



BIRSE COMMUNITY TRUST

STRATEGIC PLAN

2018 – 2023

The aim of BCT is to promote the common good of the inhabitants of Birse Parish and to deliver wider benefits

Birse Community Trust

The Old School

Finzean

Banchory AB31 6NY

Company Number SC 118799

Charity Number SC028220

Introduction

- 1.1 Birse Community Trust (BCT) is a Scottish Limited Company and Registered Charity, set up in 1998, whose aim is to promote the common good of the inhabitants of Birse Parish (Ballogie, Birse and Finzean) and to deliver wider benefits. The Trust works in partnership with the five local Community Councils and Associations and the three local Estates.
- 1.2 The Trust has a very wide ranging remit in its Memoranda and Articles, of which the key elements are to:
 - Promote the cultural heritage of the Birse area, including maintaining local historic buildings owned by or leased to the Trust and an archive of local documents and items which record the history of the parish.
 - Promote and maintain the natural heritage of the Parish and in particular the wide range of different species and habitats.
 - Deliver projects that would benefit the communities of Ballogie, Birse and Finzean.
- 1.3 The Trust currently manages 14 different sites in the Birse area:
 - a. The Water Mills at Finzean
 - b. The Old School at Finzean, Birse Kirk, Birse Hall and the Soutar's Shop.
 - c. Slewdrum and Balfour Forests, which are run as a commercial operation by Birse Trading Company (BTCo)
 - d. The Forest of Birse Commonty (along with Ballogie and Birse Estates)
 - e. Finzean School Wood, Community Woods and Paths
 - f. The Corsedarder War Memorial Site
- 1.4 Everyone living in Birse Parish is eligible to be a voting member of the Trust. The members elect the Trustees at the Annual General Meeting, where the Trustees provide an update to the members, both on progress over the previous year and on their plans for the following year. The aim is to have a Board of Trustees which represents each of the three communities.
- 1.5 The Trustees meet around 10 times a year and provide the overall direction for the work of the Trust. They are responsible for ensuring that the Trust meets the aims identified in the Memorandum and Articles, all its legal and Health and Safety requirements and that the Trust remains financially viable. Where there are conflicting requirements or priorities, the Trustees will look to find a balanced solution which reflects the views of the community.
- 1.6 The Trustees will seek to engage with the community to ensure that the actions of the Trust reflect their views.

2. Aim

This strategic plan sets out the objectives for the Trust for the next five years (2018 – 2023). These objectives will form the basis of the Trust's annual plans which are produced at the beginning of each year.

3. Strategic Objectives for Current Sites and Projects

This section of the plan will outline the key issues and plans for each of the projects. Detailed plans for the sites will be produced as separate documents as required. Each of the site or projects will have an identified project manager and responsible Trustee(s).

3.1 Balfour and Slewdrum Forests

Balfour and Slewdrum Forests are run by Birse Trading Company (BCTCo - a separate company with its own directors which is wholly owned by BCT). The activities in the Forests are driven by the Forestry Plans for the two Forests and are designed to maximise the income from the Forests (both in the short and long term), while respecting the natural heritage of the two Forests.

The Trust is also looking to increase the potential for walks within the two Forests by putting up small information signs in the car parks and on the trails. The Trustees do not, however, have any plans to increase the number of car parking spaces or put in any amenities in either site.

Each year the Trustees of BCT and the Directors of BCTCo will discuss the potential requirement for BCTCo to give a donation to BCT. The Trustees and Directors will note the requirement to maintain a financial reserve in both entities to ensure that both remain viable during periods when there will be little income from the Forests.

3.2 Birse Kirk and Birse Hall

The Trust owns Birse Kirk and Birse Hall and leases them respectively to Ecumenical Trust of Birse Kirk (ETBK) and Birse Area Community Association (BACA) respectively for a nominal rent. The leases ensure that the maintenance etc. of the buildings are the responsibility of ETBK and BACA.

BCT currently has no major plans for any projects on either building, but will meet annually with both ETBK and BACA to ensure that the buildings are being well maintained.

3.3 Corsedarder

BCT will continue to maintain the site at Corsedarder and co-ordinate the Annual Remembrance Service on the site every November.

3.4 The Commonty

BCT holds ancient shared land use rights on behalf of the community over the whole of the Forest of Birse Commonty. In particular, the Trust manages an area of land within the Commonty known as the North Hill, along with Ballogie Estate (owner of the sporting rights) and Birse Estate (owner of the solem) as native pinewood under the North Hill Management Agreement. The Management Agreement was put in place in 1998 and provides that the North Hill will be managed under its provisions until 2023.

BCT's activities in the North Hill include:

- a. Maximising any potential short term and long term opportunities for the Trust and the community on the North Hill, in conjunction with the Ballogie and Birse Estates. The Trust uses a woodland management firm to provide advice on managing the woods on the Commonty including looking at potential forestry operations and at both further planting and natural regeneration.
- b. Manages access for walkers etc. while ensuring that the area is not damaged by walkers etc.
- c. Working with the Estates to reduce the potential of fires and to limit the damage if there is one.

