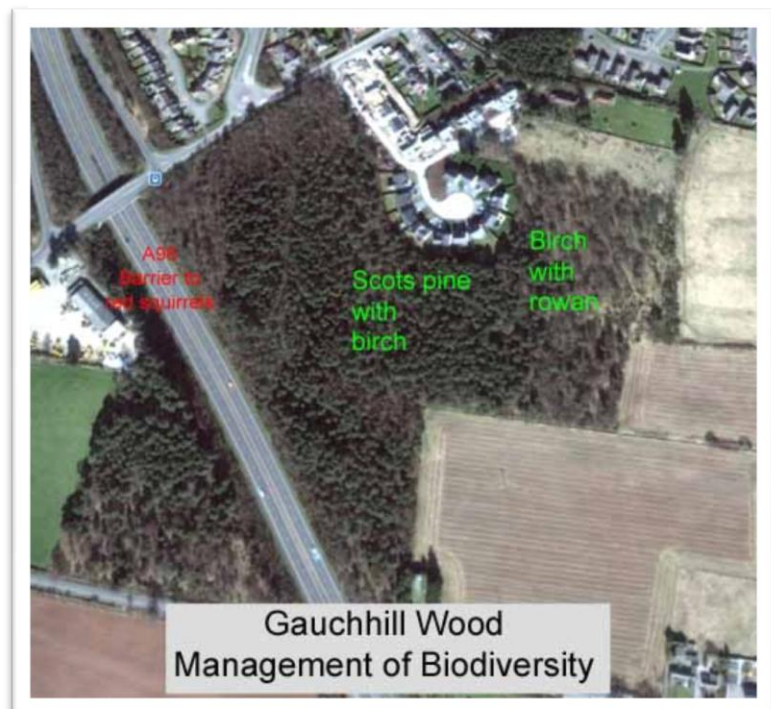
### 2.1 General description

**History.** In the Ancient Woodland Inventory, Gauchhill wood is listed as 'long established woodland of plantation origin'. Old maps show that the habitat on the site has changed several times in the past 150 years. One map dated 1869 shows rough ground (probably heathland) with scattered trees but the next map from 1899 shows no trees (it does show a cricket ground where houses now stand). By 1924 the area is once more shown as woodland with croft fields to the east. By 1957 the trees have disappeared again; this seems to confirm information (from Bob Davies) in the previous management plan that the woodland was felled at the end of the World War 2. More recent maps show the area as wooded, but it is not known whether the trees regenerated naturally or were planted. Several years ago local knowledge indicated there might be wartime practice trenches in the wood, but this has not yet been confirmed.

**Natural history.** Several surveys of the wood exist. The Integrated Habitat System Survey was carried out between 2004 - 2007. The wood was surveyed in August 2009 by Carol Robertson of Scottish Native Woodlands. Her description in the previous management plan remains valid because there has been very little change in the last five years.

The Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (2006-2013) by the Forestry Commission shows most of the woodland as mature pine woodland with mixed upland birch wood along the eastern side.

Figure 2 – Aerial photograph of habitats in Gauchhill Wood



A compilation of existing biodiversity information is in a separate Appendix 3.

## 2.2 Habitats

### 2.2.1 Pine/birch woodland

Description. Today Gauchhill is predominantly apine woodland, with larger even-aged trees probably around 60-70 years old interspersed with younger pole-stage trees. There are birch and rowan trees scattered through the wood, becoming dominant in the east of the site. Natural regeneration is widespread suggesting the woodland is not heavily browsed by roe deer. The regeneration includes plenty of rowan and birch and some holly. Regenerating beech is abundant. If left unchecked beech could eventually replace the Scot's pine, so it should be removed.



Figure 3 - Mixed wood showing beech regeneration

The woodland provides a valuable habitat and food source (seeds from pine cones) for red squirrels. The woodland is becoming more isolated as the surrounding land is built upon. In order to have a healthy population of red squirrels every effort should be made to connect the woodland to other semi-natural habitats especially westwards across the A96.

