

Ardross Community Woodland Community Ballot

Supporting Information

This document accompanies the ballot sheet, and provides additional information about the decisions we are asking you to make regarding community woodland in Ardross.

This page explains the options presented in question 1

The centre spread summarises the key characteristics of the four top-scoring woods, in support of question 2.

The back page lists the pros and cons of FCS/community partnership and community ownership, in support of question 3.

Question 1 – enthusiasm for community woodland

If you oppose the creation of community woodland in Ardross your answer to the first question in the ballot is clear-cut, and your 'X' should be placed against answer (c).

If you are not opposed, please consider whether your support is 'passive', i.e. you are happy for other people to run it for the benefit of all, or whether it is 'active', i.e. you are willing to dedicate some of your time and energy to contributing to the actual business of managing a wood, or of organising and running events, or of planning and constructing facilities, or any of the other activities that will make it a 'community woodland' rather than just another piece of agro-forestry.

Not many people have abundant free time on their hands, and it may be that you look forward to being actively involved at some point in the future when your children are less demanding, or perhaps when you have retired (whichever comes first!), or whenever you have less other more pressing commitments (if such a time exists!). Realistically, if you cannot see yourself being in the slightest bit able to join in, even just once, but do wish to be able to make use of the woods or want other people to have the benefit of community woodlands on their doorstep, then it is helpful to make this clear now, by placing your 'X' against answer (b).

This is not a pitch to actually rally volunteers; it is more an attempt to gauge the likely degree of active involvement, and hence the long-term sustainability of the project. The success of the funding bid to establish community woodland requires widespread support across the community, be it active or passive – success in achieving the potential of any community project of this scale requires widespread and steady involvement over time!

If you can picture yourself adding the benefit of your experience to a discussion of where to site a bird hide and what to put in it, or tipping up for an afternoon to help with laying a path or to plant some saplings, or being a steward for an evening during a bat survey, or dropping off some chainsaws to be sharpened and serviced (or housing and maintaining them yourself!), or in any other way participating, place your 'X' against answer (a).

Question 2 - a summary of the main features of the four top-scoring FCS woods in Ardross

We would like you to rank your order of preference for the four top-rated woods, as scored in the ‘Options Appraisal’ report. The following table draws together the summary comments from the report.

	Inchlumpie Wood	Glaick Wood	Cnoc Navie	Strathrusdale East
GENERAL DESCRIPTION	Inchlumpie is the section of Dam wood that lies to the south of the Breantra Road. It runs from the road down towards the Blackwater with mainly open Scots pine and sitka spruce on the upper slopes, and young birch and sitka woodland along the valley and lower slopes. There are occasional patches of and sporadic windthrow. There are two burns in Inchlumpie, with open sides and diverse riparian vegetation. It is easy to walk through and it is easily accessed from the road.	Comprises two hilltop woodlands, Cnoc Duaig and Cnoc Tarsin, bisected by a minor road, plus a more level area projecting NW towards Loanreoch. The Loanreoch and Cnoc Tarsin blocks both have significant areas of recent clearfell. There is a small area of recently replanted clearfell that links Cnoc Duaig to the Breantra Road	Hilltop (240m) on edge of coastal plain; gentle slopes to N, E and W, steeper to S; mostly thinned; patches of windthrow. A mixture of mainly dense Sitka spruce on the S Side with more diverse and open Scots pine stands to the North. Good forest tracks and wide walkable rides. Locally popular.	Mixed aged pine, and larch with some windthrow on gentle slopes down to waterside on E side of Black Water.
WOODLAND POTENTIAL	The location, accessibility, and diverse nature of this part of Dam Wood offer excellent possibilities for the development of a community wood. Little immediate work is needed other than the creation of a car park. It has two burns running through it and wetland areas. The lower valley area as a young woodland offers many opportunities for volunteer work for all ages and the possibility of becoming part of the diverse birch wood mosaic that runs along this valley. The different types and ages of trees offer the possibility of a steady stream of timber production. The wood is easy to get into and although it is one of the lowest, its situation offers excellent views into the hills. Educational value is already high, and the wood is effectively in a “walk in” condition for the community.	We see Cnoc Duaig as offering good potential for a community woodland, apart from the lack of open water. It is small but interesting, diverse, adequately stable, relatively easy to manage, usable immediately, affords excellent views from the hilltop and offers possibilities for significant increase in biodiversity. It is also accessible from the Breantra road and only 2km from the school. If the community were sufficiently interested and it was felt the capacity existed, the other two blocks, while being significantly less interesting, would add the opportunity of other activities such as larger scale timber production and possible sites for affordable housing. Glaick/ Cnoc Duaig is also within about 100m of Dublin wood that could form part of the community ownership responsibility and provide the hydrological interest.	Diverse and flexible woodland. Stability will allow more diversification of ages and species. Currently well used by dog-walkers, horse-riders. Scots pine could be developed towards a more native pinewood character. Recreation could easily be encouraged. All management will have to take into account high visibility of wood, especially from the A9 and occasional illegal use (motor-biking, dumping)	Northern half difficult due to windthrow. Southern half (Area A) has high potential for developing recreational and educational uses and increasing biodiversity and habitat value (pinewood habitat). Community wood could involve southern half only or incorporate northern half for timber production and greater income possibilities
CONSTRAINTS AND POTENTIAL COMMUNITY LIABILITIES	The only major constraint is the fact that the wood is bisected by an important FCS access road, which will be busy with timber lorries over at least the next 10-20 years. However, most of the wood can be accessed away from the road.	The amount of time and responsibility required would depend on whether only one or all three blocks are taken on. Cnoc Duaig only could largely be managed with steady input over time, mostly from volunteers. All three blocks would require consultant advice and contractor use. There are no particular constraints.	Main constraints are high visibility from roads, illegal dumping, and motor-biking. It would probably require one full time employee.	The whole block would need attention to the fencing – or other intensive deer management. Responsibilities and capital costs would be reduced if only Block A were purchased
TOTAL SCORE	155/200	150/200	145/200	137/200
AREA	75 hectares (185 acres)	83 hectares (205 acres)	236 hectares (583 acres)	150 hectares (371 acres)
COMMUNITY TIME AND CAPABILITY	MEDIUM	LOW-MEDIUM	MEDIUM-HIGH	HIGH-MEDIUM
APPROXIMATE LAND COST	£75,000 - 150,000	£100,000 - 200,000	£250,000 - 500,000	£100,000 - 200,000 (Area A [68 hectares] £100,000 -150,000)
6¼% COST	£4,700 - £9,400	£6,300 – 12,500	£15,600 - £31,000	£6,300 – 12,500

