

Evanton Wood Community Company

Report to AGM 14.10.2024

We were very sad to lose one of our **directors** in December, Tricia Snow, who had served on the board since 2018. The board members extended their condolences to her partner Andrew and her daughters. The family have planted a tree in the woods in her memory. The other board members over the year have been Douglas Wilson (chair), Penny Gray (treasurer), Adrian Clark (Hon. Sec.), Blandine Lynch (membership sec.), Deirdre James and Tom Mathieson. The Board extended thanks to Celina Peoples who had served on the board since 2016 and stood down at the past AGM. There was a maximum number of elected directors, 6. There were no co-opted directors during the past year; there is room for up to 3. There have been 6 board meetings since last AGM, all with 5 or 6 in attendance. Occasional decisions are made by email round robins.

This past year has run smoothly, with regular school and other visits, a weekly session for people living with dementia, weekly volunteer sessions, enhanced training, a concert programme, ongoing good use of the wood by locals and visitors alike, with no major issues arising. The financial situation remains healthy with current bank balances totalling £17.5k (previous AGM £15,692). There are currently 55 life members (29f; 26m) of the wood and 5 regular donors through the Friends of Evanton Community Wood, which raised £257 in the past financial year. The donations post raised £204. Donations attract gift aid as we are a charity.

The **schools' programme** has seen Dingwall Academy continuing to come for a weekly 2.5-hour session with a group of six selected S2 pupils and one older deaf boy for blocs of around 8 weeks. This has led towards the John Muir bronze award and we help present the certificates at the academy at each school year end. Alness Academy embarked on a similar programme (slightly shorter sessions but for more weeks) in March 2024 with mainly S2 pupils from the Base; this continues each week. St. Clements resumed regular visits in November and ran through to end May 2024, initially with junior secondary

pupils, then with senior primary pupils. We attended the certificate presentations at school just last week. The St. Clements sessions resume after the October break. The John Muir Trust has put the Award scheme on hold for new groups (until 2025) so we are assisting the schools in moving to the Scottish Junior Forester Award, for which we have received some training through O.W.L. Each of the schools attending for regular sessions led by us has made a significant financial contribution as well as undertaking some useful work e.g. removal of western hemlock and sitka spruce saplings. Kiltearn Primary school classes appear fairly frequently in the wood to run their own sessions and are increasingly confident in the use of the space. Other schools to have visited the wood for sessions include Coulhill, Culbokie and Ben Wyvis primaries, Tain Royal Academy and Staggies' Nursery. CWA Pockets and Prospects fund assisted these visits. The Home Education group has also visited.

The Highlife Highland Active Schools programme has continued to make good use of the woods during the holidays. Other regular users have included the Rangers and NHS Branching Out; occasional users have included Highland Homestart, Creativity in Care, Connecting Carers, Reach for Reality and Evanton Community Trust, as well as various walking groups. Most make a modest financial contribution. There have also been private bookings of the cabin and shelter, with corresponding donations.

The weekly sessions for **People Living with Dementia** – the Friday Futures group - have continued throughout the year, apart from a 2-week Christmas break. We were fortunate in receiving funding from Age Scotland (ESGA) for the 2024 programme, having completed the HTSI funded programme in 2023. The funding has enabled us to engage a range of freelance professionals for about two thirds of the sessions; the other ones are led by us. Participants help to prepare soup, have a chat, then engage in activities, often including walking and wooden skittles, until they sit down for lunch. The availability of a warm cabin is often much needed and appreciated. We have a regular group of 10 participants, with an average of 8.5 weekly, plus several volunteers/food and lift providers. For all the participants the Friday sessions are a highlight of their week. Application has been made to Age Scotland for

further funding, however the board are committed to continuing the sessions with or without ongoing grant assistance.

Volunteer sessions have continued each Friday morning with small numbers from a pool of 8 participants in total. Work undertaken has included: path clearing (notably by the field), removal of overhead branches, repairs to play equipment, creating log seats, thinning and tidying birch area etc. We signed up to the offer from Community Woodlands Association (Scotland) of the time of a professional forester for 2 days, which worked out well for the woodland management group. John Ireland provided good advice on health and safety and woodland management and led a practical chainsaw session with our 2 current, qualified chainsaw volunteers. The volunteers have since taken down much of the sitka spruce trees in the birch area by the houses – partly in response to neighbour request, mainly to fit with our woodland management objectives. One of the volunteers has since undertaken further training in dealing with large diameter trees and windblow trees, with 50 per cent support from ourselves, and has already started to pay back in kind. The firewood scavenging scheme has continued with 4 subscribers this year.

We ran our 4th consecutive **summer concert** season with 5 concerts at the Mag's Wood shelter, with musicians from Ross-shire and Inverness. 4 of the events were affected by the rain, however the closer gathering of people under the shelter itself, with its good acoustic, made for more intimate gatherings than usual. We are grateful to Kiltearn Community Council for a grant to pay the musicians. We are also grateful to Evanton Coop for their material and practical support for the concerts. The funds generated through donations go towards the running costs of the wood; for one concert the funds (£222) were specially allocated to the charity Make Seconds Count, in honour of Tricia Snow, who had actively supported the charity. We had to cancel last Winter's Woodland Walk due to weather, but went ahead with the lights and decorations of the Secret Trail.

We have continued to develop our website www.evantonwood.com and maintain an active Facebook presence, posts regularly reaching 1000 people.

We have presented at the CWA conference, hosted visits from OWL and Alzheimer Scotland Badaguish project.

There has been minor vandalism and during the past year, including removal of some stones at the pond seat, and some playing with fire. Youths building shelters have been encouraged to abide by guidelines for temporary structures. The board has updated the Access and Use policy which is on our [website](#). The composting toilets continue to function very well; one is open 24/7. The Board has liaised with Novar Estate regarding their plans to install a new bridge over the gorge, to replace the one broken by a fallen branch. There has also been correspondence with SSEN regarding proposed transmission lines and with Bell Ingram who confirm that the cables from proposed battery farm at Drumore will not run through Evanton Wood.

The wide array of activities and opportunities would not be possible without the support of many volunteers, notably: Douglas, Penny, Dee, Tom, Blandine, Adrian, Logan, Alan, Katie, Bryan, Roy, Dean, David, Frances, Carol. **Many thanks** to them, to our funders (KCC, HTSI, Age Scotland, CWA) and the Friends of Evanton Community Wood.

Ac 12.10.24; 15.10.24