Past management. As far as is known there has been no active management of the woodland for several decades. Many of the proposals listed below are carried forward from the previous management plan.

#### Management proposals.

- Thinning. Lightly thin the wood, remove selected pole-stage pine trees to favour the larger trees. Care should be taken not to open up the woodland too much and expose trees to wind blow. Sneds from the felled trees should be stacked in piles, but felled trunks (in long lengths) should be left to rot in situ. A few trunks could be used to create natural structures for children to play on.
- Wind-blow. Clear trees hung up in other trees close to the A96. Monitor wind blow and remove hung trees as necessary.
- Beech regeneration. Clear all beech regeneration. This can be done by hand for stems up to 10cm in diameter.
- Connectivity. Explore all opportunities to connect the woodland to other semi-natural habitats, along corridors such as ditches, tracks, field boundaries and bridges.

## 2.3 Species

### 2.3.1 Mammals

Description. The North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBRec) has several records of red squirrels in the woodland. The red squirrel is listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) and Scottish Wildlife Trust is currently running a project to 'Save Scotland's Red Squirrels'. The biggest threats to survival of the reds are competition from grey squirrels, squirrelpox virus, habitat fragmentation and being killed on roads.



Gauchhill is a small block of woodland, so to help red squirrels survive for the long term they need to be able to reach other blocks of woodland 'in safety' ie not be flattened by a car or eaten by a cat! Innovative thinking is needed to make it easier for squirrels to travel through this fragmented landscape.

One nearby resident has a squirrel feeder in the wood. The Council will work with SWT to run a squirrel event for the public in the autumn of 2014.

There is an old record of badger sett in the NE corner of the site, but this was not re-found in 2009. NESBReC has a badger record from 2102 just north of the site.

There is no evidence that roe deer are common in the wood.



Figure 4 – The A96 – a death trap for red squirrels

#### Management proposals.

- Hold a 'squirrel event' for the public in autumn 2014.
- Encourage visitors to submit mammal records to NESBReC. Consider camera traps, perhaps images could be uploaded on [www.kintore.org.uk](http://www.kintore.org.uk)
- Improve connectivity to other woodlands wherever and whenever possible – find ways to enable squirrels to move westwards (across the A96). Deploy camera trap to find out if red squirrels cross bridge over A96. Investigate student project to research red squirrel corridor. Encourage developers to create wildlife corridors through the proposed new housing developments.

### **2.3.2 Birds**

Description. NESBReC has records of notable birds at Gauchhill. Some are presumed to be passing overhead (eg common tern) or in the fields adjacent to the wood (eg skylark). There is a record of a red kite, a protected species (Annex 1) re-introduced to Aberdeenshire in 2007. Kestrels have been reported too. Other birds listed in the UKBAP are starling, song thrush, yellowhammer and bullfinch; the siskin, a bird listed in Scottish Biodiversity List because it has decline by at least 25% in last 25 years in Scotland, is present too.

There are some old bird boxes in the wood that could be replaced.

Management proposals. No special woodland management is required for birds. But birds could be increased if more hedgerow shrubs, especially berry bearing species, were planted along the woodland edge separating the wood from the houses and proposed town park.

- Birds. Enhance habitat for birds by planting berry bearing shrubs like rowan, hawthorn and wild raspberries around woodland edge close to new housing.
- Bird boxes. Inspect old bird boxes and replace or remove if rotten.

These projects are suitable for involvement from the local school.

### 2.3.3 Reptiles, amphibians, fish, Invertebrates

Description. There is a record of a common lizard, which is a UKBAP species, on this site in the NESBReC database.

Management Proposals. None.

### 2.3.4 Plants

Description. NESBReC has no records of notable plants in Gauchhill Wood. Carol Roberston, in her survey in 2009, recorded plants including creeping ladies tresses and chickweed wintergreen which are often associated with semi-natural, often coniferous woodland in the North-East.

