

Minutes of the 7th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Kilfinan Community Forest Company (KCFC) held at 7 pm on Thursday, 19th November 2015 at Kames Church Hall

1. Welcome & Apologies

David Blair welcomed everyone to the seventh Annual General Meeting of KCFC.

Present: David Blair, Di Wilson, Rob Borruso, Nikki Brown, Sara McLean, Steve Williamson, Willie McAllan, Jo Coley, Fraser Brown, Mark Bamford, Fiona Hamilton

Also attending: Debbie Hardy, Alan Wilson, Susan Mutch, David Hunter

Apologies: Robin Webster, Ali Porter, Michaela & Angus Blair, Trish McAllan, Peter & Helen McLellan, Marion & Norrie Jacobs

2. Minutes of last AGM

Proposed by WM

Seconded by DW

3. Chair Report

It's just 5 years since the forest came into community ownershipit is amazing what we have achieved My hat is off to the great team effort that has made it so. It has been and will continue to be an amazing journey of discovery

Sustainable Development

Our aim has always been to be self-sustainable and this has been the main focus of our activities in 2014-15. Using income from timber harvesting, sawmill, wood fuel sales and community composting, we have been able to support staff and core activities. Our case for a sustainable enterprise is outlined within a comprehensive five-year development plan, which identifies top priorities and how we intend to fund activities using our own resources.

Staff probably our greatest asset

During the year we employed a full time development manager (Nikki Brown), part time volunteer coordinator (Craig Blair), part time administrator (Richard Ingham), full time site supervisor (Colin Willment), and part time operations worker (Andrew McKenzie); Andy became full time in winter 2014. Due to the resignation of the site supervisor part way through the year, there was an urgent requirement for a temporary replacement until this post could be advertised formally. This role was filled in the short term by Robert Borruso, who stepped down from the Board in order to fulfil these duties. The board thanked Jamie Chaplin-Brice for his contribution as Operations Manager on the phase 3 project; his contract came to an end in July 2014 and he moved into a new post in Cumbria.

New forest acquisition

In January 2015 KCFC gained National Forest Land Scheme approval and confirmation of a grant of £750,000 from the Scottish Land Fund to acquire an additional 434ha forest (Upper Acharossan); this will bring total community ownership to 561ha. The acquisition will bring financial sustainability to KCFC via an extensive harvesting programme, enabling timber to be

sold commercially, as well as continuing to supply the community sawmill and wood fuel enterprise. This increases KCFC's capacity to deliver a range of economic, social and environmental benefits to the community of Kilfinan, including local employment, recreational facilities, training and skills development, and affordable housing. The purchase of the additional 434ha of Upper Acharossan Forest was completed post year end.

Timber and wood fuel

2014 saw the significant development of our timber operation, having now harvested 30% of the standing timber in our current 127ha forest. This has cleared space for development and infrastructure, and generated revenue via standing sales and product sales. We were able to optimise local sale of milled timber and firewood through delivering ongoing promotional activity and a focus on good customer service, achieving a solid customer base and repeat business. Both the sawmill and wood fuel enterprises have exceeded annual targets, and now generate enough income to support the operations staff required to run them.

Hydro-electric scheme

A key focus was to secure loan finance to enable installation of a 75kW hydro-electric scheme. Having achieved all necessary permissions, we were in a position to draw down a loan from Social Investment Scotland (SIS) and Renewable Energy Investment Fund (REIF) to cover the installation costs of the scheme (in the region of £200K), with a target of it becoming operational by Autumn 2014. However, satisfying extensive loan requirements was a lengthy process that absorbed significant staff/ director resources during 2014. By the end of the financial year we were able to agree final conditions, with the aim of installing the scheme during Summer 2015 to become operational by autumn.

Housing and crofts

Having outlined a project development area (PDA) for the allocation of ready built houses, self-build plots and woodland crofts, we were able to complete a comprehensive master plan to be submitted to the council as part of a formal planning application. This will enable the construction of an initial five affordable homes, three forest crofts and a new office / training centre. The site was also cleared of tree stumps, and plots have been marked out.

