



Report to AGM of 7 October 2019

by the Secretary

The past year has been particularly busy with ongoing building work on the octagonal shelter, weekly sessions for people living with dementia, weekly volunteer sessions, the regular schools programme plus additional summer visits by school and other groups, plus the summer activities programme and various community events through the year – including an increased use of the wood by third parties. Whereas some of these projects have been funded, others have not and the financial balance at the end of the year is significantly reduced from this time last year.

The Board has been busy dealing with a range of matters over the year including project and financial management, freelance contracts, access issues and building control matters. The Board has met 9 times in full session; there have also been at least 4 special sub-group meetings, in addition to those of the woodland management group. All have been well attended.

Access

Visitor Numbers to the wood continue to be high; however the people counter at the Chapel entrance has not recorded all passings and has recently been found to be faulty (last year 48,709). The counter at the Knockrash entrance has clocked 4,070 passings (previous average 3,400 p.a).

Vehicle entry to the woods is recognised as having been higher than in recent years; much of this relates to the building project. Heavier vehicles were routed via the Caravan Park entrance, others via Camden St. The wood received comments from both parties and has taken additional action to discourage vehicle access by those who do not need to enter by vehicle. Additional signage has been instated and further information given out on the website and other media. The wood needs to retain access for disabled other authorised vehicle users.

Volunteers have undertaken path maintenance work and helped to keep the paths in reasonable state. There has been some deterioration of the roadway up from the caravan park.

The Disabled Ramblers toured the wood with their motorised buggies this morning.

The Octagonal Shelter

Following the issue of a building warrant in early November the building and raising of the log structure could go forward. Several thousand hours have been spent by volunteers working with the principal contractor Henry Fosbrooke, with additional support from school pupils and the community payback team, in moving and debarking logs, making pegs, raising the marquee, measuring and cutting joints, making models, trial assembly and disassembly, installing the posts, the ring beams and roof, covering the roof and finishing off.

The funders are listed under Funding. We also acknowledge the excellent support in kind from Novar Estate, MacDonald Scaffolding, Pat Munro, James Jones which saved the project many thousands of pounds.

The completion certificate was duly received in time for the successful community launch of the shelter on 7 September 2019. The shelter is now available for community and school use and for special bookings.



The Cabin & Toilet

Planning Permission was successfully renewed (to 2026) for the cabin and the toilet. Discussion have been ongoing with Building Control regarding the cabin. Recent application to LABSS to be classified under Section 23(a) buildings regulation (for huts) was not successful. The Board, with assistance of local architect Trevor Black, is proceeding with a request for relaxation of the (Section 6) insulation requirements of the building warrant. In the interim the interior, particularly the stove, has been largely put out of use for groups. Additional costs will be incurred in getting a retrospective completion certificate but we are confident that all will be resolved.

The Composting Toilet. This has continued to work effectively. The building standards officer has queried the system; however SEPA has granted a Water Environment (Controlled Activities) certificate.

Woodland Management

The Long Term Forest Plan was eventually approved in February. Forestry Commission Scotland (now renamed Forestry and Land Scotland) paid out the £1589 grant towards the creation of the plan. The Board is now actively considering the next steps. In the meantime there has been modest income through scavenging licences and sales. The thinning of the larch from the area behind the new shelter has opened up a previously wind-blown, difficult area. The saplings planted in the early year of community ownership have made good growth over the past year; many plastic tubes have now been removed.

Assistance with thinning has been provided by Ring Link Training who have used the wood for their own chainsaw courses. SSE has also conducted training in tall tree management, which has been of benefit to the wood.

Volunteers

Volunteers (over 40 in total) have met on nearly 50 Fridays over the past year, plus 9 Saturdays, with average numbers around 5. There has been a good representation of students from the Forestry College. Work has been focussed on the new shelter; volunteers have also undertaken ditch digging, path clearing, log moving, woodland thinning and much more.

In addition, a regular core team of 4 to 6 volunteers took part in intensive, often full-time sessions planning and building the shelter, with additional help from others, including casual passers-by. These sessions involved a high degree of learning and passing on skills and an high attention to exactness of measurement and implementation.

We also acknowledge the support of the Community Payback Team led by Alisdair Stewart.

Dementia project

With funding for a 2-year programme from the Life Changes Trust the regular weekly sessions have continued for people living with dementia (including the carers). Sessions, led by freelance specialists, have included a wide range of creative activities using materials and ideas from the wood. Food has also been an important component. Volunteer assistance has again been a key aspect. A short film of the first year's activities is available on our website, social media and has served as a useful visual aid at meetings.

Additional funding from DEEP allowed the continuation of the regular programme through the winter months, mainly using the cabin interior. These sessions resulted in each participant/couple in taking away their own memory quilt.



Work in progress

Dementia Friendly Initiative

Paths for All, whose walking groups make regular use of the woods, proposed a project to enable Evanton Community Wood to be recognised as 'dementia friendly.' They sourced the funding required to enable us to level out the area in front of the cabin, install a safety bund at the steep edge, purchase some round (more accessible) picnic tables, some new signage, branded jackets and outdoor blankets and cushions. Evanton Wood paid for additional levelling of the access to the play area. As a result we were recognised as the 1st Disabled Friendly wood in Scotland and received considerable national publicity as a result.

