

Evanton Wood Community Company

Secretary's Report to AGM 8.10.25

The board extends warm thanks to departing director Penny Gray, board member since 2010 and treasurer for all this time. The other board members over the year have been Douglas Wilson (chair), Adrian Clark (hon. sec.), Blandine Lynch (membership sec.), Deirdre James and Tom Mathieson. Norma MacBeth joined the board in May 2025 as a co-opted member. There have been 6 board meetings since last AGM, each with 5 or 6 in attendance.

This past year has run smoothly, with a similar programme to recent years, with regular school and other visits, a weekly session for people living with dementia, weekly volunteer sessions, enhanced training, an events and 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 £19.5k (previous AGM £17.5k). There are currently 57 life members (30f; 27m) and one annual member of the wood and 5 regular donors through the Friends of Evanton Community Wood, which raised £318 in the past financial year. The donations post raised £249. Donations attract gift aid as we are a charity. The Board agreed to cancel the fire insurance policy, saving over£1k p.a.

The **schools' programme** has seen Dingwall Academy continuing to come for a weekly 2.5-hour session with a group of five or six selected S2 pupils and one older deaf boy for blocs of around 8 weeks. As the John Muir bronze award was put on hold, we moved seamlessly to the Scottish Junior Forester Award and we help present the certificates at the academy. Alness Academy had embarked on a

similar programme (slightly shorter sessions but for more weeks) in March 2024 with mainly S2 pupils from the Base and this continued until summer 2025. St. Clements visited weekly from regular visits from November through to end March 2025. 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, with occasional input requested from ourselves. Obsdale Primary school has started to visit on an intermittent basis, with and without our involvement. A Home Education group has also visited.

Other Users

The Highlife Highland Active Schools programme has made less use of the woods during the holidays - lastly in October 2024. Regular users have included the Rangers and NHS Branching Out (2 series of 8-week blocs); occasional users have included Outdoor Woodland Learning (O.W.L.), Connecting Carers, Reach for Reality, The Archie Foundation, Seeds of Scotland as well as various walking groups. Many make a modest financial contribution. There have also been private bookings of the cabin and shelter, with corresponding donations. We have noted an increase in camping in the woods by local folk (including a group of young women) and touring cyclists – without any significant issues. We have hosted information visits by the Lord Lieutenant and her deputies, Oregon State College of Forestry and the Highland Third Sector (HTSI). 2 members made a study visit to Dunnet Community Forest with the support of CWA and Community Learning Exchange.

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 completed our Age Scotland funded programme (ESGA) and were fortunate in having received second year funding from for the 2025-6 programme, 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, dancing around the totem pole, and playing wooden skittles, until they sit down for lunch. The availability of a warm cabin is often much needed and appreciated. 2 smart (Welsh) dressers have improved the look of the cabin interior and provided additional storage and space to display the participants' artwork. Staff of UHI and HTSI have made special visits. We have a regular group of 11 participants, with an average of 8 weekly, plus several volunteers/food and lift providers. For all the participants the Friday sessions are a highlight of their week. The board are committed to continuing the sessions with or without ongoing grant assistance. We are sad to have lost 2 regular attenders this year.

"The Evanton Woods Dementia Group were outstanding - my Dad loved going there every Friday with my mum - Playing the drums at 90 years old and them having a 90th birthday party for him in the woods. My mum still goes every week. The staff who organise it are amazing kind hearted people."

Volunteer sessions have continued each Friday morning with small numbers from a pool of 6 participants in total. Work undertaken has included: play equipment maintenance, path clearing, creating log seats, new railings at gorge, thinning and tidying the birch area, cutting western hemlock and sitka spruce etc. The

woodland management team, with 2 qualified chainsaw operatives, has dealt with large fallen branches and has started to thin the beech on the first ridge. Fortunately, Storms Floris and Amy and their aftermath only resulted in the loss of a few large trees and branches, with limited disruption to access. The firewood scavenging scheme has continued with 4 subscribers this year.

Events

The Winter torchlit walk went ahead in December with about 40 people in attendance for the illuminated trail, Swedish candles, mince pies, punch, hot chocolate; the lights stayed up over the Christmas period. We ran our 5th consecutive **summer concert** season with 5 concerts at the Mag's Wood shelter, with musicians from Ross-shire and Inverness. 2 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 Kiltarn 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 the 4th concert, the funds (£195) were specially allocated to the charity Make Seconds Count, in honour of Tricia Snow, our late board member, who had actively supported the charity.

Planning permission for the cabin (and associated structures) was due to expire so we applied to convert to permanent permission. This was not allowed, given that it had initially been approved as a temporary structure; however, the council allowed us an extended period of 10 years, renewable in 2035. (The octagonal shelter at Mag's Wood, received permanent planning permission at the start).

We have continued to develop and update our website www.evantonwood.com and maintain an active Facebook presence, posts regularly reaching 1000 people. We also post on WeareEvanton. The Ross-shire Journal had a half-page spread on the winter torchlight event.

There has been little vandalism and few incidents of anti-social behaviour during the past year. Some stones have several times been dislodged from the pond seat, requiring timely intervention. The composting toilets continue to function very well; one is open 24/7 and regularly cleaned (by Dee). Sawdust has been provided gratis by Novar sawmill. There has been some over exuberant construction of temporary dens/shelters, using screws etc. which we seek to discourage.

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 but has no recent information in this regard. SSEN confirm the proposed transmission lines will not pass over or under Evanton wood.

Thanks

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, Bryan, Roy, Norma, Frances. **Many thanks** to them, to our funders (KCC, Age Scotland), Evanton Coop, and the Friends of Evanton Community Wood. Together we strive to make it a thriving community wood.

Adrian Clark

Hon. Sec.

8.10.25 (21.10.25)

2025 per Daybook		Total	Per Cent
Own sessions	105		55.9
Joint	55		29.3
3rd Party sessions	28		14.9
Total		188	100.0
of which:			
Friday Futures	39		20.6
Volunteers	64		33.9
Schools	61		32.3
Events	5		2.6
Other activities	20		10.6
		189	100.0

Plus Toilet cleaning, twice a week on average.