

Ardross Community Woodland Project

Across Scotland, communities can now gain a permanent say in the management of local woodland currently under the control of the Forestry Commission. The benefits of 'community woodland' may be social, environmental and economic. Grants from public funds are available to support initiatives if the community shows a serious interest and puts forward a viable management plan.

In Ardross, we therefore have an opportunity to play an active part in managing some of the extensive Forestry Commission woodland in our area. There is potential for a wide range of benefits for the community, for example: to improve access for walkers, cyclists and horse riding, develop new facilities, regenerate wildlife and habitat, create new jobs, provide a resource for education and training, provide fuel to heat our buildings, to furnish sites for affordable housing, and more. If our community is willing to make the considerable effort needed, there is the prospect of creating a resource that will benefit future generations for many years to come.

Ardross Community Council has already registered an interest, on the community's behalf, in a 750-hectare (1850 acres) area of forest at Kildermorie, which the Forestry Commission proposes to sell. This has prompted interest in looking at woodland across Ardross and a wider consideration of the potential benefits of community-managed woodland. Other areas of Forestry Commission woodland are available and it will be within the remit of a feasibility study to examine the merits of these. As a result, it may recommend that the community should take on more than one area of woodland.

A public meeting, convened by the Ardross Community Council on 2nd October, set up the Ardross Community Woodland Sub-committee to act as a steering group to explore the opportunities presented by the National Forest Land Scheme, and to ascertain viable proposals for community woodland. Initially, meetings of the steering group are scheduled for the first and third Monday of the month, at 8:00 p.m., in the community hall. All members of the Ardross community are welcome and encouraged to contribute to the work of the steering group and attend its meetings.

The group has identified a potential 3000+ hectares (9000 acres) of forest comprising a number of separate areas, currently owned by the Forestry Commission. In principle, any part or parts of this may be taken under community-led stewardship. Between them, these forests provide access to plantation and native woodland, rivers and burns, tracks, trails, hills and moorland.

On advice from the Highland and Islands Enterprise's Community Land Unit, the steering group is adopting an established approach to pursuing the project to ensure that discussions are inclusive and that any decisions represent the views of the community. These conditions are pre-requisite to gaining access to public funding. The steering group's consultation strategy, therefore, has three main stages:

1. to canvas the views of the community regarding its requirements from areas of community-managed woodland or forestry;
2. to commission a feasibility study to examine what area or areas of woodland are most suitable to meet the community's needs and aspirations, and what ownership and management options would be most appropriate;
3. to present the findings of the feasibility study to the community and to determine which specific option has most community support.

Simultaneously, the steering group will investigate raising funds to undertake the feasibility study, and then set up a community trust to advance the funding and management of any identified woodland.

The short questionnaire that accompanies this leaflet is the first stage of the consultation, and is intended to establish a set of goals for 'community woodland' within the Ardross area. It is an opportunity to say what benefits and facilities you would like to see investigated. The steering group will use the results of the questionnaire when it sets the scope for the feasibility study.

Contacts: (elected officers of the Ardross Community Woodland subcommittee)

| | | | |
|-------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------------------------|
| Chair: | Jeremy Spurway | 01349 883858 | jeremy.spurway@ntlworld.com |
| Vice-chair: | Anthony Chamier | | chamier@btinternet.com |
| Secretary: | Peter Allen | 01349 884275 | peterandbarb50@btinternet.com |

An example of another community woodland project

The following example is shown as an illustration of what can be achieved, not necessarily as a model of what the Ardross community might wish to do.

The Abriachan Forest Trust was set up by a community of about 120 people to take ownership of woodland on Loch Ness. In five years it has:

- constructed a network of paths with view points and picnic areas;*
- created an easy access walk leading to a bird hide and a pond-dipping platform;*
- built a series of themed rain shelters throughout the forest;*
- made a car park with picnic area, visitor centre and barbecue;*
- installed various forms of interpretative material.*

The Trust has successfully increased the black grouse population, increased biodiversity by restoring wet areas, and has planted over 100,000 native species trees. They employ a forest officer and offer seasonal employment to local crofters, vacation work for students. Their youth club, Active Abriachan, is involved in the forest. Many community members have benefited from the Trust's training programmes.

Further information

The websites of the following organisations include further information on community woodland:

The **Community Woodlands Association** is the direct representative of Scotland's community woodland groups. [**www.community-woods.org.uk**](http://www.community-woods.org.uk)

The **Woodland Trust** is a conservation charity dedicated to the protection of our native woodland heritage. [**www.woodland-trust.org.uk**](http://www.woodland-trust.org.uk)

Forestry Commission Scotland advises on and implements forestry policy and manages the national forest estate; [**www.forestry.gov.uk/scotland**](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/scotland)

details of the National Forest Land Scheme are available on the website or from FCS offices.

