



BCT UPDATE

Birse Community Trust

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Completing a Pattern

BCT has started to develop an ambitious project to try and buy Balfour Wood and install a woodchip heating system at Finzean Old School.

The project will bring considerable benefits to the community and is strongly supported by the parish's Community Councils and Community Associations.

The purchase of Balfour Wood from the Forestry Commission would enable longstanding community issues over the management of the Wood to be resolved. The purchase will also complete a pattern as the Wood is the last of the twelve sites in the parish with which BCT has been involved, where a satisfactory outcome has yet to be achieved.

There is considerable potential for Balfour Wood to deliver greater local community and wider public benefits with, for example, the creation of an informal path network and habitat improvements for capercaillie conservation. The Wood could also be managed to produce a future timber income to complement that from Slewdrum Forest and ensure the long term viability of all the lands and buildings managed by BCT on behalf of the community.



Balfour Wood would also provide the fuel for the woodchip heating at the Old School. Increased use of the buildings and rising prices have meant that the electricity bills have gone up sharply. The biomass heating will both be a big saving and good for the environment. Aberdeenshire Council are also keen to pipe heat from BCT's system to substitute for the oil fired heating at Finzean Primary School.

Recent progress with the project includes the entry of Balfour Wood into the National Forest Land Scheme under which BCT bought Slewdrum Forest, and outline approval for an application to the Big Lottery Fund. However, BCT has a substantial amount of work to do to try and obtain all the approvals and funding necessary for the project to go ahead. BCT hopes to know the final outcome by the end of the year.

Woodwatch Project

Groups of pupils from Finzean Primary School participated in a day of activities with BCT at the Old School in preparation for their involvement as part of BCT's Finzean Community Woodlands Biodiversity Audit Project known as "Woodwatch". With great enthusiasm, bird boxes, bug boxes, log fat-feeders, roosting pouches, log piles and model insects were constructed. Lists were also made of the trees, plants and environmental features which would attract wildlife to the School Wood. Pupils and the project team will be carrying out a day-a-month of recording and learning new skills in the Community Woods and School Wood from April 2008.



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Timber being extracted from Slewdrum

Slewdrum Forest

Last year, after becoming owner of Slewdrum, BCT set up the subsidiary trading company that it needed to manage the commercial timber harvesting from the Forest.

In November, the Birse Trading Company started to thin the denser stands in the Forest. This work is due to be finished this spring with the timber all sold to Cordiners Sawmills, Banchory. Income from this is now starting to contribute to the conservation of other sites that BCT manages on behalf of the community.

BCT's progress with other work to improve the Forest has been held up, however, because government forestry schemes have been suspended throughout the period since BCT became owner of Slewdrum. Now that a new system is being introduced, BCT will be consulting locally on its proposals for Slewdrum as part of submitting a long term Forest Management Plan for approval by Forestry Commission Scotland.

Once the Plan is in place, the Birse Trading Company will manage the Forest to implement the Plan and deliver the improvements that it will make at Slewdrum. The Company's Directors are BCT members Brian Page, Christine Wright and Paul Chapman. Brian Page is also a Trustee of BCT.

BCT

Birse Community Trust exists "to promote the common good of the inhabitants of Birse parish and deliver wider public benefits".

Everyone on the Electoral Registers for the parish is a member of BCT and responsible for electing five local Trustees who run BCT on behalf of the community. The current Trustees are Donald Silcock (Chairman), Brian Page, Sandra Forster, Dorothy Dinnie and Steven Lindsay.

BCT is a company limited by guarantee and a Scottish charity (SC28220) with its registered office at J&H Mitchells, WS, 51 Atholl Road, Pitlochry PH16 5BU.