



Community
Woodlands
Association

Tourism in Community Woods Seminar

Glengarry Forest Depot, Invergarry
PH35 4HG

Thursday 17th January 2019: 10am – 3.30pm



Hosted by the Community Woodlands Association
& Glengarry Community Woodlands

Supported by the Big Lottery Fund through the Making Local Woods Work
Project & Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Outline

This free, one-day seminar was aimed at groups developing or considering tourism-related projects, whether large or small, in community woods and was intended to provide opportunities for learning, knowledge sharing and networking between groups. Presenters covered a range of topics, including project development and funding, community involvement and the practicalities of management, maintenance and marketing. After an excellent lunch provided by the Loch Oich Food Company delegates enjoyed a site visit to Glengarry Community Woodland.

Schedule

- 10.00 Arrival, registration
- 10.30 Welcome and introduction – Jon Hollingdale (CWA)
- 10.50 Introductions from participants
- 11.10 The Broadford campsite – Becky Milne (Camping Skye)
- 11.30 Reflections and experience of a campsite manager – James Fussell
- 11.40 Tourism and Social Enterprise – Sarah Cameron (Senscot)
- 12.00 Discussion
- 12.30 Lunch
- 1.15 Site visit to Glengarry Community Woods led by Tom Cooper
- 2.45 Discussion and round-up
- 3.30 Close

The Community Woodlands Association provides advice, information and assistance to Scotland's community woodland groups to help them achieve their aspirations. For more information contact Jon Hollingdale jon@communitywoods.org



Welcome and introductions: Jon Hollingdale, CWA

Jon welcomed delegates and invited everyone to introduce themselves and say a little about their interest in the day. Tourism is a hugely important industry, both for forestry and for Scotland generally. The 2015 Economic Contribution of Forestry study suggested forest recreation and tourism was responsible for 6,300 full time equivalent jobs and was worth £183 million to the economy, whilst overall spend from 165 million tourist trips was over £11 billion in 2017.

Community woodland groups have a wide range of objectives: most if not all seek to enhance recreation and amenity, many wish to stimulate rural development. Community woodland groups can contribute indirectly to tourism, by providing facilities that enhance existing businesses; and directly, by developing specific services such as accommodation themselves. Most groups will want to be very careful about the perception of displacement, and will seek to develop specific niches or work in partnership with existing businesses. Whilst tourism may be new to us as providers, we all have experience as customers!

Jon's presentation is available at <https://youtu.be/dsfDNfUUvlo>

The Broadford Campsite – Becky Milne

Broadford and Strath Community Company bought 23 hectares of mostly felled land from Forestry Commission Scotland through the National Forest Land Scheme in 2011. The land is at the western edge of the village, adjacent to a small industrial estate and the A87.

Extensive consultation and research identified a campsite and events space as potential developments that would meet the needs of the community and bring the greatest community benefit, delivering an increase in business for local suppliers, employment opportunities, an improved infrastructure in the village, new education and training opportunities. There was very limited camping provision locally and there were ongoing issues with inappropriately parked motorhomes.



The campsite has 75 pitches and serves a mixture of tents, caravans, and campervans. Camping pitches are arranged in terraces rising up the site offering views across Strath and Beinn na Caillich. Vehicle pitches blend into the regenerating woodland, each with its own private picnic area and electric hook-up. There is a motorhome service point which is open to non-residents. The camping terraces create an intimate events space that can be used for outdoor concerts and theatre, and is ideal for pitching a marquee for weddings and parties. Low-impact, energy-efficient, timber-clad buildings provide 4-star quality facilities, including:

- Toilets
- Showers
- Drying room
- Wash-up
- Tourist information
- Mobile phone charging
- Recycling & Composting area
- Chemical toilet and grey water waste disposal
- Water supply.

The majority of the funding (£1.2M) came from the Big Lottery, with contributions from Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Hydro Electric Community Trust. The site is managed by Camping Skye, which employs 2 people, Becky and a deputy warden, full time in summer, part-time in winter.

They have worked hard to maintain community support and ensure that they are genuinely eco-friendly; it's an important part of their ethos that their practices are sustainable (e.g. that the site isn't too big and the way it is built, heated etc). They try to contribute to the development of the sense of place with a market for local produce during the high season. Google maps is very important as a marketing tool given the amount of passing trade. They allow booking (some sites don't).

Key measures of success are:

- Financial stability
- Visitor experience
- Community growth

Becky's presentation is available at https://youtu.be/UILZBN_47b4

Reflections & experience of a campsite manager – James Fussell

Until recently James worked as Woodland and Campsite Manager at Comrie Croft. This opened 12 years ago as a hostel and has subsequently diversified, developing a range of facilities and enterprises, including use as a wedding venue. It has just under 100 campsite pitches, plus an additional "pop-up" camping field, and 72 beds available in the Steading, as well as teepees with sleeping platforms and woodfuel stoves.

