

## **CWA Achievements and Performance 2019/20**

The year to March 2020 was largely one of consolidation and progress for CWA and the community woodland sector, albeit with some uncertainties and challenges ahead arising from our exit from the European Union, which has been a very significant source of support for the sector. However, the last few weeks of the year were dominated by COVID-19. At the time of writing the full extent and duration of the pandemic is unknown but it is clear that it is having a significant impact on community woodlands and the communities they serve.

Most community woods are open for exercise, with appropriate social distancing, but many management operations, events and activities have been postponed or cancelled. CWA has been advising groups on the implications of the new guidelines and signposting members to sources of information, e.g. on the various funds which have been made available to support businesses, charities and the community sector.

### **Policy**

The new arrangements for forestry in Scotland continue to bed in, with CWA involved in the discussions around corporate plans for both Forestry and Land Scotland and Scottish Forestry, and represented on the working group developing the Scottish Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan.



**The reciprocating log roof of Evanton Wood Community Company's new woodland shelter.**

The EU-co-funded Scottish Rural Development Programme has for many years been the primary support mechanism for woodland management and establishment, and also for community rural development through LEADER. CWA represents the community sector on the Rural Operational Development Committee which provides stakeholder input and we have been working to ensure that any successor programme recognises, values and supports the activities of community woodlands.

CWA engages in various relevant policy debates and forums to ensure that the benefits of community woodlands and community land ownership are recognised and understood. This work, often in conjunction with other community sector intermediaries, includes meetings with Ministers, giving evidence to parliamentary committees, speaking at party conference fringe events and responding to a range of consultations.

### **Support for groups**

CWA is very grateful for financial support from Scottish Forestry, who fund us to provide an advice and support service for new and existing community woodland groups to acquire, manage and develop woodland and other assets for public benefit. In addition to this core funding, CWA relies on project funding, membership subscriptions and earned income from consultancy to ensure continuity of services and help us support our members.

We launched our new website in 2019 and expanded and updated our suite of information notes, whilst our e-bulletin, with relevant news, funding announcements, training events and job opportunities, went out monthly to over 250 members and supporters. The members' e-group remains a valuable source of knowledge and information, whilst our Facebook page (>1,700 followers) and Twitter feed (>1,900 followers) are increasingly important means of communicating with the wider network.

During the year we provided direct advice and support to 70<sup>1</sup> groups, this included:

- 32 groups advised on woodland acquisitions from public and private sector landowners: CATS and CR2B scheme requirements and processes, funding options, valuation, tendering of feasibility studies, woodland management planning, post-acquisition development and public consultation.
- 19 groups supported with projects to enhance the delivery of social benefits from woods; these included trail building and other recreation infrastructure projects, educational initiatives and a range of community engagement events in woodlands.
- 13 groups helped with business development and social enterprise initiatives, including woodfuel processing and supply, a sawmill, a tree nursery, outdoor education projects, and tourism and café developments.
- 19 groups assisted with capacity and governance issues such as constitutions, organisational forms, charitable status, business and land registration, liability and insurance, managing relationships with neighbours, staff recruitment and contracts, asset valuation and tackling anti-social behaviour.
- 21 groups supported with woodland management and planning, including LTFP plan creation and review, urban woodland management plans, woodland creation and the woodland carbon code, restocking, mensuration, tree surveys and arboricultural contractors, felling permissions and adjacency rules, timber harvesting, extraction, transport and marketing.

Our work illustrates the breadth of activity of our members: community ownership and management have been remarkably effective at unlocking latent creativity as groups use their woodlands to address important local issues. During the year a number of groups, including Mull and Iona Community Trust, Cambusbarron Community Development Trust and the Friends of Glenan Wood, were able to celebrate bringing their woods into community ownership and there are many more acquisitions in progress, including Carsphairn Community Woodland, Glengarry Community Woodlands and Arkaig Community Forest, all awarded Scottish Land Fund grants in February 2020.

### **Projects**

At the beginning of the year we launched our LEADER funded Multi-trails transnational cooperation project: working with partners in Sweden, this supports five community woodland groups in Scotland to develop, manage and promote multi-user trail networks. To date the project has delivered new paths at Kirkton Wood (Lochcarron Community Development Company), Aigas Forest and Milton Wood

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<sup>1</sup> Note some groups were assisted under more than one heading, so figures for themes add to more than 70

(Strathnairn Community Woodlands); supported an exchange visit to Sweden and welcomed a party of 14 Swedish visitors to Scotland; and funded three training events: at Lochcarron, Aigas and Laggan.



**Timber from the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust's harvesting operations (pic © IEHT)**

CWA secured funding for a second round of “Pockets and Prospects” programme, using Scottish Government funds to support five community woodlands to deliver projects intended to help mitigate the impacts of welfare reform. Projects include construction of a cob oven at Beechbrae, West Lothian; a school's project constructing and installing bird-boxes at Aultnaskiach Dell, Inverness; and developing a programme of family friendly events and therapeutic women-only sessions at Urban Roots, Glasgow.

CWA has been part of a group convened by the Forest Stewardship Council to seek to define a slimmed down forest stewardship standard for small, low-risk woodlands. Uptake of forest certification by owners of smaller woodlands, including community woodlands, remains limited in the UK: research suggests that the main barriers are paperwork, complex standard requirements, and costs.

### **Events**

Our annual conference was held in September at Chatelherault Country Park, Hamilton, South Lanarkshire with support from Scottish Forestry, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, CSGNT and Impact Funding Partners. 56 delegates representing 25 community groups and 10 other organisations gathered for an inspiring two-day event featuring networking, presentations, workshops and site-visits hosted by East Kilbride Community Trust, Cassiltoun Housing Association and the Urban Roots Initiative.

We delivered two networking and training events through the well-established “AWOO” (A Wood of Our Own) brand, supported by Scottish Forestry. The first of these, involved a morning session at Colintraive Village Hall, hosted by Colintraive and Glendaruel Development Trust, and an afternoon site visit to Rhubodach Forest, hosted by the Bute Community Land Company. The second event focussed on Long Term Forest Plans and restocking, and featured a site visit to Tiroran Forest, hosted by South



West Mull and Iona Development. Sadly, our final event of the year, a networking day for groups in Central Scotland, was a victim of the coronavirus shutdown: we hope to rearrange this later in 2020.

### ***Membership and staff***

We were very pleased to welcome 4 new community group members during the year, as well as 9 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. The AGM was held at Chatelherault in conjunction with the annual conference.

We had some staff changes this year: Chris Marsh moved on to a full-time role with Forestry and Land Scotland: we wish him well and thank him for all his work supporting community woodlands. Fiona Chalmers has been engaged to manage the Multi-trails project, and we welcomed Joanna Rodgers into a new part-time Development Officer role to promote the community woodlands sector, grow our membership, develop CWA communications and support our training and networking events.



**Lunch at the 2019 CWA Conference, Chatelherault Country Park**

### ***Future Plans***

CWA's priorities for 2020-21 are to maintain and enhance the provision and delivery of services to member groups, and in particular to expand our capacity to support groups with woodland creation projects and the management and development of urban woodlands.

Our work in 2020-21 will clearly be shaped by the progress of the coronavirus lockdown, and we will continue to support our members through this difficult time. Looking ahead, our annual conference is provisionally planned for October at The Carrbridge Hotel in the Cairngorms National Park, and we plan to continue our AWOO and Central Scotland networking forums once this is possible.