

It has been a quiet few months in Glengarry. At the community woodland, the coronavirus lockdown has meant we have not run any of our usual spring/summer activities.

We decided therefore, to use the next two editions of the newsletter to explain in detail the background to some of our projects. This edition will focus on the cabin business, and the plans for Ardochy Forest. It does mean fewer pictures of muddy, smiling children, but we thought it is important to remind everyone just why we are trying to do these projects.

Forest Cabins: The Background

Ownership of the woodland was transferred to the community at the end of 2015. It followed a long process (about 18 months) of public meetings, drop-in sessions, setting up a steering committee, consultants' assessments, and advice from organisations such as the Community Woodland Association, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. During this process, there was a ballot with a simple YES/NO question. 89% of votes returned were in favour of a community buyout.

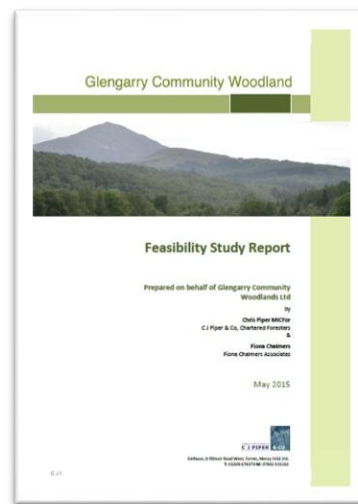
Before the woodland (which was public property), could be transferred to community ownership, a case had to be put to the Scottish Government who had ultimate say on it's future. This step was achieved successfully by the Steering Committee, who then had to raise £200,000 to purchase the woodland. They applied to the Scottish Land Fund and were awarded £190,000 of public money towards the cost of the woodland's purchase. A further £10,000 was awarded by the Glengarry Trust.

On each of these occasions the steering committee had to make an argument for ownership of the woodland. They had to put a case forward that demonstrated what the woodland could do for the community, and that the community was going to manage the woodland. They had to justify why public property and taxpayers' money should be handed over to the community.

The economic case for community ownership of publicly owned land is often the most important because so many public resources are invested into transferring land to a community.

The 'business case' for handing public property over to a community is also important because every activity proposed by the community for the woodland costs money, so there has to be a plan to secure income.

This is what we are aiming to achieve with our cabin business: a business to take advantage of Glengarry's popularity as a tourist destination; tourism was central to the feasibility study of 2015 that enabled us to secure ownership of the woodland.



The Feasibility Study (May 2015) recorded the process the community went through to buy the woodland, and proposed how the woodland could benefit the community.

To set up the cabin business, we will (where possible), employ local contractors. Once it is operating there will be more paid work for people in Glengarry. It has been carefully designed to be different to anything else on offer in Glengarry so that it does not compete with existing private businesses. And it is situated in a part of the woodland that will not obstruct other uses of the woodland, or adversely affect local residents.

As a community owned business all the revenue it generates will be reinvested back into the woodland. It will, we hope, allow us to put into practice some of the ideas discussed in 2014/15, such as new paths, guided walks, information panels etc. A lot of careful planning has gone into the cabin business which, once operational, will secure the future of the community woodland. It will also play a major part in justifying the public resources that were invested to give Glengarry the woodland back in 2015.

Ash dieback in Glengarry

Ash dieback (*Chalara fraxinea*) has been present in the region for a few years, but in the last month there is clear evidence that most of the trees around Invergarry are now infected. Ash is one of the last trees in spring to come out in leaf, and this year most ash trees are showing only a partial leaf canopy. The disease is spread by airborne fungal spores, and once infected one of the earliest signs is leaf loss. Some branches and twigs that would normally be covered in leaves are bare, and the overall leaf canopy looks thinner than it would usually. Nearly all of the ash trees in the community woodland are alongside the Faichem Road and they are all displaying early signs of infection. We are making plans to have these trees removed so they do not pose a danger to road users.



An ash tree (centre) with thin leaf cover - classic early sign of ash dieback

Ardochy Forest: new homes and crofts

Glengarry Community Woodlands (GCW) is the only organisation in Glengarry with a constitution able to take advantage of asset transfers under the Scottish Government's Community Asset Transfer Scheme; the process where communities can purchase or lease publicly owned land or buildings. As Forestry and Land Scotland (formerly Forest Enterprise) gradually sell pieces of land in the area, GCW has felt an obligation to its members to look at whether the community could benefit if they were purchased. When we were notified about the plan to sell Ardochy Forest, we decided to take a closer look. GCW has never had an interest in acquiring more forest – we already have our hands full! However, once public land has been sold, the opportunity has passed for good. This fact alone justifies a bit of further discussion on the issue. Most people in Glengarry know that the availability of housing is a big problem across the Highlands.

The popularity of Glengarry as a place to retire to, and as a destination for holidays has put significant pressure on the existing housing stock. Younger people often find it impossible to find somewhere to live in Glengarry, and people on average incomes cannot afford to buy. In some areas (such as Lochcarron) this has led to a drop in school roles, and shops and services have been threatened with closure.

For a community-led approach to address the housing issue to be successful, the community needs access to land. GCW has the ability to acquire land for the community. The next step is looking at how new housing can be managed. That's why we partnered with the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT) and Woodland Crofts Partnership to look at whether a small part of Ardochy could be used to address some of the housing issues in the Glen. The HSCHT have been involved with housing in Invergarry for years, and have a lot of experience of managing housing in rural communities like ours. Their housing is managed under the 'rural housing burden', which not only helps keep the house price affordable, it also allows communities to set an allocation policy, giving communities a degree of control over how the house is used. Examples of how homes could be allocated include links to local family, or links to local employment. We hope to give local people a chance to live in the Glen affordably, and create homes which are lived in and cannot be managed as holiday lets or second homes. The proposal that we're developing is to allocate four self-build house plots at Ardochy, which would be managed in this way.

The proposal for crofts is similar; around 6-7 new crofts would be created along the bottom of Ardochy forest. It would be up to each crofter to build a home, and an allocation policy, developed by the community would also apply. The croft would be subject to exactly the same crofting legislation as any other croft - the only difference being these crofts come with woodland and not fields.

These two proposals are both designed to give the community some degree of control over its own future. We will be carrying out another round of consultation on these plans in August, but in the meantime, please get in touch with any comments.