BCT is currently looking to update the Forestry Plan for the woods in the Commonty in order to ensure that the trees are being managed as effectively as possible, and to ensure that the Commonty continues to be self funding in its own right. This updated plan will drive the work scopes over the next 3-5 years.

3.5 Finzean School Wood, Community Wood and Path

The Trust will continue to maintain the School Wood, the Community Wood and the paths around Finzean. This will include liaising with the Community Association as required over any issues.

3.6 The Old School, the Soup Kitchen and the BCT Archive

The Old School and the Soup Kitchen at Finzean currently hold the BCT office, meeting room and the archive collection of historical items and artefacts. Finzean Primary School also uses one of the rooms as a reading library.

While the Soup Kitchen is in reasonable condition, the Old School is likely to require significant work to make it an effective building, particularly in terms of insulation. Previous attempts to use the Old School for offices have failed as the building is too cold in winter. The Trustees are aware that the buildings in the Old School complex are not currently being used to their maximum potential.

In Q3 2018, the Trust received grant funding to complete a feasibility study for potential options for the Old School, including funding for engaging the community to get their views. Once this has been completed the Trustees will decide the best option for the complex, and the Trust will seek funding to deliver the plan.

3.7 Soutar's Shop

The Soutar's Shop is a Grade A listed two room old cobbler's shop on the B976 in Ballogie. It is a time capsule of how a cobbler's shop looked 70 years ago when the shop closed.

The Trust aims to maintain the building, ensure that contents are properly archived (link to the BCT Archive above) and also show interested parties around the shop as required – noting that it is a very small in size. The Trust will also investigate ways to raise the profile of the shop.

3.8 The Water Mills in Finzean

The Water Mills at Finzean consist of the Bucket Mill, The Saw Mill and the Turning Mill situated on the River Feugh. They are Grade A listed buildings of national importance. The objectives at the mills are as follows:

- a. **To maintain the mills in working order** The current focus in 2018 is to complete the repair of the weir above the Saw Mill. The Trust will continue to ensure that the Mills remain in working condition - the Trust currently spends around £2,000-3,000 a year maintaining the mills.
- b. **Personnel** To identify more people who will be able to operate and maintain the mills in the future and particularly to look at options to use the mills to produce goods etc. Without competent personnel to operate the three mills, they will soon effectively become “museums”.
- c. **Friends of the Mills** The Trust will look to set up a Friends of the Mills group that will help to maintain and develop the three sites.
- d. **Long Term Strategy** To identify a long term strategy for the Mills – this is likely to involve initially getting funding for a scoping study to identify potential options for the mills and a plan/cost to achieve this.

4. New Projects

The Trust is always open to looking at potential new projects which are supported by the local community and where funding can be identified. The Trustees plan to meet annually with the community bodies and the Estates and these meetings will include discussion on potential projects. Any potential projects identified will then be included in BCT’s annual plans.

5. Finance

The management of BCT is always a balance, particularly in terms of finances, between:

- Completing the activities required to meet our legal obligations (e.g. holding an AGM, having audited accounts etc.)
- Maintaining the sites and projects identified above
- Identifying potential future projects (in alignment with the local communities) and obtaining funding for them

The Trustees will ensure that the Trust remains financially viable and will also focus on ensuring that the base line administrative costs are as low as possible while still meeting our legal obligations.

The Trust is currently extremely fortunate to have income from BCTCo to support its activities. Currently the Trust uses the bulk of this money to support the base activities of the Trust (its administration of the Trust and supporting sites and projects with no or little income). This

model allows BCT to meet its current commitments and means that there is a local organisation capable of delivering projects for the community, thus enhancing the local area.

However, in future the Trustees would like to use a proportion of this income from BCTCo to complete projects which will generate additional future income for the Trust. The timber in Balfour and Slewdrum Woods is essentially a community resource that would otherwise be depleted at an unsustainable rate supporting BCT's core activities as opposed to any new projects.

6. Resources

BCT does not currently plan to directly employ personnel but rather to employ people on a contract basis based on a fair wage for each role. The Trustees will ensure that there are sufficient personnel working for the Trust to support the required or identified activities.

7. Community Engagement

The Trust will seek to ensure that as many local residents as possible sign up to become voting members of the Trust

The Trustees are also keen to ensure that the Trust has the right level of engagement with the three local communities and Estates, both through formal and informal meetings and also through the annual meetings with the Community Councils/Associations and Estates.

The main ways to engage with the wider community will be through the annual report which will be sent out to as many houses as possible in Birse Parish prior to the AGM and through social media and the website. The Trustees will also look to put on 2 -3 guided tours of BCT sites a year.

8. Comments / Feedback

The Trustees see this plan as providing the overall direction of the Trust over the next five years and welcome any comments on it, either verbally through the Trustees or personnel working for the Trust or through a letter or e-mail. Any comments or projects will either be taken into account in a revision of this plan or included in the annual plan as specific activities.