Management Proposals.

- Plants. No active management for plants is required, but care should be taken to ensure path developments do not destroy colonies of creeping ladies tresses.

<b>Managing biodiversity</b>		
<b>Habitat Management</b>		
Project No		Project Title
1	Woodland habitat Thinning	Thin the wood lightly.
2	Woodland habitat Wind blow	Clear wind-blown trees hung up in other trees close to the A96.
3	Woodland habitat Beech regeneration	Remove beech regeneration.
4	Woodland habitat Connectivity	Explore opportunities to connect the woodland to other semi-natural habitats.
<b>Species Management</b>		
5	Red squirrel	Hold a 'squirrel event' for the public in autumn 2014.
6	Red squirrel	Encourage visitors to submit mammal records to NESBReC.
7	Connectivity and corridors	Improve connectivity to other woodlands. Investigate ways to allow squirrels to cross over A96. Encourage developers to provide wildlife corridors in new housing developments.
8	Birds	Enhance habitat for birds by improving woodland edge - plant berry bearing shrubs like rowan, hawthorn and wild raspberries.
9	Birds	Inspect old bird boxes and replace or remove if rotten.
10	Plants	Ensure path developments do not destroy colonies of creeping ladies tresses.



### 3. Gauchhill Community Wildlife Site

#### Managing for people

##### *Aims – managing for people*

*Local people know about Gauchhill Wood and its wildlife.*

*Visitors, including children, enjoy a quiet wildlife experience in a well-managed wood with good facilities.*

#### 3.1 General description

There are no formal visitor facilities in Gauchhill wood, but people walking through the wood have created a network of informal unsurfaced paths.

In 2009, in preparation for the previous management plan, local residents were asked to complete a survey and give their opinions about the woodland. In total 28 completed forms were returned, including 15 from the primary and nursery schools. In August 2014 further consultation provided additional comment from the primary school.

In the survey most people said they went to the wood to go for a walk (roughly equal numbers with and without a dog) and to look for wildlife. Children used the wood to play a variety of games. In general people liked the naturalness and quietness of the wood but disliked the muddy paths, litter and dog waste. Young children felt threatened by teenagers hanging about in the wood. People wanted to keep the wildness of the wood, but improve the paths, clean up the litter and dog mess. The children suggested a play area. In 2013/14 children from the primary school ran a 'Dog Mess Blog' as part of a John Muir award.

The land to the east of the wood is reserved for a 'town park' development with playing fields. This offers imaginative possibilities to link up with the wood. A core path has been identified around the wood which links to the proposed development to the east.

The population of Kintore is currently around 4,500 and could rise by another 2,000 once the new housing is built. The location of the woodland is very accessible to those living in the southern part of Kintore. The woodland is a relatively robust habitat and can with stand current and increased use by people as long as there is a surfaced path for people to use and they do not have to guddle through widening boggy patches.

#### 3.2 Managing the visitor facilities

##### 3.2.1 Entrances and paths

Description. There are several informal entrances to the wood and a network of informal, unsurfaced paths around the wood. The paths are well used, with some eroding wet muddy sections as well as good dry sections. The Council have identified a core path around the wood. There are more drains



Figure 5 - Muddy path getting wider

and ditches crossing the site than shown on maps.

The wood is well used by local people and their dogs. There is a small amount of litter in the wood which could be cleaned up. There is a little dumping of garden waste which should be stopped. There is dog waste lying around the wood, so dog owners should be encouraged to clean up after their dogs, but providing bins at the entrances where visitors can dispose of collected dog waste would help.

### Management proposals.

**Entrances.** There are multiple informal entrances to the wood at the moment. Three or four key entrances into wood should be formalised - with key entrances developed in the east and south in preparation for future housing developments. The other informal entrances (eg the two from Gauchhill Road) should not be developed as key entrances but can be left in hope that users will prefer the key entrances.



