

## CWA Achievements and Performance 2018/19

The year to March 2019 saw a number of positive developments for CWA and the community woodland sector, amidst significant change for forestry in Scotland. There are also some longer term challenges as a result of the EU referendum, which has created considerable uncertainty regarding the future of rural policy and support. CWA has been engaging in various policy debates and forums to ensure that the benefits and interests of community woodlands are fully appreciated and considered in the design of future policy and support mechanisms. The Committee on Climate Change's "Net Zero" report and the First Minister's declaration of a climate emergency underscored the urgency for radical change in the land-use sector and also underlined the importance of broad community engagement and involvement and the contribution that sustainable woodland management can and must make.



The new mural at Blarbuie: supported through the Pockets and Prospects programme

The Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Act 2018 contained provisions for new administrative arrangements for forestry in Scotland which were formally introduced on 1 April 2019. Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) has been replaced by two new agencies: Scottish Forestry, which is responsible for regulation and grants, and Forestry and Land Scotland, which has taken on the role of Forest Enterprise Scotland and is responsible for managing the public forest estate.

Another important outcome of the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Act was the requirement on Scottish Ministers to produce a new Scottish Forestry Strategy, which was developed through the year and laid before Parliament in February 2019. CWA was heavily involved in the strategy consultation and development process, seeking to ensure that the new strategy recognised the wide reaching benefits delivered by community woodlands.

Forestry Commission Scotland has been a key funder for CWA and community woodlands for many years. We were grateful for their support and very pleased to announce that Scottish Forestry has approved funding for CWA for 2019-20. In addition, CWA depends on project funding, membership subscriptions and earned income from consultancy to enable continuity of member services, offering specialist advice and support on all aspects of woodland acquisition, management and governance.



For the last three years CWA has been a partner in the UK-wide, Big Lottery-funded “Making Local Woods Work” (MLWW) project which supported thirteen Scottish groups (all CWA members) to grow as social enterprises. In the past year this has included facilitating feasibility work and master-planning for Lochcarron Community Development Company’s social housing proposals, supporting the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust with bringing policy woods into management and the development of a tree nursery and scoping the establishment of an Outdoor Education Centre for Carsphairn Community Woodland. In addition to direct support to participating groups the project funded the production of a range of tools and resources and two training events, focussing on woodfuel (hosted by Aigas Community Forest) and tourism (hosted by Glengarry Community Woodland).

CWA also delivered the “Pockets and Prospects” programme, which used Scottish Government funds to support eight community woodlands to deliver projects intended to help mitigate the impacts of welfare reform. Projects focussed on beneficiaries from the most deprived areas as measured by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation and included a young person’s nature club at Beechbrae, West Lothian, regular outdoor activity sessions for local families and a new Community Meal at Urban Roots in Glasgow and recruiting, equipping and training a volunteer group at Castlemilk.



**Family Play Day at Malls Mire (Urban Roots Initiative): supported through the Pockets and Prospects programme**

Supporting community groups with the acquisition of woodlands, through the asset transfer provisions of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and by other mechanisms, has been a major part of our work. During the year a number of groups from North Sutherland to Eshiels in the Scottish Borders celebrated bringing woods into community ownership and there is a very healthy “pipeline” of community acquisition projects in development.

We also support groups with woodland management planning and implementation, and the development of innovative projects within their woodlands. Community ownership and management have been



remarkably effective at unlocking latent creativity as groups use their woodlands to address important local issues. Amongst the many achievements and milestones of our member groups, a new cabin arose from the ashes of its sadly vandalised predecessor at Wooplaw Community Woodland, Broadford and Strath Community Company opened their new campsite in April 2018 and Evanton Wood Community Company became Scotland's first dementia friendly wood in March 2019.



**Dronley Community Woodland celebrate their acquisition**

One of CWA's key roles is to network the sector. Our annual conference was held in October at the Strathpeffer Pavilion, Ross-shire with financial support from the Big Lottery Fund through the MLWW project, FCS and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. 75 delegates representing 35 community groups and 14 other organisations from across the UK gathered for an excellent two-day event featuring networking, presentations, workshops and site-visits to Abriachan Forest Trust, Aigas Community Forest and Evanton Wood Community Company.

We delivered a networking and training event at Ardentinny, Argyll under the well-established "AWOO" (A Wood of Our Own) brand, supported by FCS, and a similar event at Blackridge, West Lothian, for groups in Central Scotland, supported by FCS and the Central Scotland Green Network Trust. We also worked in partnership with Forest Enterprise Scotland to host a well-received seminar in Stirling for groups developing Community Asset Transfer Scheme proposals.

We were very pleased to welcome 6 new community group members during the year, as well as 8 new individual members. The CWA membership includes ~150 community woodland groups directly, with a further 30 groups represented by "Umbrellas", as well as individual and associate members. We communicate with our membership and the wider world through a mix of new and old media: our regular e-newsletter contains illustrated news from our members and our monthly e-bulletin is an essential reference for news, jobs, funding, events and training courses. The members' e-group remains



a valuable source of knowledge and information, whilst our Facebook page (1,350+ likes) and Twitter feed (1,800+ followers) take the community woodland message to an ever-expanding audience.

We are a small organisation with limited resources: we look to maximise our impact by working with other community sector organisations in the Scottish Community Alliance and by promoting our members' achievements, e.g. through the Scotland's Finest Woods Awards. Gifford Community Woodland (East Lothian) won the small woods category in the 2019 edition whilst Abriachan Forest Trust, Beechbrae and Doune Community Woodlands were all highly commended in their respective categories.

## Future Plans

CWA's priorities for 2019-20 are to maintain and enhance the provision and delivery of services to member groups and to secure the financial sustainability of the organisation. As noted above we have secured funding from Scottish Forestry to contribute towards providing an advice and support service for new and existing community woodland groups to acquire, manage and develop woodland and other assets for public benefit.

Working with partners in Sweden we have successfully developed a transnational LEADER cooperation project which will support five community woodland groups in Scotland to develop, manage and promote multi-user trail networks and will fund exchanges, training events and the development of tools and resources. We are currently working with our partners from the Making Local Woods Work project to develop a successor programme supporting the further development of woodland social enterprise across the UK.

Our annual conference will be held in September at Chatelherault Country Park, South Lanarkshire, and we intend to continue our AWOO and Central Scotland networking forums. We have a new website under construction which will hold our growing library of resources and provide a fresh and updated window to the world.



Conference 2018: the view from the front