

FORRES COMMUNITY WOODLANDS TRUST



Report by the Chairman of the Board of Trustees to the 2016 Annual General Meeting

This report covers the period from the 2015 AGM in November last year to November 2016.

I was elected Chairman of the Board of Trustees in November last year in succession to Graham Hilditch. During Graham's stewardship much was achieved by the Trust. I have been a member of the Board for 4 years and for those of you that don't know me I am a local guy born in Forres, raised in Findhorn and after a bit of travel through work I've been resident for the last 25 years.

Over the year I have been ably supported by my fellow **Trustees**. We are 9 in number at present and on the lookout for new blood. We can have a maximum of 12. Without singling out anyone in particular I would like to thank them for their support. We have a broad range of skills within the group which are pertinent to the business of running the Trust and much effort is expended by all.

Member numbers are sadly in decline. Year on year since the highs of 2012 we have seen the total numbers drop from 289 to 106 this year. We are putting plans in place to address this decline. Membership subscriptions and donations are important source of income for the Trust. We are also looking at simplification of payment methods since we think that the current manual system is impacting members' desire to renew each year. We are grateful to those of you who continue as members and also to those who have made donation. We value your continued support.

With the exception of specialised services, the maintenance work in the Woodlands is carried out by **volunteers**. Over the past year we held a campaign to recruit more volunteers with limited success. Work parties take place in both Muiry and Sanquhar on a monthly basis. The work comprises mainly of clearance of non-native invasive species and path maintenance. This is not very exciting work but it has to be done. We are grateful to those who give up their time to the monthly work parties.

Major achievements over the past year have included; completion of the Sanquhar planting where 1400 trees of mixed species have replenished the clear felled area adjacent to the housing. Seasonal wind-blown trees were removed from all areas. We continue to develop the Coffin Field as a wildflower meadow with encouraging results. The mowing work was delayed this year due to availability of the equipment which resulted in the work being done in the wet. Despite this, although a more difficult task, most of the grass cuttings were lifted.

Our 5 year programme of rhododendron and laurel clearance continues into year 3 with the help of a specialist contractor. An application for funding of this activity has been submitted.

The bike track hut, which is a regular target, has been repaired by volunteers and we are grateful to Keith Builders Merchants for the donation of materials.

Repairs have been made to the access track from Mannachie Road in conjunction with the farmer at Sanquhar Mains who donated materials.

In Muiry and New Forres large areas of heathland have been mechanically cleared of heather to encourage biodiversity and new growth. This has also opened access to areas which were impassable due to waist deep heather and gorse.

A mapping exercise has been completed at Sanquhar to allow the production of new sign boards which will soon be erected at the main entrances to the woods. This work will be partially funded by "Paths for All".

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On the **admin front**; we have completed the new 5 year plan and it is now up on our website. The website itself has been remodelled to make it more functional and informative. We continue to produce newsletters which we are distributing electronically where possible.

Awards

In mid-summer we were visited by the judges for the **Scottish Finest Woodlands Awards** who visited all three woods and interviewed some of the trustees. We were subsequently awarded a commendation in the Healthy Lifestyle Competition. Unfortunately no cheque but we did receive a commemorative rosewood plaque and they made some complimentary comments.

The Co-op awarded us £480 from their members' charity scheme. If you are a Co-op member you can nominate you favoured charity to receive 1% of what you spend there.

Events

Also during the summer we had Caroline Inckle, a **local artist** using material from the woods to create artistic pieces for a display which went on show in Inverness. We are now in discussion with Caroline regarding the possibility of her creating artistic displays within the woodlands.

The **bike track** continues to be used fairly heavily by local and visiting bikers. It hosted only one official event this past year, something called a Dirt Crit, one of a series of events held over the North. Some 65 bikers participated. We hope to be able to attract at least one more structured event in the coming year.

On the same weekend as the bike event we had a visit from an **orienteering** event with over 100 participants.

And, also that day we hosted a party of 25 delegates from The **Community Woodlands Association** conference which was being held in Forres, on a guided site visit of Sanquhar Woodlands. We received many compliments. AS part of CWA's conference programme we gave a presentation on FCWT.

School visits continue. I recently encountered a large class from Anderson's who were scurrying around in the rain looking for nettles. It is pleasing to see the youngsters in the woods and we will make efforts to encourage more of them.

Plans for the coming year

Continue into year 3 of the rhodie and laurel clearance. The forestry plan will be completed and plans laid for thinning works in all areas. A bird box installation programme will start. We will investigate the feasibility of installing squirrel boxes and the construction of an amphibian hibernaculum. Development of a plan for the management of our ponds in Sanquhar is still on the agenda. A member recruitment campaign is planned.

Financial

Eddie (The Treasurer) will go into the details. However I would like to stress that we are an organisation dependent on three sources of income, namely; subscriptions, donations and grants/awards. In the past financial year we took in only £1,700 mainly from donations and there were no grant awards, mainly due to timing, resulting in a deficit of £10,000 for the year. Fortunately we have a cash balance of £25,000 with no big commitments imminent.

In closing, I would again like to thank our members and volunteers for their continued support and you all for your attendance tonight.