Volunteering

A formal 'volunteer for skills' programme (funded by the Voluntary Action Fund) enabled us to employ a Volunteer Coordinator to manage volunteers working in the forest in exchange for unique training opportunities, giving them practical experience in all areas of forestry and in many cases helping to improve their employability. A combination of formal and in-house training was given to 44 volunteers, with training courses including: wood carving, emergency first aid at work, chipper (Lantra), telehandler, Chainsaw City Guilds NPTC, and a course in pesticide spraying. We also provided inductions on the Wood-Mizer sawmill and firewood processor. Whilst volunteers were gaining skills, they were also able to offer useful work for the forest, including firewood processing, saw milling, path and wind blow clearance, and tree felling.

Archaeology

We also delivered a formal archaeology walkover survey of the entire forest (funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund) with professional archaeologists Argyll Archaeology and 25 volunteers from the local community. A number of features of archaeological interest were identified, including uncovering a lost section of the Kilfinan Way, and ancient stone and turf dyke, original water tanks and a series of weirs associated with the Tighnabruaich reservoir (built in the late 19th century), an old sheiling, and a curling pond (which was in use until the 1950s). The walkover resulted in the production of a formal report by Argyll Archaeology, setting out key outcomes from the project and recommendations for 'phase 2' activities. As a result of the interest shown in local heritage, progress is being made towards setting up Kyles Heritage Group, which has led to plans to construct a heritage walk in the forest, opening up sites for public access and restoring key features.

Youth skills development

During their summer holiday in July, we employed five students from Dunoon Grammar School in a four week pilot work placement, in which they were paid to work in the forest, whilst benefiting from land-based, nature, and archaeological skills and training. The students were involved in creating a forest squirrel walk from start to finish, planning an event space area, developing a forest product, and acting as team leaders in an archaeological walkover survey. We received positive feedback from the students at the end of their placement, which was also celebrated with a barbecue and presentation of their work, attracting 30 attendees from the local community. It was decided subsequently that this programme would run every year, with the opportunity for all local 15-18 year olds to participate at least once.

Awards

We also won two prestigious awards this year: Scotland's Finest Woods Awards 2014 for 'promoting viable livelihoods' and the Voluntary Action Fund Awards 2014 for improving our ability to involve and support volunteers.

Community composting

This has been another great year for the community composting facility which generated sufficient garden waste to fulfil the maximum target of 80 tonnes and receive the full council subsidy available to contribute to operational running costs.

Since the beginning of April...

On 24th of June we received planning permission for 5 affordable homes, 3 forest crofts and a new office and training centre thanks to the perseverance of Robert Borusso whose patience is now being tested by building control.

Sara started in post on the 30th of June as our Forest Access Coordinator to encourage and entice more people into the forest and she started with the youth skills development programme that this year had 8 youths employed in the forest for a month learning new skills and contributing to the development of the forest

The hydro Scheme was constructed over one of the wettest summers, there was a lot of mud and not all of it was glorious, but it was commissioned on the 6th of August and has been generating ever since. It was a pleasure to welcome Michael Russell MSP to officially open the hydro on 25th August.

The acquisition of Upper Acharossan finally went through on the 20th August making the Kilfinan Community Forest a substantial 561Ha and giving us an asset that will sustain our operations for the long term, well done Nikki for driving this.

We also ran a woodworking weekend at the beginning of August that attracted around 30 participants to learn a wide range of skills, we had an open day the following weekend with live music from Kantrio and others we came home with a lovely gypsy rose! And a couple of weeks later we hosted the CWA conference on a site visit where everyone was mightily impressed.

What a year it has been for the fabulous Kilfinan Community Forest! 10 years ago it was an idea, 5years ago it was born and look where we are now, we've not just grown legs, we've learned how to use them - a round of applause!

I would like to thank the directors who served during the year and since the year end Steve Williamson, William McAllan, Fiona Hamilton, Fraser Brown, Diane Wilson (Appointed 26/02/15), Mark Bamford (Appointed 13/05/15), Alistair Porter (Appointed 05/08/15), Joanne Coley (Appointed 05/08/15), Robert Borrusso (Resigned 07/12/14), Andrew Graham-Weall (Resigned 07/01/15)

Will the members present please welcome onto the board those directors co-opted since the last AGM Di, Mark, Ali, Jo,

And please offer thanks to those standing down tonight Fraser and myself, thanks is also due to all the previous directors and staff who have given their time and energy to this great work

As well as the amazing voluntary commitment of the directors there are many other volunteers who help make it happen in the forest, my thanks to John King, John Moran, the Kings Court, Don McInnis and Michaela Blair (HR department – don't mess) to name a few.

