

Forestry Commission Scotland

PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The Case of Birse Parish

June 2004

PREFACE

This report describes the partnership which has developed over the last five years between the Forestry Commission and Birse Community Trust (BCT) in Birse parish on Deeside in Aberdeenshire.

The partnership has delivered an increasing range of benefits to both the local community and wider public and is seen as a model of its kind. This report provides an account of the development, current operation and future potential of the partnership.

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SUMMARY

1. *For over 50 years, the Forestry Commission (FC) has managed government owned land in Birse parish. Three areas have been involved. They were all acquired in the 1950s as bare ground:- Slewdrum Forest (155 ha) had been a treeless Crown Common for centuries, while Balfour Wood (240 ha) and Easter Clune Wood (c.120 ha) had both been felled by local estates to pay death duties at the end of the First World War. The FC planted the three sites in the early 1960s and then had very limited involvement with them until the 1990s. By that time, when extraction roads were put in and the first thinnings carried out in Slewdrum and Balfour, Easter Clune Wood had been sold back to the previous owner.*
2. *In the late 1990s, the FC (as Forest Enterprise (FE)) was approached by the newly formed Birse Community Trust (BCT) with a proposal for a management agreement between FE and BCT over Balfour Wood, to enable the local community to have a greater influence on the management of the Wood. A very positive relationship immediately developed between FE and BCT through a series of meetings in 1999, enabling BCT to have its first project in the northern half of the parish very soon after it was established. This was vital to BCT's credibility as a new parish wide body. BCT was also able to use consultations over the project to facilitate a wider local interest in that part of the parish and this has since lead to a range of other successful community development initiatives there.*
3. *By the time the Balfour Wood Management Agreement between FE and BCT was signed in 2000, they were actively co-operating over the management of the Wood and their partnership was already identified by Scottish Ministers as providing a leading example from which other rural communities could learn. The Agreement itself was also taken by FE as providing a model of its kind and has been used since in a number of their other community partnerships. In 2000, FE and BCT also agreed to extend their partnership to include Slewdrum Forest and they signed a second agreement to cover it in spring 2001.*
4. *The FE / BCT partnership has continued since its early stages to deliver an expanding range of local community and wider public benefits. These have been at three levels. Firstly, there have been the improvements within both Balfour Wood and Slewdrum Forest, covering many different aspects from the overall structure of the woodlands down to the details of their ecological interest and amenity values. The second level of benefits has resulted from the expansion of the co-operation between FE and BCT to a wider scale which involves both the other local woodlands managed by BCT (notably the 550 ha of native pinewoods in the Forest of Birse Commonty) and the historic water powered wood-working mills in Finzean which BCT owns and operates.*
5. *The benefits at this second level have resulted both from practical co-operation across all the sites involved and from FE and BCT working together with their shared interests and complementary contributions on parish wide issues, such as local deer control and fire protection. The third level of benefits has been other strategic gains which FE and BCT have each derived as organisations from the partnership, such as, for example, the importance to BCT of the start of the Balfour Wood project (2 above). Simple examples for*

FE include its use of Birse for visits by staff, Ministers and others, as well as its use more generally of the FE / BCT partnership to illustrate how such partnerships can contribute to rural development.