Figure 6 - Culverts will be needed on an all abilities path to cross drains and ditches

**Welcome/orientation/behavioural signs** should be installed at the key entrances. Litter and dog waste bins will be needed too. The development of these key entrances can be phased to align with the construction of the new houses.

**Path.** A circular path should be constructed around the wood with a surface suitable for all abilities and all weathers. This path should have spurs linking to each key entrance, but paths to informal entrances should not be surfaced. The route of the path should avoid colonies of creeping ladies tresses. Many drains and ditches criss-cross through the wood – both water-filled and dry – these will have to be culverted (with a large bore pipe) and back filled for the main path to cross. Some users will probably continue to use the established informal network of paths; this won't be a problem in the immediate future but the amount of erosion should be assessed for the next plan.

**Seats.** At least one 'woodland' seat should be installed alongside the path, this can be a natural seat made of stone or wood.

**Play structures.** Some play structures, now abandoned, have been built and in the wood – old dens and rope swings. New structures could be constructed from felled logs (from the light thinning) for children to play on safely. Old 'unsafe' structures should be removed.

**Outdoor education zone.** It would be useful for the ranger to have a small area zoned for outdoor environmental activities which is safe and free of litter and dog waste.

Figure 7 – Proposed new visitor facilities in Gauchhill Wood Community Wildlife Site

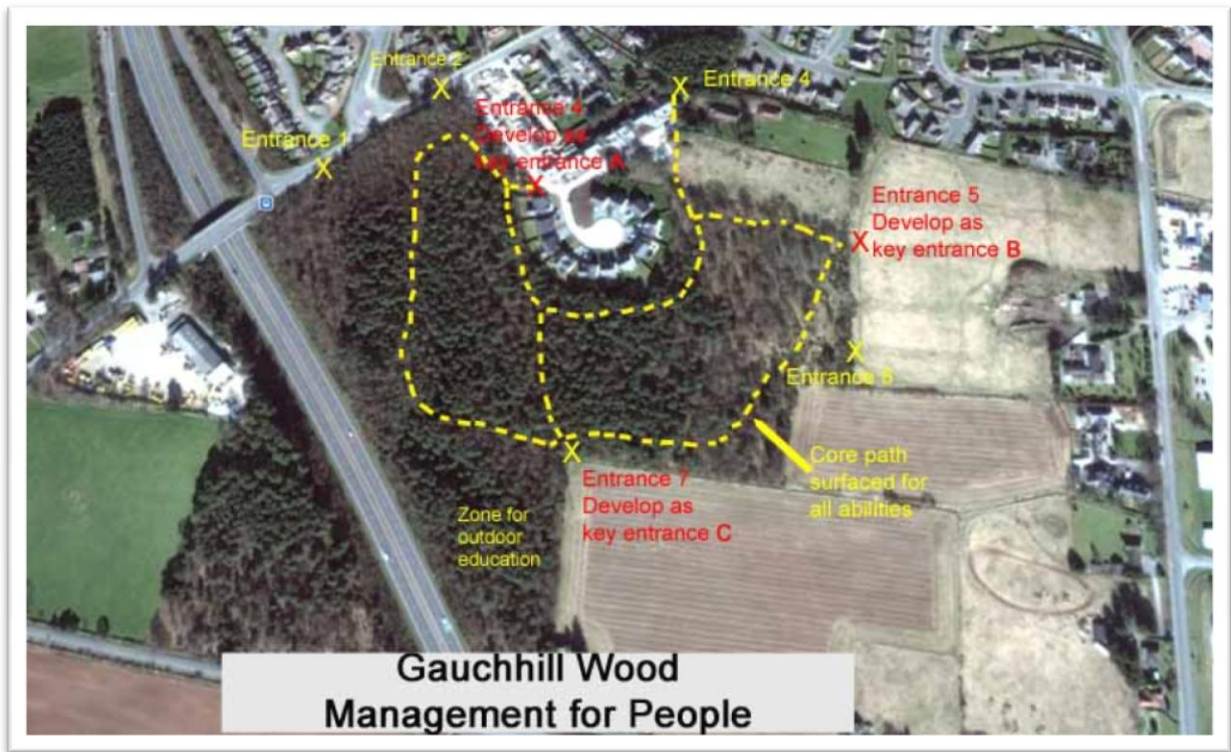






Figure 8 - Entrance 1 from Gauchhill Road.  
Not a key entrance.



