SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: LOUTH HALL AND ARDEE WOODS

SITE CODE: 001616

Louth Hall and Ardee Woods proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) encompasses three areas of mixed, planted and semi-natural deciduous woodland to the north of Ardee in Co. Louth. This pNHA has diminished in size since it was first surveyed in 1974, due to tree felling, agricultural improvement and new housing development, but it still contains good examples of both dry and wet woodland habitats with a representative ground flora.

The woods at Red House, 1km north of Ardee, contain a mixture of Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*), and Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) with some Yew (*Taxus baccata*), Wych Elm (*Ulmus glabra*), Holm Oak (*Quercus ilex*) and Horse-chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*). The understorey is patchy with frequent Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*). This wood is surrounded by farm buildings and pasture grazed by horses.

Lodge Wood is an isolated area of deciduous woodland with a similar species composition which occurs 5km north on the Ardee to Tallanstown road. Many of the mature trees along the roadside were cleared during the erection of new bungalows and this portion of woodland is seriously invaded by the non-native Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) but it was also retained within the site as there are few remaining woodlands in this region.

To the north of the impressive ruins of Louth Hall, an area of wet woodland occurs around the margins of a small lake. This area, known as the Icehouse Plantation, is wet woodland and contains a good diversity of species. Willows (*Salix* spp.), Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) are the dominant species with some Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*). Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) and Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) are common in the understorey.

There are also several undisturbed islands within the lake with good species diversity. The margins of the lake are colonised by Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*). Rubbish dumping near the lake has unfortunately reduced the naturalness of the site and is threatening the water quality within the lake. The spread of Rhododendron within all these woods has inhibited the development of the ground flora and is a serious threat.

Although parts of these woodlands are comprised of exotic species, they are some of the last remaining well established broadleaved woodlands in the area. They are quite close to the town of Ardee and are of value for educational purposes as well as providing habitats for local woodland flora and fauna.

24.11.2009