

**Trustees' Report (12<sup>th</sup> November 2014 to 11<sup>th</sup> November 2015) by the Chair of the Board of Directors (Trustees) of the Forres Community Woodlands Trust  
11th November 2015**

My report runs from our last AGM, 12<sup>th</sup> November 2014, until today, 11 November 2015.

In the course of last year, one Trustee, Vicky Flood, who had previously been co-opted onto the Board, resigned. I would like to thank Vicky for her services to the Trust.

**BOARD ELECTIONS** The Board currently has 10 trustees. Three board members are standing down, after serving a three year term of office, Wils Metcalfe, Eddie Tomkinson and myself. Both Wils and Eddie are seeking re-election, and I will be standing down. As there are no new nominations for Board Membership, we do not have to put it to a vote, and therefore Wils and Eddie are re-elected for a further 3 years.

**TIMBER FELLING** The main goal of the Trust in 2015 was to carry out the timber felling at Woodside Drive, Mannachie and Loch View. In recent years, we had received a number of communications from Sanquhar residents who had expressed their concerns about trees which bordered their properties: these included safety issues, shading, and the continuing growth and height of the trees.

The Board does risk assessments of any trees which are reported as dangerous and continues to monitor them. Many of these problems were historic as the wood was originally planted as commercial woodland and the trees would have been felled as part of the commercial process. Sanquhar Woodlands is not now run commercially and the Board has to try and represent the interests of all parties. It was decided that the costs of trying to deal with each individual tree problem as it occurred would have been too much to bear financially, and outwith our funding and could create financial problems for the future. The Board decided that the way ahead, was to tackle the problem as one big task, which would allow costs to be kept under control and prevent the problem arising in the future. It was therefore agreed that a selective felling program should be carried out along the boundary at Mannachie, Loch View, Woodside Drive, Woodside Park and Woodend. A letter of explanation was circulated to all householders whose property bordered the wood. This was followed by a series of consultations and meetings with householders who raised concerns or who wanted further information and work done.

A felling licence was obtained, a contractor engaged, and the work was carried out in the early spring. The felled area will be replanted with about 1530 new trees, which have been selected as more appropriate for the boundary. The trees have been purchased, and Members have been contacted regarding helping with the re-planting which is a big job. These new trees will not grow as tall and should cause less problems for future generations. It is hoped that the planting will be carried out by spring 2016.

**LAUREL & RHODODENDRONS** The very heavy invasive growth of rhododendrons and laurel has been addressed as part of a 5 year plan. This had been neglected for a number of years and it is now a very formidable task. We engaged a professional forestry contractor, experienced in this field. Initially, areas were mechanically cut down, to allow access later in the year for spraying with Glyphosate to destroy the plants. This is the most effective long term solution to the problem. We had discussions with both the Forestry Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage regarding the problem, and they advised us on the correct procedures for tackling shrubs which were close to the ponds, to minimise the harm to amphibious life. We also sectioned off a badgers hide to prevent possible disturbance.

**WILD FLOWER MEADOW** The 'Coffin Field' continues to be treated with the aim of it becoming a wild flower meadow. Moray Council were contracted to mow the field with the majority of the grass being lifted which will help development of the meadow and encourage the growth of wildflowers. The Trust were donated 800 trees, some of which have been planted in the Coffin Field to create two coppices and the remainder have been planted along the boundary edges.

**WORK PARTIES** Work parties have continued throughout the year under the guidance of Steve Hull, who continues to do a fantastic amount of work for the Trust, and I would like to thank him for all his efforts. Work parties have continued monthly. Steve will give more information on the Sanquhar work parties later in the meeting, as will Ian for Muiry and New Forres Woods.

**WORK OF THE BOARD** The Board Members all do a huge amount of work for the Woodland Trust, most of which goes unnoticed. Eddie will go into more detail regarding the finances later in the evening, but new systems are in place, loose ends tied up, and we now have a clear picture of things.

**COMMUNICATIONS** We continue to try and engage with the community to the best of our means. Gisela goes to great efforts in producing a regular newsletter, and to try and cut down on costs and time, we have encouraged members to receive this where possible by email. Wils continues to maintain and update our website, which also allows communication with the Board. This has been used by a number of people.

**MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS** Mountain bike events will again take place in Sanquhar this year, and the mountain bike trail continues to be well used. We now have proper insurances in place to cover the bike trail, and we are upgrading signage to meet current requirements. John Young, an experienced mountain biker, has become involved to oversee the trails and to report and make suggestions to the rest of the Board.

**FINANCE** The short term financial status of the FCWT continues to be strong. We have approximately £31,731 in our bank account and we are now confident that we have no outstanding large liabilities apart from the £6500 balance due to Altyre Estate for the purchase of the Coffin Field and we still have a period of some six years to repay this sum. The amount has been ring fenced in our accounts.

At the moment, our main funding comes from the Forestry Commission Landfill Trusts, WIAT grants, donations and membership fees.

**THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE** We have a number of plans for the future. We are currently reviewing the mapping of the woods, to ensure that all paths are clearly marked, and we plan to install new signs at each entrance. We will then identify areas of the wood which require thinning, and when this has been finalised, and if costs allow us, we will engage a contractor to carry out the work. Given the expense of felling individual trees, and to address further valid requests from housholders regarding tree issues, we will address this problem at the same time.

As I touched on earlier, the re-planting will take place in Sanquhar next spring, the rhododendron and laurel clearance will continue, and the proposed wildflower meadow will be worked on.

We are also considering a review of the state of the various ponds in Sanquhar Woods, and we are working on our next Five Year Woodland Plan which we aim to have completed by next year.

**SUMMARY** This year has been another busy year for FCWT. I have been extremely well supported by my fellow Trustees, who are a very talented team with mixed skills, who work well together, and who all have a passion and real interest in the well-being of the woods, and I am confident that we continue to leave our Woodlands in very safe hands.

Finally I would like to thank my fellow Trustees, FCWT members, volunteers and the public for their continued support in 2015 and I would like to wish them all the best for 2016.

Thank You

Graham Hilditch  
Chairman