Figure 7 - Entrance 2 from Gauchhill Road.  
Not a key entrance



Figure 8 - Entrance 3  
New key entrance A and possibly a small car park



Figure 5 - Entrance 4 between existing houses  
and construction site.  
Not a key entrance.



Figure 10 - Entrance 5  
Key entrance B from the eastern side



Figure 11 - Entrance 7.  
Key entrance C

- Entrances. Formalise three key entrance points (A,B and C) to the wood. Leave other entrances as informal.
- Signs. Install welcome/orientation/behavioural signs at key entrances. Maintain signs.
- Litter bins and dog bins. Install litter and dog waste bins at key entrances. Maintain all bins.
- Path. Construct and maintain a circular all-abilities path around the wood linking to all key entrances. Maintain.
- Seat. Install two 'woodland' seats on the path. Maintain.
- Play structures. Use felled and snedded timber to construct wooden structures from for children to play on at intervals around the path. Maintain.
- Outdoor education zone. Zone a 'wild area' for outdoor education for schools and youth groups – route paths (and discourage dogs) away from these zones.

### 3.2.2 Health and safety

Landowners are obliged to maintain visitor facilities in a safe condition, so all the visitor infrastructure must be inspected regularly and maintained properly. The Council must have a system to record problems and ensure that any reported hazards are dealt with promptly.

#### Management Proposals;

- H&S. Introduce an H&S system to inspect visitor facilities and rectify faults quickly.

## 3.3 Awareness and promotion

### 3.3.1 The Public

Description. The population of Kintore is just under 4,500 but is expected to increase to over 6,000 in next few years. In 2009 the survey of local residents about the wood yielded few responses. It is possible not many people know the wood is owned by the Council (because there are no signs) and they can walk there.

Management Proposals. The Council involve local people with the management of their other sites and it would be good practice to form a group for Gauchhill Wood too.

- Public engagement. Seek views from local groups (like the primary school) and involve them in deciding where to place benches, put up bird boxes and other actions.
- Community management. Seek to establish an informal group of local people interested in management of the woodland. (Also included in Property Management)

### 3.3.2 Education

Description. The ranger takes children from local primary school to Gauchhill Wood for outdoor education activities. In 2013 the ranger ran 4 events for the local primary school involving a total of visits 232 by children as well as 3 events for Kintore Beavers. The primary

school is due to move to a new location in the future and this will make the wood is easier to visit than it is at present.

Management Proposals.

- Ranger-led events. The ranger work plan should continue to include events for school children and local groups every year.
- Other-groups. In future, once the visitor facilities have been improved, the Council could encourage other educational groups and organisations to make more use of the site.

**3.3.3 Information about Gauchhill Wood - digital**

Description. There is no leaflet for Gauchhill wood at present. A leaflet is not necessary because most of the current visitors live locally. The wood is unlikely ever to become a tourist destination in its own right, but local residents may bring friends and family here for a walk so web-based information about the site would be useful.

Gauchill does not have a website or facebook page.

Management Proposals. After the visitor facilities have been improved, develop web pages containing information about Gauchhill for local people and visitors. It would be useful to be able to inform local people about developments such as work on new entrances and a new path.

- Web page/s. Produce web-based information for locals and visitors after the visitor facilities have been upgraded. The web pages can be shared by the Council and local organisations.