Education Programme

There were 138 school and nursery visits during the school year 2018-19 (69 secondary, 22 primary, 8 nursery) of which 71 per cent were led by us – mainly Simon Harry, 29 per cent were self-led (an increased proportion) . The regular weekly sessions were with Dingwall, Tain and Invergordon Academy pupils – many involved in the John Muir bronze award; we were pleased to note an increased use of the wood by Kiltlearn Primary including during the Scottish Storytelling Festival. St. Clements school made frequent visits, normally self-led; St. Duthus also visited occasionally; various primary schools came for special visits in the summer term. Due to the lack of ongoing funding we have been obliged to ask for a financial contribution from schools for the led sessions - not however from our local primary. This has helped to meet the direct costs but not overheads. Schools have been involved in work that has benefitted the wood e.g. the new wood store.

One-to-one sessions for a few school leavers have continued through the year in a direct contract between Highland Council and a freelance provider.

Summer Activities Programme

Again we ran a well attended programme in the wood in conjunction with Highlife Highland. 136 participants took part in 13 sessions. The programme covered its direct costs and was deemed to be a success by HH and the wood.

Groups

Birchwood Highland (Inverness Area) have visited for 2 programmes of 10 weeks, taking part in some practical activities, normally with food involved. Their contribution has met direct costs and helped to meet overheads.

Other groups that have made organised visits in recent months include:

- Highland Homestart – 4 family visits
- SOAR (based at St. Duthus) – 2 visits
- Highland Young Carers – 1 visit
- Connecting Carers – 2 visits
- Dingwall Medical Centre - 1
- Isobel Fraser Care Home - 1

These groups have generally made a financial contribution; all but 1 of the above sessions were run by volunteers.

The local uniformed groups (Rainbows, Guides, Scouts) have made good use of the wood under their own steam.



Events

- A well attended family arts and crafts event was held before Christmas.
- An Easter Fun Run in conjunction with Active Schools had a great turn-out
- The Dementia Friendly launch attracted many new people to the wood.
- Fèis Rois Ceilidh Trail came again and performed to an appreciative small group who had braved the poor weather.
- The launch of the octagonal shelter attracted some 80 people; we are grateful to Evanton Coop for their support, also to Betty, Esther, Unn and board members for their support.
- Creativity in Care have run 2 events in the wood. Ross and Cromarty Athletic Club ran the North League Cross Country races.
- There have also been a number of private events, some booked some informal.

We are keen to involve additional people in an events group.

Design, Media and Publicity

- A new logo was designed by EWCC member Esther Armstrong (see header).
- 2 new pull-up banners have been designed by EWCC member Helen Sharratt and are now in use in Cornerstone and for conferences etc.
- We have had frequent coverage by the Ross-shire Journal and North Star.

- BBC Alba has covered the dementia programme and twice covered the new shelter; we have also been featured on Radio Scotland news.
- The dementia friendly initiative received national press coverage
- The website www.evantonwood.com has attracted 4100 sessions (4400 last year)
- Our facebook site (<https://www.facebook.com/Evanton-Wood-Community-Company-105048782860982/>) regularly attracts 1000 views; 3000+ for the shelter opening
- We have made presentations at various events including the Highland Environment Forum and the Community Land Scotland and Community Woodlands Scotland annual conferences.

Friends of Evanton Wood

The Board recently launched a way of supporting the community wood through a Friends scheme and has recruited the first members. We would welcome further supporters through this initiative. <http://www.evantonwood.com/index.asp?pageid=701520>

Personnel

Simon Harry provided coordination services for the schools programme, dementia project (including the dementia friendly initiative) and some other group visits (mainly the Birchwood programme) and aspects of the shelter project. He ran several events and oversaw the construction of the log store and BBQ at the cabin and helped to access funding for the shelter and the dementia programme. Simon chose not to renew contract from July 2019. The Board gratefully acknowledge the good work that he has done for the community wood since September 2012 and wish him well (NB further words by the chair).

The company and overall programme has continued to be managed by the board on a voluntary basis. Volunteer input into the delivery of sessions has become increasingly significant with additional freelance support when required.

Some Issues

Anti-social behaviour. There was a spate of vandalism in June/July, in particular the breaking of a large window and the burning of a litter bin. Police were called on each occasion but have not identified any culprits. Matters have improved in recent months.

Dog Litter. A 'Stick and Flick' policy was introduced 12 months ago; we have noted a reduction in the number of poo bags left in the wood.

Funding

We are grateful to:

- Life Changes Trust and DEEP for funding the ongoing dementia programme and contributing towards physical improvements; also Paths for All for the latter.
- Forestry Commission Scotland, Kiltarn Community Council RWE Innogy Windfarm grants, Dingwall Windfarm Cooperative, Community Woodland Association, DEEP, Tesco Bags for Life, Global Energy, Pat Munro Foundation for funding towards the octagonal shelter.

The Board extends thanks to all who have assisted the community wood over the past year and extends an invitation to anyone and everyone to become involved over the coming year.

The Board

Douglas Wilson, Chair
 Penny Gray (co-opted), Hon. Treasurer
 Adrian Clark, Hon. Sec.
 Blandine Lynch, V/Ch, Membership Sec.
 Celina Peoples
 Patricia Snow

Groups:

Budget Group: DW, PG, PS, AC

Personnel: DW, PS, AC

Friends of Evanton Community Wood: PG, PS

Events Group: Board plus Betty Fraser

Volunteer Coordinator: AC

Woodland Management Group: DW, Kennie McCusker, Paul Mooney, Esther Armstrong convened by David Smith

