



Community
Woodlands
Association

ANNUAL REPORT

FOR APRIL 2006 TO MARCH 2007

Support for CWA provided by
CLU, FCS, Esmee Fairbairn and SNH.

**COMMUNITY WOODLANDS ASSOCIATION
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Chair's Report

2006 – 2007 has been very much a year of transition. Jon Hollingdale did a great job of overseeing the development of the CWA business plan and this plan became the basis for our successful bid to the Big Lottery Fund for growing the association. However, this funding does not kick in until the 2007-2008 financial year, so we had some awkward moments financially while we bridged the gap. We managed to hang on to Diane Campbell as Development Officer, but Matilda Scharsach, the part time member of our 1½ development officer team, was made redundant. During Matilda's maternity-leave her role was ably covered by Michaela Hunter who played a key role in our successful annual gathering in Sunart. Through the year, directors have played a very active role in the organisation, all of them fired very much by their vision for community woodlands and what the organisation can do to develop community woodland groups. It is this bringing of the local concerns to the national level that is fundamental to the whole ethos of Local People Leading, a new initiative that includes CWA and which seeks to put more power back into the heart of communities.

With limited staff resources the directors have represented CWA at meetings with policy makers and at various forestry and rural development fora. It is their experience at the ground level that makes this representation so important. It is also why the management team needs your comments and feedback. So, we are grateful to all those who fed back to us through the CWA membership survey. The results indicate your support for what we are doing and provide us with some direction as to what we should do more of in the future, such as: encouraging the establishment of new community woodland groups, supporting groups through land acquisition, supporting new groups as they become established, helping groups become more sustainable and independent and helping groups to learn from and support each other.

The concept of learning from each other is the basis of the Knowledge Share project that enables groups to visit each other, organise and deliver training courses to community woodland group members. While this project has been generally under-subscribed, we do want to keep it going, but as the phrase goes; "use it or lose it!"

Through 2006-2007 and into the new financial year we have been in the process of securing charitable status for CWA. This will bring a greater range of funding options within reach. The temporary loss of forestry grants has also brought home the concerns that groups have about long-term funding for community woodland projects. We are pleased that CWA has helped direct a small amount of tree-planting money from the Woodland Trust towards community groups, but we also secured some of the funding for research into directing carbon offset funds into community woodlands.

So, a huge thank you to all of our funders, to our very dedicated staff team and to our members for their continued support to keep us focussed on delivery and for helping each other become more successful.

Piers Voysey
CWA Chair

Introduction

The focus for the year was the development of the business plan for the next 3 year period and securing a funding package to continue the work of CWA.

Following a director's strategy meeting in April 06, the PT Development Officer was asked to support a contractor working on producing the new business plan (BP) and to secure funding for, and organise, the annual conference in November in Strontian, Lochaber. The full time Development Officer was asked to secure funding to engage a contractor to draw up the BP and then to secure a funding package on the strength of this plan for the next 3 year period.

A contractor for the BP was appointed in July 06 with completion of the plan by expected by October 06. The final plan can be downloaded from the CWA website at www.community-woods.org.uk. The plan outlines the necessity to increase staff capacity from 1.6 FTE to 5FTE to carry forward the work of CWA.

Due to the application process for the Big Lottery Fund (BLF), Investing in Communities, it was necessary to present an outline proposal form before the plan was complete. This was done in June 06 with approval to submit a full application in August 06.

The CWA was appointed a BLF caseworker in December 06. DC provided the caseworker with a considerable amount of additional supporting information during the months of December 06 and January 07. In February 07 our full application was accepted and we were awarded £416,000 funding from BLF. HIE-CLU and Forestry Commission Scotland then confirmed their verbal offers and we ended the year with the majority of the £656,000 funding package required to allow further development of CWA.

Staff and directors' time commitment to the preparation of the BP and the BLF bid has had an impact on the targets set for 2006 to 2007. The following report outlines the achievements during the year.



I. Membership

Information Sharing

The monthly e-bulletin, implemented during last year has proved very successful with members. Following feedback from some individuals and evaluation of the time commitment to prepare the bulletin monthly, it was revised to allow news of member projects to be more accessible. A quarterly e-newsletter was therefore created, extracting the member news element from the bulletin and developing this to include many more projects of interest. Groups have responded well and regularly update CWA on their progress to allow inclusion in this popular bulletin.

In the Highland region the pilot Knowledge Share project has allowed many groups to visit others able to assist them by sharing experience. All the reports from participants were positive. In addition the Knowledge Share project certificated 6 experienced individuals from community group who attended a course on group training techniques. Four of these individuals are now applying these techniques in delivery of training for others.

Following on from contact made using funding for experience visits, groups are benefiting from informal twinning arrangements. For example Kilfinnan Community Wood and North West Mull Community Woodland Trust who are sharing experience of progress through the National Forest Land Scheme (NFLS).