<b>Projects to manage Gauchhill Community Wildlife Site for people</b>		
Project No		Project Title
<b>Managing the visitor facilities</b>		
1	Entrances	Formalise three key entrance points into the wood.
2	Signs	Install welcome/orientation/behavioural signs at each key entrance. Maintain signs.
3	Litter bins Dog waste bins	Install litter and dog waste bins at key entrances. Maintain all bins.
4	Paths	Construct and maintain a circular all-abilities path around the wood linked to key entrances. Maintain.
5	Seats	Install two 'woodland' seat on the path. Maintain seat/s.
6	Play structures	Use timber thinning to construct natural wooden structures for children to play on.
7	Outdoor education zone	Zone 'wild areas' for outdoor education for schools and youth groups.
8	Health and safety	Introduce an H&S system to inspect visitor facilities and rectify faults.

<b>Projects to manage Gauchhill Community Wildlife Site for people</b>		
Project No		Project Title
<b>Awareness and education projects</b>		
9	Public engagement	Seek views from local groups (like the primary school) and involve them in deciding where to place benches, put up bird boxes and similar actions.
10	Community management.	Seek to establish an informal group of local people interested in management of the woodland. (Also included in Property Management)
11	Ranger –led events for schools	The ranger to continue run events for children at the primary school and in other groups every year.
12	Other groups	Encourage educational groups and organisations to make more use of the site.
13	Information	Produce web page/s about Gauchhill Wood for local people and visitors once the visitor facilities have been improved. The information to be available on the Council website and linked to local websites (eg Kintore.org.uk).



## 4. Gauchhill Wood Community Wildlife Site – managing the property

*Aim – managing the property*

*The Council and local community to work together to manage Gauchhill Wood Community Wildlife Site efficiently and effectively, producing regular reports on progress and expenditure for the projects in the management plan.*

### 4.1 Introduction

Aberdeenshire Council have owned Gauchhill Wood for less than 10 years. The Council has carried out minimal management to date because of limited resources. The Rangers occasionally use the site for educational purposes.

This section looks at the management structure, the manpower and the money needed to deliver the management plan and report on progress. There are no buildings in the wood.

### 4.2 Management Structure

Local community groups are involved with management of other wildlife sites owned by the Council but Gauchhill Wood community wildlife site has no group at present, so local people could be asked whether they would like to become involved in the management of the site. A start has been made by asking local people to consider the developments proposed in this management plan

One option for the future is to link up with the community planning exercise; the Garioch Community Plan (3.3) indicates that “Initial discussions with the Community Council over the community’s needs in respect of on-going and future development within Kintore” will start in March 2015. This would allow more detailed discussion of proposals.

#### Management proposals.

- Consult local people about the management of the wood.
- Encourage local people to form a new group (or add responsibility for Gauchhill to an existing group) and become involved in managing the wood.
- Decide how the management of the wood can be shared between the group and the Council.
- The Council and the group to meet regularly - twice a year and probably more frequently in the first year in the ‘start up’ phase.
- Consider linking with Garioch Community Planning exercise in autumn 2014.

### 4.3 Manpower to work on the projects in the wood

Description. The Council draw on a variety of manpower to manage their properties and it will probably be the same for Gauchhill.

- Ranger continues to work with schools and other educational groups and organise events for the public, working with the local group if one is established.

- Landscape services to carry out amenity work such as removing fallen trees, strimming grass and overseeing path works.
- The Council will employ contractors to work on larger or more specialist projects like path construction.
- The Council can request help from the Community payback team to work on some projects.
- In other places volunteers from the local community help manage sites in many different ways, by clearing up litter, by holding public events, by raising funds, by planting trees, by counting birds, by carrying out research etc. etc There are many opportunities and it is up to the community to decide what they can offer.

#### Management proposals.

- Council staff and the local community to agree who does what work in the wood and allocate projects in this management plan accordingly.

