

## **THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND THE COMMUNITY WOODLANDS**

At General Meeting No. 194 of Strathnairn Community Council on Monday 21st November 2011 it was agreed to set up Specific Roles agreed within the Community Council team.

For Community Development Planning the three members were Paul Davies; Sally Moore, and Ewen Hardie.

The group undertook a survey to obtain the views of the community. The survey was completed in 2013.

At General Meeting No. 216 of Strathnairn Community Council on Monday 27th January 2014 the Community Council directed that the result of the survey be distributed to the appropriate groups.

Strathnairn Community Woodlands have received their copy and would like to thank every one who contributed to the survey. This is the second community wide consultation about how the community wanted to use their woods – the previous survey was carried out in 2000 and the purchase concluded in 2003. The directors noted that most of the points that had been raised were similar to the ideas from community wide consultation that was undertaken as part of the ground work for purchasing the woods.

It should be noted that the objective of the Community Woodlands is to conserve, regenerate and promote the restoration of predominantly native woodlands in the geographical area of Strathnairn as an important part of Scotland's native environment for the benefit of the public.

The recently approved management plan sets out in more detail how it is proposed to meet these objectives.

The directors response to the suggestions is available [here](#), once again we would like to thank everyone who took part.

### **EXTRACT OF KEY ISSUES FROM THE SUGGESTIONS MADE THROUGH THE COMMUNITY SURVEY OF 2012**

*The issues have been taken from the CC spread sheet in the order they were found. No attempt has been made to prioritise them.*

1.     **Footpath network could be improved for disabled wheelchair access**  
Providing a footpath network suitable for wheelchairs was identified in the additional community consultation prior to purchasing the woods. The proposal has the support of the directors and it is just a question of locating funding and selecting the paths that are suitable for upgrading. In this respect some input from wheelchair users would provide some impetus.
2.     **Footpath to join Milton Woods & School Woods**  
Providing a footpath to join the woods was identified in the additional community consultation prior to purchasing the woods. The proposal has the support of the directors. But it can only be achieved with the support of the landowners through which the path traverses, currently this agreement is not available due to problems associated with the dog owners not being able to control their pets. A possible solution might be to provide a high fence on both sides but to some extent this would reduce the amenity of the path and likely discourage the public from using it.

3. Kids love cycling in woods. Build more cycle paths for kids. Develop woods more for community.

Both the initial management plan and the current management plan have the clearly stated objective of developing the woods for the benefit of our environment and the community. By its very nature this can only be achieved through a long-term programme that will take between 80 to 100 years to achieve. The present directors have taken the first few small steps in what is going to be a fairly long journey.

The directors believe that the layout of paths within the woods is adequate. It would be difficult to increase the number of paths without them encroaching on the available space for wildlife and regeneration, both of these are essential for improving the amenity of the woods.

Increasing the number of paths would also have the effect of making harvesting more complex because the extraction plant would have to avoid the paths to prevent them becoming damaged. It would not be wise to increase the number of paths until the harvesting and re planting are completed and we have sustainable mixed woodlands where harvesting is at a minimum.

4. Mountain bike trails in the Community Woodlands

The community woods are quite small and the directors are concerned that if they introduced mountain bike trails there would be conflict between the mountain bikers and walkers. There are also concerns that the introduction of mountain bike trails would introduce issues such as the resources needed to maintain the trail so that it was safe to use and the need for insurance cover for this activity. The Forestry Commission are sympathetic to mountain bike trails and own the plantations on the east side of the B851. This has good access and the varied ground that lends itself to mountain bike trails.

5. I'd like to see extended access throughout the Strathnairn valley via marked signs e.g to Brin Rock.

The directors support this idea and in the past have written to the Forestry Commission to ask them to include the extension of foot paths within the strath to achieve this objective.

6. Dog poo is an increasing and dangerous problem. Infuriates me that dog owners do not pick up. It's disgusting is a dog poo bin the solution? Would like to see an obstacle course or adventure trail in school wood.

The directors have discussed this as an ongoing issue. Unfortunately the Highland Council are unable to service any litter bins and the directors, believing that the responsibility rests with the dog owners, are not prepared to take on the responsibility of managing litter bins.

7. Electricity in the cabin

This is an issue which has divided opinions. Providing mains electricity to the cabin would be quite expensive and would introduce management issues such as how would the cost of the electricity be funded. At present no charge is made for the use of the cabin we just ask for a donation. This is because we are a registered charity and would lose our charitable status if we charged for the use of the cabin.

The fact that it is difficult to provide the electricity means that the users, particularly our young children, learn the hard lesson that there is more to providing an electric light than flicking a switch.

