

Public Events: Update

With continuing uncertainty around lockdown restrictions, we have decided not to run any public events at the community woodland for the rest of the year. This is a big disappointment, especially as the October holidays and Halloween weekend are just round the corner. So instead of the usual updates on our projects, in this edition of the newsletter we've continued with an in-depth look at some of the work we're doing in Glengarry on behalf of the community. In this edition its Drynachan 2 and felling & replanting at the community woodland.

Drynachan 2: The Background

This field is one of the few areas of flat ground around Invergarry that is not privately owned. Being directly opposite the community woodland, it's value to the community was recognised in 2014-15 by the GCW steering committee who explored purchasing it at the same time as the community woodland. The value to the community of owning this field was also raised when the possible purchase of Drynachan 1 was being discussed between the Community Council and the Communities Housing Trust in 2017-19.

When Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) notified the community of the intention to sell it, there was already a strong basis for community ownership, and further discussion with the Community Council and GCW board confirmed this position. GCW formally registered the community's interest with FLS and the asset transfer process was triggered. The next step in the process was to explore the field's potential uses in more detail, and examine whether they would even be possible. This step is a requirement for any community who request ownership of public property; it allows the community to build a case for ownership and also highlights potential issues. Consultants are usually employed to carry out this step, by exploring the feasibility of different uses, recording their findings in a feasibility study.

A community garden, business premises, affordable housing, extension of the cemetery car park, and a timber & firewood processing yard were all examined by the consultants. The field would not necessarily be used for all of these, but by looking at how each of them would work, the consultants were able to identify potential barriers that would have to be overcome in the future.

Community ownership of the field creates an opportunity to improve access to the area of community woodland that lies to the west of the

cemetery between the river Garry and A87 trunk road. The woodland in this area is practically cut off on all sides, which makes management costly and very difficult. Access could be taken between the two areas by crossing the short distance behind the cemetery. Sensitivity around the cemetery is of paramount importance, and if access was joined up between these two areas, it would only be used periodically - most likely no more than a few days every few years - and only used by our small tractor.



'Drynachan 2' the field looking west towards Ben Tee

The feasibility process did reveal a potentially significant barrier to the proposed uses of the field: Transport Scotland will not support the creation of a new or upgraded access from the A87 Trunk road. The only way to upgrade access into the field would be to share a new cemetery access. This would mean re-building the cemetery access. If this was carried out, it could tie in with extending the cemetery car park. As part of the assessment, this was discussed with the Highland Council, who, having long known about the problems of car parking at the cemetery were very supportive.

At the moment there are no plans to take forward this proposal; GCW is putting all its resources into Ardochy Forest and establishing a cabin business. We are also respectful of the location; proximity to the cemetery, and to the village means any major changes in this area should be consulted on much more thoroughly by the community and the Highland Council. However, the field does now belong to the community, and there is an expectation that it will be used to address some of the community's most pressing needs. In the meantime, GCW is looking at other much lower-impact uses including a grazing lease. Get in touch if you are interested!

Depot renovations

Anyone passing the Depot recently will have noticed that its looking different! Renovation work started in September and is part of preparations for the cabin business. It will now have a much larger and purpose built office with a log burner in the old deer larder, the main meeting room where we hold our AGM and courses now has wall-mounted electric heaters. The old - and completely rotten - double doors have been replaced with a window. All the doors and windows at the front have been replaced, and most notably, the entire building has been re-clad in larch. Hopefully this has breathed a few more decades of life into the building!



Larch cladding started going up in early October

Re-planting at the Community Woodland

When the community purchased the woodland in 2015, it had to demonstrate to the Scottish Government that there was a plan for its ongoing management. There had been very little carried out by the previous owners – most areas were over-stocked, well-matured, and beginning to blow over. Like most commercial forests planted in the 1950s, the community woodland was designed to be clear felled. The challenge has been how to manage an even-aged forest which is past maturity, in a way that it wasn't designed for.

The forest plan commissioned by the community in 2016 sets out how to achieve this. It describes a gradual transition over 25 years, which will ultimately leave a more natural forest with a much larger proportion of native species, including trees of different ages, and a significantly improved wildlife habitat.

For the most part, this transition will be gradual. However, because of the way the forest had been planted and managed since the 1950s, clear felling was the only option for some areas. Trees which

grow their entire life in close proximity do not develop strong root systems. This limits options for their management and usually means they have to be clear felled. If a stand of trees which has established in this way was thinned, (where some are cut and some left) they would almost certainly all blow over. Clear felling was therefore the only real option for some of these areas, and they're now lying fallow while the leftover dead wood rots down.

Another complication is the pine weevil – a native Scottish insect which lives in coniferous forests. Adult pine weevils feed on the bark of living trees. But weevils live in dead and decaying wood, so after a harvesting operation the weevil population explodes. A large population of weevils can kill thousands of young trees in a short space of time – this is a big problem for forest managers.

To re-plant the community woodland now, having only harvested two years ago would require managing the weevils using chemical treatments, which can be environmentally destructive, always expensive, but not always effective. The alternative is to wait for the weevil population to drop – usually about five years after harvesting, once much of the dead wood has decayed. Evidence of weevils in the community woodland is only too clear; naturally regenerated tree saplings in the clear felled area in August 2020 showed a significant level of damage by weevils.

Change at the community woodland will take years; it takes decades to convert a forest from even-aged commercial trees to a more natural forest structure. The big challenge for the community is how to pay for these expensive forestry operations when the amount of timber available to finance operations is so small. We are looking at other ways to use the wood such as milling larch for our cabins, and improving access so we can take wood out with our own small tractor. In the meantime, there won't be any re-planting for another few years until the weevils die off.

In November we will be clearing trees from alongside the Faichem Road. These are mainly the diseased ash trees, but we will also remove some of the other less-stable trees which have tended to blow over across the road when there's strong wind. Residents of Faichem will be contacted shortly about temporary traffic arrangements.