

## CWA Achievements and Performance 2021/22

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the looming climate and biodiversity emergencies and the deepening cost of living crisis ensured that the year to March 2022 was another challenging one for all of us. However, despite the gloom, there were positive signs, not least in the gradual return to in-person activity epitomised by our day of site visits in October. Community woodlands have shown extraordinary resilience over the last two years, demonstrating their capacity to help deliver a green recovery, whilst the Scottish Government's welcome commitment to community wealth building and the forthcoming Land Reform Bill are likely to bring more opportunities and support to our sector.



Site visit to Strathnairn Community Woodlands



Kate Forbes MSP visit to Glengarry Community Woodlands

### **Support for member groups**

CWA is very grateful for financial assistance from Scottish Forestry, who fund us to provide an advisory 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 are also extremely grateful for a significant donation received from Stewart Investors which will enhance our work supporting community woodland groups.

We have continued to develop our website, expanding our suite of information notes, whilst our e-bulletin, with relevant news, funding announcements, training events and job opportunities, goes out monthly to over 450 members and supporters. Our members' e-group is an invaluable source of knowledge and information for community woodlands, whilst our Facebook page (>2,400 followers), Twitter feed (>2,500 followers) and new Instagram account (276 followers) allow us to engage with the community woodland network and reach a wider audience.

During the year we provided direct advice and support to 65<sup>1</sup> groups, this included:

- 22 groups seeking to acquire (buy or lease) woodland from public and private sector landowners: 6 of these were potential Community Asset Transfer Scheme applications to Forestry and Land Scotland, another 3 were Asset Transfers from Local Authorities. The remaining 13 (which included several lease proposals) were for land owned by a wide range of private sector landowners. Our advice has covered the requirements and processes of the Asset Transfer and Community Right to Buy mechanisms, valuation, potential funding routes (Scottish Land Fund and other grants, crowd-funding, pre-selling or borrowing against timber sales), lease terms, tendering of feasibility studies, business planning, community consultation, and post-acquisition governance and management structures.
- 22 groups were assisted with enhancing the delivery of social benefits from woods: this included a number of trail building and other recreation infrastructure projects (e.g. car parking, mountain bike

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<sup>1</sup> Note some groups were assisted under more than one heading, so the figures for the five themes add to more than 65

trails), art installations, tackling anti-social behaviour, showcasing the historic environment in woodlands, volunteer development and funding for tools & equipment, and community consultation and engagement. An ongoing theme this year has been the need to ensure that the gradual return of community woods' activities (e.g. volunteering groups and event hosting) is COVID-safe and remains within Government guidance.

- 16 groups were helped with a range of business development and social enterprise initiatives. These included advice on strategic planning, permitted development rights and planning permission, timber sales and adding value through sawmilling, woodfuel and brash recovery, tree nurseries, orchards and community growing, woodland crofts and registration for peatland and woodland carbon codes and biodiversity offsetting.
- 23 groups were advised on capacity and governance issues. Topics covered include organisational forms, constitutions and charitable status, director/trustee recruitment and responsibilities, Rural Payments business and land registration, risk assessment, health and safety policies, child protection and GDPR, liability and insurance, staff recruitment and retention, staff contracts and handbooks.
- 29 groups were supported with woodland planning and management topics. This included the preparation and review of Long Term Forest Plans, urban woodland management plans and simple woodland management plans, as well as advice on woodland creation, harvesting and restocking, *Phytophthora ramorum* and Statutory Plant Health Notices, marketing timber, managing ash dieback, arboricultural tree surveys, and control of Rhododendron, laurel and other invasive species.

The volume and range of support enumerated above is testament to the amazing and inspiring activities and initiatives that community woodland groups engage in to ensure their woodlands meet local needs. During the year several groups, including Helensburgh Community Woodlands Group, Inchinnan Development Trust, Braemar Community Limited and Insh Community Holdings were able to celebrate bringing their woods into community ownership; there are a number of other acquisitions in progress.

### Events

The 22nd annual CWA Conference took place on 1 and 2 October 2021. With the Covid-19 pandemic on-going, it was clear that we could not return to a full, two-day in-person plenary conference, so we settled on a blended format this year, with one day held physically and a second day online. The in-person day featured four site visits (all delegates could attend two): Strathnairn Community Woodlands, Rothiemurchus Estate, Laggan Forest Trust and Anagach Woods Trust.