James outlined some of the practical and logistical challenges of site management, especially when trying to maintain "eco" credentials:

- Water: never underestimate how much water is needed. Demand is very high at certain types of day, and lack of water pressure can be an issue on a hilly site.
- Toilets can be problematic. Various systems have been tried: a septic tank needs regular emptying, emptying long drop compost loos was a particularly unpleasant task. Vermiculture was more promising but there are limits as to how many can use a unit.

- Power: difficult to provide when off-mains, various options including a solar array with big batteries, car batteries (used for wooden huts)
- Heating: biomass boiler for water heating is great when it works but needs immediate support if it breaks. Chips must be dry to be efficient and it can be difficult to source them locally, it's not very green to import them!
- Waste: the more bins you put out the more waste appears. Weddings generate a lot of waste! Even though the site is very clearly marketed and pitched to the eco-conscious not everyone has the same understanding of what this entails.

His key messages were:

- Understand your business, try not to be everything to everyone
- Know your site and what will work there
- Let your customers know what's expected of them



Tourism and Social Enterprise – Sarah Cameron

Sarah is Local and Cultural Social Enterprise Coordinator for Senscot, one of CWA's sister networks in the Scottish Community Alliance. Senscot's mission is to establish and maintain a national support network for community activists and their social enterprises.

Sarah outlined the Social Enterprise Code which distinguishes between social enterprise and the private sector and has 5 key principles:

- A Social Enterprise is a trading business
- The constitution of a Social Enterprise will include the requirement that profits are reinvested in the business or in the beneficiary community
- A Social Enterprise has an asset lock
- Social Enterprises are constituted and managed in an accountable and transparent way
- Social Enterprises are distinct from the public sector and cannot be the subsidiary of a public body.

Senscot manages 15 local social enterprise networks (there isn't one for Highland) and 6 thematic networks, covering food, culture and creative, employability, health, sport and tourism. They have produced several briefings relevant to tourism, these are available on the Senscot website at <https://senscot.net/network/tourism/>

Sarah's presentation is available at <https://youtu.be/UadnE75Vjv8>

Glengarry Community Woodland plans & site visit

Tom Cooper, Development Manager for Glengarry Community Woodlands (GCW), described his role and GCW's proposals. GCW acquired 31 ha from Forestry Commission Scotland in 2015 through the National Forest Land Scheme. The woodland is in two blocks, with the larger area, including the forest depot building, to the north and east of the A87 and a smaller area with very limited access on the other side of the road by the river.

The community is relatively small (330 on the electoral roll) and widely dispersed, Invergarry is the main settlement but the community area is 26 miles wide. There is a high proportion of holiday homes and retired folk. Tom's job is to engage the community with the woodland, including by a range of events and activities: forest school, primary school visits and family events (Halloween, Easter egg hunts etc).

The overarching aim of GCW is to use the woodland to deliver economic regeneration, producing revenue to support salaries (ideally all-year round) and deliver wider community benefits. The wood is too small for sustained commercial timber income (there is good quality timber but not enough of it) but is very well placed by the A87 and just off the A82 Great Glen / Loch Ness corridor and thus has significant tourism potential.

They are in the first stages of project development: at the moment the proposal is to install a small number of high quality units (huts or yurts) which would be furnished and carpeted, with wood burning stoves. New services would be provided at the foot of the hill, and visitors would access the accommodation on foot. They are keen to focus on longer stays, rather than one-night stops, and will seek to develop the depot as a venue to help attract trade out of season: weddings, conferences, seminars, courses, etc.

Tom then led delegates on a tour of two sites. First we visited a field on the other side of the A87, which GCW is currently considering acquiring from Forest Enterprise Scotland. There are a number of possible uses for the site, which is close to the river, from community growing and facilities for mobile homes to affordable housing. Acquiring the site might also facilitate access to GCW's existing woodland on the same side of the road.

Next we visited the proposed ecotourism site. Recent thinning operations had created a (muddy) track into the woods, and revealed just how rocky the site is. Phytophthora ramorum infection of larch stands may necessitate further felling in the near future. There was extensive discussion about the suitability of the site, the market niche being targeted and the need to appropriately market the visitor offer.