Question 3 – partnership/ownership: pros & cons

We have tried to list the key advantages and disadvantages of woodlands managed both:

- in partnership with Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), where FCS retains ownership,
- or solely by a community trust, where the community takes ownership.

Furthermore, we have attempted to address certain key concerns raised about each approach.

FCS/community partnership

FOR:	AGAINST:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• access to FCS technical expertise & skilled resources• zero (or small) initial funding commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• limitations on number of FCS staff able to participate• reduced scope of funding opportunities• evidence of difficulties in negotiating and developing mutually acceptable partnership terms• potential for development to be constrained by FCS commercial priorities• evidence of frustration with FCS bureaucracy, and timescales for agreement

NOTES & QUERIES:

- There is a large body of evidence of productive communication between FCS and community groups.

Q: How does the community gain a voice with regards to the management of facilities available in woodlands owned by the Forestry Commission?

A: The degree to which a management partnership requires to be formally constituted is dependent on the scope of the developments that the community wishes to pursue.

For instance, specific small-scale developments may be negotiated via informal liaison at *ad hoc* meetings, whilst ongoing co-management of forest design and habitat enhancement (planting and harvesting strategies), and facilities and recreational development (paths, signage, benches &c.) may require formal agreements providing for equal representation of community and FCS interests.

Community ownership

FOR:	AGAINST:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• sense of greater opportunity• independent control over decision-making• access to wide range of funding sources• sole rights to any revenue or other exploitable resources (e.g. timber)• establishes an adaptable community legacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• legal and financial responsibility• onus of decision-making falls to the community• fund-raising to purchase• reliance on community capacity (i.e. volunteers) and contracted labour/skills• long-term commitment

NOTES & QUERIES:

- We are able to approach the Big Lottery Fund for up to 75% of the cost of purchasing any woodlands; furthermore, HIE's Community Land Unit are able to fund up to 75% of the outstanding 25%. Thus, the total to be found by the community from other funding sources may be as little as 6¼% (see Q2 info.).
- A number of skilled forestry operatives have offered their services as volunteers.

Q: What happens if, ten years down the line, enthusiasm wanes, the community finds itself lumbered with property that it isn't inclined to manage, and the management trust is dissolved?

A: The charter of any woodland management trust will include a 'dissolution clause', specifying the beneficiary of any assets remaining after the settling of all outstanding debts. Depending on whether the trust is dissolved within any 'obligation period' (typically 10-20 years) specified by the funders, the remaining assets will either pass to some alternative community organisation with comparable goals, or may be sold to benefit an alternative community project, or the capital may revert to the funders.