Site visit to Laggan Forest Trust



Involving youngsters in playpark design: Tiroran forest, Mull

The online day included two workshops, focussing on community engagement and tackling the climate emergency, and four parallel breakout sessions, on tourism, marketing wood products, rewilding and tree safety, plus the CWA AGM. The conference attracted 75 bookings, representing 36 community groups

and 12 other organisations plus individual members and academic researchers. Recordings of online sessions are available at <https://www.youtube.com/user/CWAcommunitywoods/videos>

We also delivered a number of events online, with topics including controlling and eradicating Rhododendron, effective governance for community woodlands and the historic environment in woodlands, as well as co-delivering two events with Community Land Scotland on encouraging responsible behaviours in woods and greenspace; and communities and the carbon codes. Whilst we miss aspects of face-to-face contact, there's no doubt that online events have advantages for accessibility and inclusion, and we will continue to deliver a mix of face-to-face and online events. Reports from all our events are on the CWA website at <https://www.communitywoods.org/training-event-reports-1>

### **Policy**

CWA engages in relevant policy debates and forums to ensure that the benefits of community woodlands and their role in delivering community empowerment and tackling the climate and biodiversity emergencies are recognised, understood and supported by government. We represent the community sector on National Forestry Stakeholder Form, which has been advising on the implementation of the Scottish Forestry Strategy, and the Rural Operational Development Committee which provides stakeholder input to the Scottish Rural Development Programme, and we have been working to ensure that future funding programmes, including any LEADER replacement fund, recognises, values and supports the activities of community woodlands.

The year saw growing attention to land reform issues, driven in part by media frenzy over “green lairds” which has stimulated a range of discussions and policy proposals. Jon wrote a well-received discussion paper: “[Green finance, land reform and a just transition to net zero](#)”, for Community Land Scotland which received national coverage. The paper analysed the main green finance mechanisms, discussed the impact of fiscal measures on the land market and identified a suite of interventions by which the Scottish Government could take a more proactive role, driving the land use changes necessary to achieve net zero whilst contributing effectively to social justice and community wealth building.

### **Membership, staff and projects**

We were very pleased to welcome eight new community group members during the year, as well as two new individual members. The CWA membership includes ~160 community woodland groups directly, with a further 30 groups represented by “Umbrellas”, as well as individual and associate members.

The main staff team of Jon, Piers and Jo was unchanged through the year, with Heloise Le Moal joining us for 4 months on an internship funded by the Pebble Trust. Heloise's role involved working with employees and members of Glengarry Community Woodlands (GCW) and Culduthel Woods Group to design innovative and effective ways to communicate the social and environmental benefits of their activities.



Volunteers at Glengarry



Gaelic School pupils at Culduthel

Heloise assisted GCW in developing a media and communications strategy to promote their new projects and in particular their community shares offer. She also acted as official photographer during a visit from the local MSP (Kate Forbes), recorded and promoted volunteer events and assisted with the production of leaflets and promotion for GCW's Forest club.

Culduthel Woods Group is keen to enhance communication with the local community to increase involvement and support and Heloise's time at Culduthel was focussed on working with the six local schools. Heloise documented and promoted the activities of two school groups that are already using the woods. This included the co-production of videos with young people to encourage them to articulate the benefits they derived from use of the woodland. Heloise also supported members of the group with web design, social media use and leaflet production.

CWA continued to manage the "Pockets and Prospects" programme, using Scottish Government funds to support community woodlands to deliver projects intended to help mitigate the impacts of welfare reform. Projects delivered this year included the creation of a living labyrinth at Beechbrae, West Lothian; Hilton Primary School installing bird boxes at Aultnaskiach Dell, Inverness; and provision of equipment to assist the expansion of the volunteer programme at Castlemilk Park, Glasgow.



Living labyrinth at Beechbrae



Community engagement event at West Stormont

### **Future Plans**

CWA's main priority remains to maintain and enhance the provision and delivery of services to member groups. We will continue to advocate for the interests of community woodlands, particularly with respect to the forthcoming Land Reform and Community Wealth Building bills, the revision of the UK Forestry Standard and the development of funding programmes.

We will be working closely with partners to help increase the co-ordinated promotion of the opportunities for adults and children to engage in woodland-based activities that improve mental health and physical well-being; and to develop and implement a framework for increasing local community benefits from forestry and increasing forestry's contribution to community wealth building.

CWA will launch a new project in 2022-23 to identify and articulate the economic and social value of community management of native woodlands. We will work with 4 community woodland groups who own or manage native woodlands to document and showcase their various activities and plans to derive local community benefits from their respective woods.

We expect to deliver a range of online training and networking events but anticipate that our annual conference - provisionally planned for the first weekend in October - will be held physically.