Visits to Groups

Staff and directors visited 20 groups and attended 8 committee meetings during the year. The groups visited are now in regular contact with CWA and are more aware of the benefits of membership, taking advantage of funding available and the information provided.

Membership Benefits Developed

- The Knowledge Share project as mentioned above has encouraged many more visits to fellow groups and training opportunities have been more easily accessible.
- The quarterly e-newsletter, in addition to the monthly e-bulletin are welcomed and are valuable in keeping everyone up to date.
- 3 groups hosted courses through the Biodiversity Action Grant Scheme which ended in March 07. This benefited the groups both financially and by building capacity for the future development of training events.
- The anticipated insurance scheme was unsuccessful due to the underwriters, Royal Sun Alliance, pulling out of discussions at the very last stage. Their senior managers felt the potential business in relation to administration would be unprofitable to them.
- The original member benefits of the Woodland Information Pack, Woodland Voices, conference subsidies and membership of the e-group continue to support members' development.

Contact With Non-member Groups

Although time constraints have meant that CWA staff were less proactive in encouraging new membership there has been a considerable number of enquiries from emerging or newly established community woodland groups across Scotland. In all there have been 20 new members and an additional 13 enquiries from potential members. Those yet to join will be contacted again when new staff are in post.

Membership Development

Membership statistics

The following is a breakdown of the statistics for membership throughout 2005/06

Increased membership

Date	Members	Cancellations	New Members	% increase
1 st April 2006	104			
31 st March 2007	115	6	20	11%

Breakdown

The membership breakdown at 31st March and the percentage change from March 2006, is shown below.

Category	Members 1/4/05	Members 31/03/06	% increase
Standard	32	32	0
Full	44	51	16
Individuals	17	14	-17
Umbrella	5	5	0
Associate	6	8	33
Founder	1	1	0

Renewals / cancellations

Six members did not renew their membership during 2006/2007. Two of these were standard members who decided to be represented through their associated Umbrella membership, a full member and three individuals gave no reason for not renewing. Two groups have upgraded their membership from Standard to Full membership.

During this period new members included two local authorities, Aberdeenshire and Glasgow City and one of the major land initiative groups, North Harris Trust.

Feedback

As part of the preparation for the business plan a survey of members was carried out to determine what they wanted from CWA in the next 3 years. The result of this survey is contained in the new CWA business plan. The response was around 45% of the membership and was generally very supportive and positive for the work and continuation of CWA.

2. Representation and Networking

Twinning

During this period informal twinning arrangements have developed for example, an emerging urban group in Dundee have kept contact with Cumbernauld Glen following their visit and as a result are progressing their plans to develop a community woodland. This was facilitated by one of the CWA directors through funding from Seeing is Believing. Since their first visit to Hillholt Wood in Lincoln, as part of the Social Enterprise trip arranged by CWA, Milton Community Woodland Trust have kept in close contact with Hillholt and have developed a social enterprise project helping excluded groups to learn woodland skills.

Conference

The Annual Conference, 'Growing Confidence – Building a future' was a very successful networking event with over 100 people attending. The full report was posted to members and attendees in February and can be downloaded from the website. Subjects covered included Forest Schools, sustainable building, developing and enhancing partnerships and arts culture and heritage events.



Representation

In the past year the Directors and staff have become involved in a large number of advisory groups and represent CWA and its members on several committees. The list below gives both National and Regional groups.

National

- Scottish Forestry Forum - FCS
- NFLS Evaluation Panel - FCS
- Forestry and Rural Development Scheme Steering Group – FCS
- National Forest Schools Sub Group
- Forest Schools Steering Group
- Native Woodland Partnership for Scotland
- Native Woodland Discussion Group
- Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme Users Group
- Scottish Environment LINK Woodland Task Force
- Forestry Policy Groups
- Stakeholder Reference Group (SGS) – community development theme FCS

Regional

- Highland Forestry Forum – FCS
- South Scotland Forestry Forum - FCS
- Regional Advisory Committee - FCS
- Borders Forest Trust
- North Highland Forest Trust
- North of Scotland Archaeology Group
- Caithness Renewable Energy Forum
- Lochaber Forest District
- Highland Council – councillor, particularly Sustainable Development and Environment Select Committees Chair of Housing and Social Work committee
- Scottish Borders Forest Education Initiative Cluster Group
- Scottish Borders Environmental Partnership
- Scottish Natural Heritage (Borders)
- Scottish Borders Council
- Argyll and Bute Biodiversity Forum
- Highland Biodiversity Partnership
- Argyll and Bute Regional Environmental Education Forum
- Forestry and Environment Steering Group for H2007 events.

Networking

The development of the CWA network has continued through representation and an increased profile with key stakeholders.