I would also like to thank our principal funder HIE who have supported us since the initial purchase

4. Election of Directors

Directors co-opted during the year onto the board were accepted as elected board members.

David Hunter volunteered to join.

Proposed: DW

Seconded: SW

5. Financial statement

Treasurer's Report Financial Year 2014-15

Headlines 2014-15

Income

- Sawmill - £12,400 – significant growth on previous year. Now more than covering costs
- Composting – maximised Council contract
- Woodfuel -£4,500 – also exceeding costs

Expenditure

- Salaries - £66,500 – enriching local economy
- Repayment of Kilfinan Trust loan of £5,000

Points

- Cashflow remains major challenge but KCFC not requiring to draw upon overdraft facility
- KCFC paying own way without significant grant aid
- Stronger financial position now than ever before

Looking forward to 2015-16

Income

- Hydro from December 2015
- Timber sales from January 2016
- Core business (sawmill, woodfuel, composting)
- Rental income from new acquisition Acharossan Forest (hydro rent, deer stalking, fishing)

Expenditure

- Hydro installation
- Acharossan Forest acquisition
- Preparation for house building
- Repayment of loans (Acharossan advance and previous loan)

Issues

- KCFC has new treasurer – Jo Coley
- KCFC may appoint new accountants

Questions?

Any questions?

No questions from the floor

6. Appointment of the independent financial examiner

Our arrangements are currently being reviewed and a replacement will be sought. Jo and Nikki will advise the board.

7. Any Other Business

Nikki Brown, Development Manager, gave an update on current and future projects.

- KCFC was honoured to be one of six shortlisted for the Scottish Social Enterprise Awards
- Woodland Burials: an innovative use of land available and service to the local community. KCFC will be the first community run woodland burial site in West of

Scotland. Key outcomes: local employment, use of local timber, promote local woodworking expertise. Feasibility study has been commissioned. Two potentially suitable sites identified, one for body burial, the other for ashes. Significant investment required. Business plan has been drawn up with aim to start the project by end of 2016.

- Event Space: three hectare area to be developed around curling pond. Vision document has been produced. Aim to create a visitor destination and boost tourism in area and local economy. Significant investment required.

No questions from the floor.

Robert Borruso, Operations Manager, gave an update

- Housing: Planning permission received and now the building warrants process is being worked through now. Cash flow issues, as ground works will be costly. Drawings available
- Crofts – a number of people have expressed an interest. Shortlist should be drawn up by end of 2015. Once crofters have been selected approval is sought from Crofting Commission
- Training Centre and Bunkhouse: Will be built using own materials and staff.

No questions from the floor.

Sara McLean, Forest Access Coordinator – Dates for the diary.

- Wed 25th Nov – community walk at 2 pm followed by tea and cake
- Thurs 10th December – Christmas holly hunt as part of Kew Gardens Seed Collection

Question from the floor:

What are the plans for the shop in the village that displays forest project?

People come in wanting to spend money, the problem is the time to make enough products for sale. Mark Bamford and Don McInnes volunteer in it. More volunteers required to have the shop open more often. Forest products will be developed as part of the Woodland Burials project. Map of the paths in the forest will be produced, starting from the village, to ensure people know how to get to the forest. Information on prices needs to be kept. Alan Wilson volunteered to do a few hours a week. SM will put the production of leaflets further up list of priorities.

WM proposed a vote of thanks to David Blair for his years of effort, and to Fraser Brown for his technical support.

Election of Office Bearers:

Chair: Steve Williamson

Proposed: WM

Seconded: MB

Company Secretary: Di Wilson

Proposed: FH

Seconded: WM

SW also thanked DB. All the progress made by KCFC has been the direct result of his drive and vision. The directors have decided to give a presentation of Ash trees to be planted as a grove beside the office building

The meeting was closed at 1955 hours.