

Good afternoon Tim,

I spoke to you several weeks ago now regarding the site of the Old Forestry depot and woodland at Invergarry in connection with commenting on the Local Development Plan.

I am the secretary of the Glengarry Community Woodland Steering group and it is in this capacity that I propose to submit our comments online. As we agreed I am also sending you a copy of the information which we are submitting and any comments which you have would be helpful to us.

We formed the steering group in October 2013 when the Community Council were informed by FCS that the woodland and Depot were being sold as surplus land under the NFLS (National Forest Land Scheme). This comprises of approximately 30 hectares of woodland plus Depot.

Susan Hunter of the HSCHT (Highland Small Communities Housing Trust) was involved with FCS in organising a valuation for the land by the District Valuer. This was set at £200,000 which required a ballot of the entire community to ensure that they were behind any such purchase scheme. At the same time a survey was done to gather ideas as to the use of the woodland and depot which would benefit the community. This was done in August 2014. The results showed that out of 300 people eligible to vote, over 60% did so, and of those just over 90% said they were in favour of purchase.

We also have the approval and support of the following bodies, the Community Council, the Glengarry Trust Fund, our three Local Councillors, VAL based in Fort William, HSCHT and the Community Woodlands Association amongst others.

Our representative from HIE (Highland & Islands Enterprise), Pamela Noble, has been available for help and advice throughout as have the various people in FCS, Malcolm Wield, Ben Lennon and Richard Wallace, with whom we have been involved.

Our application to purchase was submitted in October 2014 and a letter of acceptance was received from the Director of FCS in December 2014. This approval will last until 07.05.2016.

Subsequently we have managed to get funding from HIE and FCS to employ two consultants, Chris Piper and Fiona Chalmers, to carry out a Feasibility Study and Business plan with a view to submitting an application to the SLF (Scottish Land Fund). It is hoped this will be submitted in June 2015, and decided on by November 2015.

We are having an Open Day on 28.03.2015 to keep the community informed of our progress, to present the results of the feasibility study, and to encourage people to join the Limited Company, with Charitable Status (Glengarry Community Woodlands), which we are in the process of setting up to manage the running of the Woodland if, as hoped, we are successful in our bid to buy. Our solicitor is Johnny Bell, of Twin Deer Law in Fort William.

I am attaching various items which I hope you will find useful, including a map of the area. The area under discussion is the shaded part of the map, and the darker shading shows where the depot is sited. There is power and water on site, and a reasonable splay at the road side.

Our full application for purchase can be seen in the NFLS section of the FCS webpage.

To summarise from that our intended use of the site would:

- Improve health opportunities for all sections of the community, provide and encourage woodland/riverside walks and small bike trails;
- Allow for small business development, e.g. craft facilities, IT unit, educational facilities regarding the forest, and an opportunity for sourcing and providing locally sourced firewood.
- Provide and encourage links with existing village facilities, e.g. cafe in Community Hall, and the local Heritage centre situated in the Community Hall.
- Create improved biodiversity in the woodland, improve landscape quality whilst protecting known good soil quality (ascertained by FCS Torlundy). Coppicing and other woodland management.

These are only a few of the suggestions we have had; others include setting up allotments, ensuring additional parking for the Cemetery which is situated almost directly opposite, and even in the longer term providing one to two affordable homes for key workers in the community should this be required or desired by the community.

There is concern that the voice of the community should be heard in the new Development plans of the area, as although we have not purchased this area of woodland yet our ballot showed a keenness that this area would be protected from any unsuitable and large scale developments in the future. To this end it may be that the existing zoning should be retained to only allow limited and suitable environmental developments which are approved by the whole community.

I hope this is not too long a summary and that you find it useful, and as I say any feedback you have would be helpful to us. If you require any more information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards,

Grace Grant
Secretary, Glengarry Community Woodlands Steering Group