

The Dornoch Trust
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Reg Charity Number SCO51210

To: Properties adjacent to Earl's Cross Woodland

Dear Neighbour

Earl's Cross Woodland

Further to our last letter in May, we would like to update you with progress on the woodlands.

- The logs and brushwood, from the felling of dangerous trees, last year have now been tidied up. Because most of the nutrients in a tree are in the branches and leaves rather than in the trunk, the branches of the felled trees have been retained in the woodland and made into 'brash hedges' to maintain the soil fertility. A few of the logs have also been retained for the same purpose, but the bulk have been removed to be processed into firewood which it is intended to sell to create funds for the maintenance of the woodland.
- Our Volunteer Days have proceeded throughout the summer removing some of the non-native species, clearing up litter and carrying out some maintenance work on the paths and gates.
- We have taken advice on the replacement of bat boxes. As there are plenty of bats in the woodlands already, they do not need any encouragement and the boxes would merely damage the trees they are attached to.
- With the kind help of professionals, we have completed our draft Management Plan for the woodland and overleaf we introduce and summarise this plan. The full version is on the following link: www.??????.com

Please let us know any comments you may have by emailing dornochtrust@gmail.com .

Yours faithfully

The Trustees
The Dornoch Trust

Management Plan for Station Wood & Earls Cross Wood

Preface

The management plan has been written primarily to provide land managers in government agencies, funding agencies and forestry contracting businesses with a clear understanding of our aims. As such it is inevitably a technical document, but the underlying principles are straightforward and the plan has two over-riding priorities.

- **The first priority** is to maintain the woodland as a safe place for the community to use. This is why potentially dangerous trees were felled last year.
- **The second priority** is to maintain the overall character of the woodland.
 - In the short term this means removing unwanted non-native species such as American Holly, Cypress, and Hemlock because, in the absence of the pests/diseases/competitors of their homelands, these species threaten our native species such as Birch, Rowan and Scots Pine.
 - In the longer term maintaining the character of the woodland requires regenerating it. Clear felling of large areas followed by replanting would mean losing much of the character of the woodland for decades at a time, so to avoid this a 'continuous cover' approach will be adopted, which entails using the gaps naturally fallen trees make in the woodland canopy. Where necessary these gaps will be widened to ensure sufficient light reaches the woodland floor, to allow young tree seedlings and transplants to grow. Wherever possible natural regeneration (i.e. self-seeded saplings) of desired species will be used because a) the saplings are derived from parent trees that have proved well adapted to the site, b) they cause superior root development to a transplant, c) they are less expensive than planting.

You will see on the map overleaf that we have divided the woodland into compartments.

Compartment 1 and Sub-compartment 2a are a mixture of Beech and Scots Pine. We have identified priority sites where there is existing dense natural regeneration of Beech. At these sites, other species will be removed and gaps will be created in the centre of the patches of Beech regeneration, where there is most light, to allow for planting Scots Pine which requires far more light than the more shade tolerant Beech.

- **The third priority** is to improve the ecological resilience of the woodland.

This is why the priority site in Sub-compartment 2b is where native species such as Birch, Rowan, Ash and Hazel are currently being suppressed by Sycamore, Norway Maple and Beech. To maintain and improve native biodiversity and ecological resilience these latter species will gradually be removed to allow the native species dominant in Sub-compartment 2c (Birch, Rowan, Hazel, Oak, Ash and Scots Pine) to become dominant here as well.

The overall plan is to regenerate the entire woodland over approximately 100 years of gradual change, and to retain its present overall appearance while becoming both more biodiverse and ecologically resilient.

Summary

Woodland description

Station Wood and Earls Cross wood are integral to the landscape of Dornoch, bordering an important residential area and extending almost to the town centre. They are a valuable recreational resource providing a well-used pedestrian route into the town. The woodland comprises two distinct parts: one where a mixture of Beech and Scots Pine dominates while the other is more characteristic of a Scots Pine/Birch/Oak woodland.

Woodland history

The woodland was established as a plantation some time between 1843 and 1873. Nothing is known of subsequent management, but the stocking density of mature Beech in Compartment 1 and Sub-compartment 2(a) indicate that it was thinned, the final thinning probably being between 1925 and 1965. Some small-scale felling has been carried out since then, mainly in compartment 2.

Long term vision

Dornoch Trust purchased the woodland in 2022 to safeguard it from commercial or infrastructure development and to ensure that future management maintains its overall character and appearance.

Management intervention will be minimised, but opportunities afforded by advanced natural regeneration will be used gradually to improve the age structure and, particularly in Sub-compartments 2(b) and 2(c), to enhance biodiversity.

As a result, in a hundred years' time the woodland will have a more diverse age structure. It will still be predominantly Beech and Scots Pine in Compartment 1 and Subcompartment 2(a), but with a more varied predominantly Scots Pine/ Birch/Oak woodland in Sub-compartments 2(b) and 2(c). As such the woodland will be a more diverse, ecologically resilient resource.

Management objectives

- 1) Maintain and enhance existing informal path networks
- 2) Remove litter and rubbish and prevent further accumulations
- 3) Improve canopy age structure and diversity
- 4) Improve biodiversity and ecosystem resilience
- 5) Strengthen community involvement and engagement

Management strategy

Dense patches of beech seedlings in Compartment 1 and Sub-compartment 2(a) and existing canopy gaps throughout the woodland will be the vehicles for regeneration. If necessary, naturally developing gaps will be enlarged to create clearings at least 1.5 x the height of the surrounding stand in diameter. Preferred light demanding species will be prioritised in the centre of the regeneration sites. Shade bearing species which are regenerating freely throughout the woodland will be restricted to the shadier margins. Species choice and proportions will reflect the twin aims of maintaining the Scots Pine/Beech mixture in Compartment and Sub-compartment 2(a) and improving, extending and further diversifying the Scots Pine/Birch/Oak woodland in Sub-compartments 2(b) and (c).