

**Trustees Report (6<sup>th</sup> November 2013-12<sup>th</sup> November 2014) by the Chair of the Board of Directors (Trustees) of the Forres Community Woodlands Trust  
12th November 2014**

My report runs from our last AGM, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2013 until today, 12 November 2014.

In the course of the last year two trustees, Claire Feaver and Stuart Johnston resigned. I would like to thank both Claire and Stuart for their services to the trust. Steve Hull and Gareth Whyment were elected to the board at last years AGM, and Vicky Flood was co-opted to the board later in the year.

Most of the historic documentation which the new board inherited, has now been correlated and new systems have been put in place. I must single out Eddie Tomkinson for the huge amount of work that he has put in this year going through all the financial documentation and bringing us to a point where we have a clear understanding of our position. Eddie will give more information on the finances later in the evening. We have tried very hard to engage with the community in 2014, and this is an area which we will continue to work at. We have produced a regular newsletter, and to try and cut down on costs, and time, we have encouraged members to receive this, where possible, by email. Our website is fully operational, updated with information on a regular basis, and with an email contact address, which allows communication with the Board. This has been used by a number of people.

We continue to promote FCWT to the wider public, and to this end, we took tables at both Piping Hot Forres in June and Forres Culture Day in September where we had information leaflets available, ran competitions and displayed a range of merchandise. Vicky Flood represented us by attending the Community Woodlands Conference at Dunbar in September. This proved a very useful networking exercise, has given us many new contacts and new ideas which we can take forward.

Work parties have continued monthly. Steve Hull will give more information on the Sanquhar work parties later in the meeting, as will Ian Suttie for Muiry and New Forres Woods.

In the Spring, several hundred trees of varying varieties, which had been donated by the Woodland Trust, were planted in and around the 'Coffin Field'. We invited children from Pilmuir Primary School to participate in this and we had an article feature in the Forres Gazette. The board has decided to try and develop the 'Coffin Field' as a woodland meadow over the course of the next 2-3 years. Moray Council were engaged to clear the grass, a process which will be repeated next Spring. Woodside Park Residents Association continue to maintain the trees which they planted along the edge of the field.

Benromach Distillery completed their water pipe laying last winter near the Mosset Burn section of Sanquhar Woods. The disturbed ground was re-landscaped with new trees planted and bird boxes positioned under the guidance of Ian Suttie.

A section of footpath of 150-200 metres was repaired and re-stated as well as new steps being put in place leading from the footbridge over the burn, near the Chapelton dam. A new heavy duty picnic table was installed at a viewing position overlooking the Burn. This has been firmly secured to prevent any possible vandalism. An additional 50 metre of path was also improved by Board Members by scattering gravel to even it out. I would like to thank the directors of Benromach Distillery for their generosity which enabled the project to be undertaken.

Moray Council were engaged to undertake some path clearing at Sanquhar, and we have had many positive comments from walkers and users of the woods. It never ceases to amaze me just how much our woods are used, and how lucky we are to have such a resource on our doorstep.

Mountain bike events again took place in Sanquhar Woods this year, and the mountain bike trail continues to be well used. We now have proper insurances in place to cover the bike trail and we are currently working on upgrading signage to meet current requirements. The trail should never be seen as a “free facility” as ongoing expense will continue to be incurred in maintaining the trail, and in meeting all the legal requirements. Eddie may touch on this subject later.

We have had a number of communications in recent years from Sanquhar residents who have expressed concerns about trees which border their properties. These include safety issues, shading, and the continuing growth and height of the trees. The Board does risk assess any trees which are reported and continues to monitor the situation. Many of the problems, are historic as the wood was original planted as a commercial concern and the trees would have been felled as part of the commercial process. Sanquhar Woodlands are not now run commercially and the Board has to try and represent the interests of all parties. It was decided that the costs of trying to deal with each individual tree problem as it cropped up would be too much to bear, and beyond our funding and could build up financial problems for the future. The Board felt that the way ahead, was to tackle the problem as one big task, which would allow costs to be kept under control, and save the problem arising in the future. It was therefore agreed that a selective felling program should be carried out along the boundary at Mannachie, Loch View, Woodside Drive, Woodside Park and Woodend. A letter of explanation was circulated to all householders whose property borders the wood. This was followed by a series of consultations and meetings with householders who raised concerns or who wanted further information and work done. I am happy that we have now met with all of these people and that we have addressed their concerns.

A felling licence has been applied for, amounting to 251 trees. The felled area will be replanted with about 1530 new trees, which have been selected as more appropriate for the boundary, which should not grow as tall and which should cause less problems for future generations. It is hoped that this work will be carried out by Spring 2015, subject to the funds being available. Eddie will speak more about this shortly.

The short term financial status of the FCWT continues to be strong. A great deal of work was undertaken in tying up loose ends with historical projects and tidying up outstanding matters. We have approximately £36,000 in our bank account and we are now confident that we have no outstanding large liabilities apart from the £6500 balance due to Altyre Estate for the purchase of the 'Coffin Field' and we have a period of some seven years to repay this sum. The amount has been ring fenced in our accounts. I must stress that our running costs continue to exceed our income, and that this is an area which will need to be addressed in the near future to prevent us further eroding our capital. The forthcoming felling will certainly impact on our reserves.

2014 has been a year of consolidation for the FCWT. I have been very well supported by my fellow Trustees, FCWT members, volunteers and the public. Our current board possesses a very wide skills base, we continue to work together well as a team, and while we all have differing view points, I think we all have a clear vision for the future.

Finally I would like to thank my fellow Trustees, FCWT members, volunteers and the public for their continued support in 2014 and I look forward to working with you all in 2015.

Thank You

Graham Hillditch  
Chairman  
Forres Community Woodlands Trust