### **4.4 Money and Budget**

Description. The Council may be able to find small sums for routine maintenance works in Gauchhill Wood, but will need to seek funds from elsewhere to pay for major capital works like the proposed new path, associated structures like seats, new entrances and signage. The Council plan to apply to the new Woodland In and Around Towns Initiative (WIAT) when it is launched; initial discussions with the Forestry Commission for Scotland about this source of funding have been promising. Local communities can raise money from different sources; this is beneficial because it allows complementary funding.

#### Management proposals.

- The Council and local community to decide which projects to proceed with and then agree how to fund these projects.
- Explore funding options for major upgrading of the visitor facilities – entrances, paths, signs etc. The Council to apply to the new WIAT scheme when it is launched.

### **4.5 Reports and plans**

Planning and reporting are integral parts of managing a site properly.

Management proposals. This management plan should be updated every year and rolled forward for the next 5 years. Work plans and budgets should be updated at least annually.

An annual report should be written summarising the work and events that have taken place on the site. A review of this management plan should be undertaken in year 5 (2019) before the new management plan is prepared, the review should examine what worked and what failed and why and whether or not the direction of management needs to radically change.

- Update this management plan every year. Produce annual work plan and budget.
- Write next management plan in 2019/2020
- Write annual report about activities in the wood
- Write five year review of management in 2019 before preparing next management plan.

<b>Projects to manage the property of Gauchhill Wood Community Wildlife Site</b>		
<b>Project No</b>		<b>Project Title</b>
1	Local people	Involve local people in the management of the wood. Consider links with community planning in Kintore in autumn 2014.
2	Local group	Encourage local people to form a new group (or add responsibility for Gauchhill to an existing group) and become involved in managing the wood.
3	Manpower	Decide how the management of the wood can be shared between the group and the Council. Agree the most suitable manpower for each project.
4	Liaison	The Council and local group to meet regularly (twice a year).
5	Management plans	Produce annual work plan and budget. Update management plan every year. Write next management plan in 2019/2020.
6	Reports and reviews	Write annual report about activities in the wood. Write five year review of management in 2019 before preparing next management plan.
7	Funding	The Council and local community to decide which projects to proceed with and agree how to fund each project. The Council to apply for funds from the new Woodland In and Around Towns Initiative when it is launched.

#### 4.6 Did the management plan succeed? Measures of success.

Gauchhill Wood is a mixed semi-natural woodland, the majority of which is dominated by pine with birch and some rowan; red squirrels live in the wood.

Local people, about half accompanied by their dogs, walk in the wood, and children play in the wood too. More houses are going to be built around the wood, so it is sensible to improve visitor facilities sooner rather than wait for the increased visitor pressure to damage the woodland and its wildlife.

In a few years time it will be worthwhile reflecting whether management has succeeded in achieving the 'desired' woodland. The table below proposes success measures which could be used in 2019 to evaluate whether the management plan worked to deliver effective management at Gauchhill Wood. The suggestions are open to discussion.

<b>Gauchhill Community Wildlife Site Proposed Measures of Success</b>	
<b>Whole Site</b>	The whole site is wooded and no construction has encroached into the wood.
<b>Biodiversity</b>	
Woodland habitat	The pine/birch woodland habitat is healthy and regenerating naturally. Unwanted invasives like beech have been removed. The woodland is connected to other nearby wildlife habitats by corridors and stepping stones.
Species	The population of red squirrels is thriving. Squirrels can move freely between Gauchhill Wood and nearby woodlands.
<b>Management for People</b>	
Local people	Local people, including children, know about Gauchhill Wood and its wildlife.
Visitors	Visitors to the wood are satisfied that the wood is well cared for.
Paths	The core path is in good condition and suitable for all abilities.
Litter	There is no litter or garden waste in the wood.
Dogs	There is no dog waste in the wood.
<b>Property management</b>	
Management structure	The Council and local people have worked together to look after the wood.
Project and budget management	A good planning and reporting system has kept track of projects (and expenditure) in the wood and is available for everyone to see.

## Appendices

Appendix 1 – Table of projects - to follow

Appendix 2 – Prof-forma for 6 monthly report – to follow