Following changes in the way that SNH deliver funding CWA began regular, quarterly meetings with Reforesting Scotland and Scottish Native Woods. The first meeting took place in Aviemore in April to establish the roles of each group within the community woodland sector. Since that first meeting the organisations have met regularly, keeping up to date with developments, avoiding duplication and identifying areas to work in partnership.

In addition to closer relationships with these organisations, CWA has also been working more closely with Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS). In particular we have been working in partnership to develop a research project for a social enterprise based on carbon sequestration. A large proportion of the funding for this research project has been secured and the next year will hopefully see the rest of the funding package being put in place and a contractor appointed to carry out the research required.

Political

CWA has been closely involved in developing the campaign Local People Leading highlighting the benefits of passing more control to community groups. Specifically, Local People Leading calls on the government to commit their support to the following key actions:

Action 1: Put power in the hands of local communities. Commit to the principle of decentralization and invest communities with greater control over decision making and responsibility for matters which shape local quality of life.

Action 2: Review and extend the scope of Land Reform (Scotland) Act. Review the

operation of the current legislation and extend the community right to buy as set out in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act so that all communities in Scotland, urban and rural, can benefit.

Action 3: Enable the transfer of public assets into community ownership. Enable public sector bodies to dispose of assets into community ownership at less than market value without seeking Ministerial approval where community benefit can be demonstrated. (In England discretion has been passed to local authorities where the difference between transfer and market value is less than £2 million).

We have also become members of the Scottish Social Enterprise Coalition, which promotes the benefits of social enterprise to politicians. This involvement has further increased the profile of CWA in political circles.

3. Training

The Knowledge Share pilot project has proved successful for those who have used the funding to access training. In particular use for travel expenses to visit other groups to share experience. A list of training providers in the Highland region has been compiled and will be distributed to Highland member groups.

The Biodiversity Action Grants Scheme allowed 3 groups to benefit from arranging courses. This fell short of the target of 5 events but the events that took place were well attended and feedback very positive.

In addition CWA arranged two experience trips, one for Highland groups and one for the central belt. Highland groups were given the opportunity to visit social enterprises and learn from sharing experience. A group of 9 went to Hillholt Wood in Lincoln and visited the Woodschool in the Borders. A group of 15 from Dundee visited several other community woodland groups and GalGael in Glasgow to learn from their experience of developing projects.

CWA took on a contract to survey those benefiting from the CLU Skills Development Project. This involvement highlighted several new topics that community groups requested training for. This information has been added to the curriculum CWA have been using to deliver suitable training courses.

4. Promotion and Publicity

Towards the end of the year development of a revised promotional leaflet began. The tender for development of the website was also issued and a contractor appointed in March 07. Completion of the new leaflet is expected in April 2007 and the website update will be launched by the summer 07.

5. Additional Projects

Social Enterprise Visits

As mentioned above, in June 2006 nine representatives from six groups across the Highlands attended a four day trip to Lincoln and the Borders to visit Hillholt Wood and the Borders Woodschool.

The trip cost £4000, funded by HIE and Seeing is Believing and was extremely successful. Following the trip one of the groups is now taking forward a project to deliver similar outputs as Hillholt Wood, assisting young people excluded from mainstream education to develop new skills and confidence.

Woodland Trust Tree for All

This project began in Spring 2005 and has now awarded £100 grants to 23 groups for tree planting events. The last of these will be run in Autumn 2007 and the grants will thereafter come direct through the Woodland Trust.

Carbon Offset

Working with DTAS and with involvement from Senscot we have successfully secured £9,000 towards the research phase of this project. The proposal is to investigate the potential for a Community Carbon Company. The company will sell carbon sequestration to companies and individuals. Community groups will benefit through payments for trees planted as part of this project. Funders to date are Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish Communities Foundation. We will pursue the final £8,000 required for this to go ahead during 2007/08.

Scotland's Year of Highland Culture 2007

A grant of £30,000 was awarded by Forestry Commission, HIE – Strengthening Communities and SNH to appoint a Co-ordinator to support groups interested in developing events for the year of culture. This has proved very successful particularly with the Touchwood Festival in Dingwall. 12 community groups will participate in the CWA tent at the event.

In addition to coordinating involvement in projects organised by FCS and SNH, CWA has secured funding for a residential theatre tour by Edinburgh based to POOKa through six community woodland groups in the Highlands. The project budget is £44,000 and funding was secured from Scottish Arts Council and H2007.

ELAV

There was an international conference in Orkney in October and two international exchanges by the end of 2006.

Viv Halcrow took over the post of Project Officer following the resignation in December of Ailsa Spindler. This new appointment and subsequent meetings of the Planning Forum, has led to renewed interest in the project from the wider community. Many more people have become engaged in the consultation process. Exchange visits during 2007 are already filled with schools and community councils being given more in depth information.

Forestry Partnership Research Project

A full survey of 91 partnership agreements between communities and the Forestry Commission was carried out. This was completed in July 2006 and the report is available on the CWA and FCS websites.