

FORRES COMMUNITY WOODLAND TRUST

MINUTE OF EXTRAORDINARY MEETING

5 July 2012, at 7.30pm
Tennis Courts, Forres

Members present:

Chris Wortley (chair), Fiona Chalmers, Chris Piper, Alan Smith, Pat Johnstone, Gisela MacFarquhar (minute)

Apologies: George Alexander, Ian Suttie

Non-members present:

Bob Hellyer (chair FCC, charring meeting), Karine, Carson, John Carson, Rosmarie Pearson, Graham Hilditch, Barbara Adams, Maxene Rutherford, Jane Johnston, Stuart Johnston, Alan Tissiman, Claire Feaver, Chris Spencer, Mark Bond, Ian Lewis.

AGENDA – Clarification of Developments in Sanquhar Woods

Mr Hellyer welcomed everybody and invited the spokespersons for the members and non-members to make an opening statement.

Mr Tissiman said that he would like to know what's going on at Sanquhar Wood. He felt uninformed, and, essentially, he would prefer the Woods to remain as they are with no development.

Mr Spencer said that he didn't disagree in principle, with green burials, but considers this woodland unsuitable.

Mr Wortley said that many concerns were based on misconceptions. There was no financial gain involved for any members. Leaflets had been dropped in the adjoining housing area on 22 Oct 2011, but he acknowledged that there were communication issues. There was a development plan, approved by the Forestry Commission, accessible to the whole community.

Mr Piper said that Muiry and Sanquhar Woods had originally been acquired by the Forres Community to safeguard them against housing development. An income from green burials would help the trust to become more financially sustainable and less dependent on donations.

Mr Johnson regretted that the trust had not maintained regular contact with the original donors.

Mrs Chalmers said that the purpose of this meeting was to demonstrate the Trust's transparency and their openness to all questions.

Mrs Feaver said that whatever communication efforts had been made they had not been successful.

Mr Tissiman expressed his concern that there had been no feedback after the consultation and nothing had been publicised before diggers moved into make the path.

Mr Piper said that the follow-up to the consultation had been extensively covered in the Gazette.

Mr Carson said that he considered anything that went beyond what there was now as undesirable development.

Mr Wortley said that there were no plans for any form of building, there would be no woodland centre and no form of building for the green burials.

Mr Tissiman said that a majority of the citizens of Forres were objecting to any development.

Mr Carson said that he had noticed a discrepancy between income and expenditure in the Financial Report. It appeared that far more had been taken in than spent.

Mrs Chalmers said that routes of communication existed through the Hub, the Gazette, the AGM, and by joining the FCWT.

Mr Hilditch asked what the situation was with regard to plans by the Altyre Estate to set up a Country Park.

Mr Wortley said that a consultation would take place, but Sanquhar would remain a woodland. He said that green burials were, by definition, quiet, low-key events. No headstones or other evidence would remain. A notice could be put up prior to a burial taking place. It is estimated that there would be around 10 burials per year for the first 3 years. There was room for 600 burials in total, plus another 100 at Manachie.

Mrs Chalmers said that there was increasing demand for green burial sites and they were a service to the community.

Mr Lewis said that the potential sites were overlooked by paths and walkers couldn't avoid coming across funeral ceremonies. Also children might be playing on the sites and people might feel uncomfortable.

Mrs Feaver said that she had circulated a petition opposing the plan for a green burial site and had to date collected 200 signatures.

Mr Piper said that a Financial Report might be an inaccurate reflection on how much money exactly is spent in any financial year as expenses might be carried forward to the next. He said that the only further form of construction might be a path round the Manachie site, a gate at the 'red brick cottage end' of the wood, a slightly enlarged area for equipment and two signposts. The graves would be dug by hand, the depth having to be two to three feet. Inspection pits had been dug and the ground conditions had been found suitable. There were no specific grants available for the development of the green burial site.

Mr Wortley said that the cost of the recently completed up-grade at Muiry had been £12,000 and that money was required for that kind of thing.

Mr Hellyer suggested that the Community Council noticeboard could be used for communication purposes.

Mr Piper assured everybody that there was no big project looming, that there was no intention to municipalise the woods and that no form of building was planned. The thinning of the woods was not carried out for financial gain but was part of wood management, as was the maintenance of paths and the clearing of brush.

Mr Hellyer said that the issues surrounding the green burial site had been clarified and the FCWT is committed to improving communications with the wider community.

The meeting was adjourned at 9.15pm.