**8. Toilets/eco friendly**

When the plans for the cabin were being drawn by the architect a cubicle for a toilet was included. As the cabin was being built it became clear that there was insufficient funds to provide a toilet that did not require considerable input in order to prevent it being used to dispose of non-biodegradable material and considerable input to keep it empty and serviceable. Since then the design of eco-friendly toilets has improved and if sufficient funds can be made available from the community benefit fund then the directors can consider this, prepare a scheme and put it before the community as a proposal. If this proposal was to proceed one issue that would have to be resolved is that of hygiene in that there is no water supply near the cabin so that it would be difficult to provide facilities for hand washing.

**9. A wood stove would allow? a better use of the cabin in winter months**

As with the toilet, when the plans for the cabin were being drawn by the architect a wood stove was included. This stove slab for this remains in the cabin. In the end it was decided that the unsupervised stove and the unsupervised stack of fuel would provide too much of a temptation to unsupervised teenagers. The resulting risk of losing the cabin through a fire was too great, modern clothing should enable the user to keep themselves warm.

**10. More events across broader range needed. Could be a bigger forum for community events / activities e.g music / picnics / art exhibitions**

The directors would welcome more activities in the woods and the Cabin. They are there for the benefit of the community please go ahead and use them. If any one would like to join us for the purpose of organising events they would be welcome. At present our meetings are preoccupied with achieving the objectives set out in the Management Plan.

**11. The cabin should be booked online.  
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**12. One comment by my grandchildren about the wood was that it is excellent but dangerous to cross from wood to playpark.**

The directors agree with the grandchild; this was the reason why a formal path was not constructed to the edge of the wood.

Despite this a well established path is now in use. Unfortunately this means that people cross the road at the bottom of a dip where they are unseen by vehicles travelling from the south.

However this is a road safety issue and out with the remit of the directors of the woodland.

No doubt it would be possible for the benefit fund to sponsor a footbridge but it is doubtful if anybody would use it. We will just have to hope that the people crossing the road at this point will be extremely careful.

**13. More benches would be good to enable elderly workers to rest**

The directors agree that more benches are needed and will be working to achieve this end.

**14. Adventure area in woods, play area**

The directors agree that it would be nice to have an adventure and or play area but this does raise a number of issues. There are also concerns that the introduction of a play area would introduce issues such as the resources needed to maintain the area so that it was safe to use and the need for insurance cover for this activity. So far the children using the woods for play have shown that they do not lack the necessary imagination to make up their own games.

**15. Tree houses in the woodland areas for kids**

The possibility of tree house was considered at a recent meeting and after a short discussion it was decided that the children using the woods for play have shown that they did not lack the necessary skill to use the available material to built their own houses at ground level and they gained more benefit from doing this for themselves.

**16. The woods are well used and are a great resource. However I would refrain from the development of any additional paths through the woods. Although the woods are a plantation, it would be a pity to increase human input into them. People tend to visit the woods and countryside to escape from manmade objects and construction. Having additional manmade structures or road would defeat the very purpose of why people come to enjoy the forests.**

The directors support this view.

**17. email sent out about any activities**

The directors consider that advertising through the Web site, Newsletter and posters is adequate and are reluctant to ask for a volunteer to take on the responsibility of managing an email list.

**18. Be inclusive- not exclusive- allow horse access**

Horses are not excluded. Horse riders are asked not to use the formal paths because the hooves cut up the surface which makes them dangerous for the pedestrian user and increases the maintenance cost.

If dog poo is a problem then horse poo is a bigger problem, if not for health but certainly for size. The Highland Council is currently running a campaign over dog poo. the campaign vein “it is your dog – it is your problem”. The directors are not sure that the horse riders would undertake to clear up their mess.

**19. Create better habitation for wildlife seldom seen**

This is one of the key objectives of the Management Plan. By its very nature this can only be achieved through a long-term programme that will take between 80 to 100 years to achieve. The present directors have taken the first few small steps in what is going to be a fairly long journey. The riparian area in Milton Wood (the area near the river) is attracting a lot more birds and animals than it did when it supported the pine trees.

**20. Increase the amount of deadwood within the community woodlands. Most biodiversity in woodlands is found in deadwood.**

This is part of a natural process and is happening in its own time. It would be dangerous to import deadwood in order to increase the biodiversity. The introduction of dangerous diseases may increase the biodiversity but the directors would regard this as the wrong sort.

**21. More promotion to the wider community, particularly older people**

The directors are not sure how this can be achieved, perhaps the Friendship Group could organise a walk in the woods.

**22. Bird hide in the woods.**

At present the tree canopy is very high so that most of the bird life is out of sight. As the mix of ages changes the biodiversity will change and more birds will start to use our woods. Once this happens it will be easier to decide on a suitable location for a bird hide.