Tom's presentation is available at <https://youtu.be/OkOQaG7-o8Q>

Delegate List

Group

Glengarry Community Woodlands
Glengarry Community Woodlands
Glengarry Community Woodlands
Glengarry Community Woodlands
Senscot
Camping Skye / Broadford & Strath Community Company
Independent
Independent
Forres Community Woodland Trust
Independent
Kyle of Lochalsh Community Trust
Laggan Forest Trust
Arkaig Community Forest
Aigas Community Forest
Ullapool Community Trust
Ullapool Community Trust
Benmore Community Forest
Independent
Abriachan Forest Trust
Wild Scotland / Arkaig Community Forest
CWA
CWA / Lochcarron Community Development Company

Feedback

	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
Location	8	3		1	
Organisation	9	3			
Catering	10	2			
Facilities	1	6	5		

Do you feel this event delivered your expectations?

Yes	13
No	0
Partly	0

Why did you want to take part in the event?

Learn more about uses of forestry for community benefit should we be going ahead and purchasing

*I work as a Project Development Officer on a mixed woodland 50ha site with tourist driven projects
We are working on a development similar to this one
Our woodland group has plans to develop tourism opportunities
To network with others working in this field, to offer and receive information, advice. To learn from presentations and other working in this area
Interested as a Director of CW group
Learn more about opportunities of tourism in community woodlands
Explore with others the potential of more eco-tourist facilities / how can I support development / inform myself of the issues
To get an understanding of where the gaps are in understanding of tourism and marketing opportunities for communities
To start the process of how we become part of the tourism market
Exploring possibilities of future community woodland purchase
To develop eco-tourism potential of our community woodland*

What benefits did you feel you gained from attending the event?

*Refreshed thoughts and knowledge. Met new and reconnected with like-minded folk either working or volunteering in community woodlands network
Lots of ideas and connections
Great (very honest) feedback from current providers in the presentation. New contacts and inspiration / ideas
Insights into other projects. Made useful contacts
Ideas, knowledge exchange, networking
Excellent insight into different ideas for community development and ability to make money
The reality of turning “difficult” forestry land into something that is commercially viable using tourism. Hearing of schemes that have succeeded
Networking, meeting others. Understanding the wider social / political / economic landscape
Lots of ideas & benefit of other folks’ experiences
Share experiences. Discuss similar and different ideas
Many contacts, websites, thinking!
Significant knowledge about supporting organisations. Very interesting experiences shared*

What will you do with the experience / skills/ ideas you have gained from attendance?

*I will be following up with new contacts and start collating useful contacts and info to share
Use it!
Feedback to group
Share with my colleagues
Integrate into my professional work
Hope that I can contribute to bring about more community initiatives in woodland that will bring multiple benefits – social economic, health and wellbeing, community, ecological
Feedback, put a plan in place of how we could take the learning forward
Use the ideas and shared experience to shape our plans for Eco-tourism project
Feed it back to our group. Make them aware of contacts / organisations who are there to advise and support – i.e. yourselves
More collaborative working
Take in to own community projects*

Would you recommend others to take part in such an event?

Yes	12
No	0

Please explain why / why not:

Valuable advice for woodland / tourism projects. Good overview
Great networking
Evening sessions would be easier for volunteers who run our community woodland
People who are working with community woodland sharing experience and networking – ideas and help
Contacts, networking, hearing what's possible, professional support available
To learn, get inspired
The open and honest discussion was better than the usual training events. Great contacts & sharing
Getting to know others working with passion / share experience / vision / precedence / skills
Very useful and well-organised So important to create events like this where people: volunteers and professionals alike can meet, contribute and share
The shared knowledge and experiences was very useful

What would you like to see Community Woodlands Association do next? Are there any other training / seminar opportunities you would like to see organised?

Event on how to manage Community Woodland groups (people and expectations)
Project specific advice / site visit
Keep up the good work
Governance, trading subsidiaries and social enterprise development
Wildlife tourism / adventure tourism and community woodlands
More of the same
Tourism specific section of resources. Provisions of help and advice / facilitated discussions for communities to use prior to appointing consultants to avoid standard options
Visitor management or nature connection site management
More tourism related seminars and training events with other organisations and community groups
Current funding landscape for capital and revenue projects
Follow up event (in 2 years?) Tours of other projects
Keep linking and looking at the ways we can sustain our community woodlands

Do you have any other comments on any aspect of the event?

Good mix of activities and timings. Lunch!
Thank you
Venue was a tad cold!
Balance worked well!
Warn us about the cold! Excellent local food, worth travelling in the snow.
Warm and welcoming. Appreciated the food and friendliness of all participants
The cold weather was a bit beyond the ability of the depot to cope with, overall excellent event
Well done!
A bit more heating in the shed would have helped or perhaps more walking about rather than sitting for so long