

Carsphairn Community Woodland



In 2012, members of Carsphairn Community Trust attended the first Rural Parliament in Oban. They were really impressed with what was happening in communities across Scotland and were enamoured with the fact that Mull had already purchased a forest.

In 2016, The Trust saw an opportunity for a forest acquisition in their area and received great help from Jon Hollingdale (formerly Community Woodlands Association, now an independent consultant) to undertake a feasibility study and write a business plan.

At the time, the policy of Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES, now Forestry and Land Scotland FLS) was to try to sell unviable or isolated forest in order to buy new green space to plant more productive forest. The acquisition would be through the Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS). In 2018, the Trust created Carsphairn Community Woodland Limited (CCW) to take the project forward.

At the time, people were moving out of the Carsphairn area and the primary school was in danger of closing. It was hoped that if the community purchased the forest, it would create 12 new jobs and bring in new families to the area. The initial valuation on Muirdrochwood Forest (324ha) came in at £1.2m.

However, larch disease was subsequently discovered in the forest and the required felling, estimated to take six months to clear by FES, actually took 12 months, delaying the progress of the acquisition.

By this point, the original valuation had expired and the new valuation received was £1.8m, despite 90 ha of timber having been removed. A significant contribution to the steep increase in forest prices is big investors purchasing large tracts of land and forests across Scotland, making it hard for communities to compete.



CCW took ownership of part of Muirdrochwood Forest (120 acres)!

Local funding was secured along with a discounted cost from FES due to community benefits that would be delivered, but sufficient funds could not be secured from the limited Scottish Land Fund pot. However, the community did not give up and decided to try for a smaller area of forest (120 acres) – this would mean a reduction in the number of jobs CCW could offer (from 12 to two).

From the outset, South of Scotland Economic Partnership (SoSEP) and then South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE) was on board with their plans however, they could only offer development funding not purchase costs.

CCW successfully applied to the Scottish Land Fund and also received funding from Carsphairn Renewable Energy Fund Limited (local windfarm Community Benefit Fund), along with an £80,000 discount from Forestry and Land Scotland for benefits delivered by the project to the community.

Finally, after four and a half years, CCW took ownership of part of Muirdrochwood Forest (120 acres) on Friday 26th March 2021 on behalf of the local community and visitors. The vision of CCW is to create a sustainable forest providing outdoor space for the community, greater access to the countryside, allowing a more diverse woodland environment for wildlife, local employment, a wood fuel enterprise and a rural skills training centre.

The first task of CCW was to fell the diseased larch, which took place over the winter of 2021-2. Development funding was secured from South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE) in the Autumn of 2021.

This has been a great boon and enabled CCW to build a forestry shed, drill a bore hole for water supply, install solar panels and a generator and set up the woodfuel enterprise. The community can now make full use of the woodland for recreational purposes and interest groups.



Carsphairn Community Woodland is hopeful of bringing people back into the community.

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Two jobs have also been created, currently a forest supervisor who is mentoring a pre-apprentice. The aim is to establish a rural skills training centre teaching practical and relevant forestry qualifications and providing work experience opportunities, along with courses and workshops in other wood related activities.

As part of this, students are being given training and work experience. The ambition is also for the CCW staff to undertake smaller jobs for other organisations/land owners to bring in external revenue for the community woodland.

CCW is confident in what they are doing, generating their own income and also bringing in more grants, felling timber for sale and home use, and employing people.

Despite the school being mothballed, CCW is hopeful of bringing people back into the community. It is an exciting time and after all of the hard work feels like a corner has been turned.

The best part is that the woodland now belongs to the local people, which will enable CCW to do the best they can for their community.

Top Tips:



Make sure there is good support from the community for the project.



Engage a knowledgeable adviser with relevant experience early on, to guide you and help to get a good business plan in place.



Be prepared for it to take much longer than you think – you need plenty of will and determination.



Speak to other similar organisations to learn from their experience.



A piece of advice we were given - don't take no for an answer!