Highlands & Islands Enterprise – Community Land Unit [**www.hie.co.uk/CommunityLand.htm**](http://www.hie.co.uk/CommunityLand.htm)

Reforestation Scotland is a network for ecological and social regeneration throughout Scotland. [**reforestingscotland.org**](http://reforestingscotland.org)

Ardross Community Woodland Consultation

issue:

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information about the Ardross community's aspirations for its woodland areas. You don't need to opt for a particular area or areas of woodland at this stage, nor is this your final opportunity to make your views known.

Please complete the short questionnaire below and return it to the steering group; it asks you to rate your view on a number of aspects of community woodland. When considering your response to each of the questions, remember that not all of the benefits proposed will be immediately available, but may become so in the future.

A copy of the questionnaire is being distributed to all members of the community whose names are on the copy of the Electoral Roll held by the Ardross Community Council. If you know of anyone who has not received a copy, please ask him or her to request one from one of the contacts in the accompanying leaflet

We hope to make arrangements with Ardross Primary School to enlist the interest and obtain reactions from pupils to our ideas. If there are young people in your household of secondary school age, we would like you to include their views in the comment box at the end of the questionnaire.

When completing the comments box, please try to envisage any changes there may be in your own requirements over time, and also the needs of future members of the Ardross community. If there is insufficient space for your ideas, please enclose additional pages as required.

Your replies will be covered by the Data Protection Act. They will not be shared with any outside organisation or agency other than those specifically commissioned by the Ardross Community Woodland Subcommittee. Any analysis of the results will not attribute names to particular responses.

| | | | | |
|---|------------|--------------|----------|-----------------|
| <i>Please mark (tick, cross, underline) below the option that corresponds most closely with your view...</i> | | | | |
| 1. Roughly speaking, how often do you visit woodlands within the Highlands? | | | | |
| weekly or more | monthly | six-monthly | annually | rarely or never |
| 2. To what degree do the woods within Ardross fulfil any of your existing needs? | | | | |
| completely | mostly | more or less | hardly | not at all |
| 3. Would you like woodlands within Ardross to be developed to provide more recreational facilities? <i>Examples include: family outings; cycling; horse-riding; picnics; arts events; serviced camp-sites.</i> | | | | |
| very keen | acceptable | indifferent | not keen | disapprove |
| <i>(we are very keen for you to submit your ideas – please use the suggestions space at the end)</i> | | | | |
| 4. Would you like community woodland to provide an educational resource? <i>Examples include: learning about wildlife and its habitat; forest management; craft skills; forest school; safe chainsaw operation training; work experience; guided nature rambles.</i> | | | | |
| very keen | acceptable | indifferent | not keen | disapprove |
| <i>(we are very keen for you to submit your ideas – please use the suggestions space at the end)</i> | | | | |
| 5. Would you like community woodland to provide the opportunity for building affordable housing or to include areas that may be leased as “forest crofts”? | | | | |
| very keen | acceptable | indifferent | not keen | disapprove |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|------------|-------------|----------|-----------------|
| 6. | Would you like community woodland to be managed so as to benefit wildlife and its habitat? | | | | |
| | very keen | acceptable | indifferent | not keen | disapprove |
| 7. | Would you like access to renewable biofuel and firewood from community woodlands? | | | | |
| | very keen | acceptable | indifferent | not keen | disapprove |
| 8. | Developing new uses for forest resources may create local employment; how much would you support the idea of creating such jobs within the Ardross area? | | | | |
| | strongly support | support | indifferent | reject | strongly reject |
| 9. | Do you support the creation of community woodland areas within Ardross? | | | | |
| | strongly support | support | indifferent | reject | strongly reject |
| <p>Finally, please offer any comments or suggestions you have regarding the potential uses or management of community woodland; for example, are there activities that you would like to see promoted or facilitated, or are there some that seem incompatible to you?</p> | | | | | |

Completed questionnaires may be sent to Peter Allen at Ardross Community Hall or deposited at the hall in the letterbox.

Please use this opportunity to express your views by **7th January 2007**; however, the sooner we receive your reply, the sooner we can get started carrying your ideas forward.

The steering group plan to present a summary of responses to the questionnaire at its meeting at 8pm on **22nd January 2007** in the hall. This will provide a further opportunity for discussion and to express your views. All members of the community are urged to attend.

If you have a particular proposal that you wish to discuss further with the steering group, you can either supply some contact information, or attend any of the fortnightly meetings.

name:

phone:

email:

Thank you for your time – Ardross Community Woodland Subcommittee