- 6. The progress to date of the partnership between FE (now Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS)) and its potential for further development are underpinned by two factors. Firstly, FCS's commitment to engage in community partnerships as part of its contribution to the Scottish Executive's policies to support sustainable rural development. Secondly, the active local community in Birse which has both a long tradition of woodland involvement and an effective local community business (BCT) to partner FCS. This local potential is further strengthened by BCT having both significant forestry involvements of its own and a wide range of other activities to promote community development locally.*
- 7. The scope for the partnership to generate further benefits from their shared management of Balfour and Slewdrum is reflected by both these woodlands being at a very early stage of restructuring. A large amount of further work is required to make both areas into sustainable woodlands with quality timber, rich wildlife habitats, good path networks and high amenity values. Similarly, there are valuable opportunities for increased co-operation over all the sites managed by FCS and BCT, including area wide issues such as deer control. In all these aspects, there is a very good 'fit' between the contributions of the partners, for example, the positive combination of BCT's local knowledge and FCS's wider expertise or between BCT's capacity for detailed small-scale work and FCS's ability to undertake large scale operations.*
- 8. It is, however, at the third or strategic level of benefits that the most distinctive opportunities exist for the FCS / BCT partnership. The sale of Slewdrum to BCT within the continuing framework of the FCS / BCT partnership, is proposed as a means of releasing the fuller potential of the partnership. This transfer would enable BCT to develop its community forestry enterprise to a sustainable level that secures its long term future and also make BCT a more able partner for FCS. At the same time, BCT's increased forestry activity would be a significant boost to the overall operation of BCT. In the same way that BCT was originally established in 1999 on a platform of forestry projects and expanded to cover many different activities, so the Slewdrum project would be a very important contribution to the major role which BCT continues to play in promoting sustainable rural development locally.*

INTRODUCTION

The main purposes of this report are:

- to describe the partnership which has developed over the last five years between the Forestry Commission and Birse Community Trust in Birse parish on Deeside, Aberdeenshire; &
- to identify the types of local community and wider public benefits that have already been produced by this productive relationship and its potential to deliver further such benefits.

The Forestry Commission (FC) is a government department which, as part of its responsibilities, manages publicly owned forests throughout Britain. Until recently, the part of the FC managing these forests was known as Forest Enterprise (FE). Now, following devolution, the FC in Scotland has become Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS). At part of this, Forest Enterprise has been split between England, Wales and Scotland and in Scotland, Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) is the part FCS that manages the land held by FCS. FES therefore manages over one and a half million acres (667,000 ha) of land in Scotland. This is 8.5% of Scotland's land area and over a third of the Scotland's woodland area.

This FCS land in Scotland is owned by Scottish Ministers on behalf of the people of Scotland and managed by FCS in line with Scottish Executive policies as reflected, for example, in the Executive's "Scottish Forestry Strategy" (2002). The Scottish Executive is also currently carrying out a review of the management of this national forest estate as part of ensuring that it is managed in the best public interest.

One strand of this management that has been developed over the last ten years by FE and now FCS, has been to increase the involvement of local communities in the management of local FCS woodlands. The level of this involvement can vary community to community depending on local interest and the different levels of potential involvement can be seen as offering communities a menu of options to suit their circumstances.

At the lowest end of this hierarchy of increasing involvement, are communities which may only be interested in being consulted by FCS over its plans for the local FCS woodland. Other communities may want to be more involved, for example, to create local paths or ensure local employment. The level of involvement can increase in some instances to FCS and a local community jointly managing a FCS woodland under a long term management agreement.

The partnership between FCS and Birse Community Trust (BCT) over the two FCS woodlands in Birse parish is an example of one of the fuller working relationships.

BCT is a local charity which exists '*to promote the common good of the inhabitants of Birse parish and deliver wider public benefits*'. Birse is a rural parish covering 50 sq.mls (125 sq. kms.) and everyone on the electoral registers for the parish (c.550 adults) is a member of the Trust and responsible for electing the five local Trustees who run BCT on behalf of the community.

The partnership between BCT and FE, and now FCS, has been developing since soon after BCT was set up in 1999 and is seen as being at the forefront of demonstrating the potential of these partnerships to deliver both local and public benefits. Rhona Brankin MSP, for example, when she was Scottish Forestry Minister, described the then FE/BCT partnership as “*a shining example of its kind from which other rural communities in Scotland can learn*”, while the Director of FCS Scotland, Bob McIntosh, stated when Chief Executive of FE that “*the local partnership that BCT and FE are continuing to develop will be a model of its kind*”.

The role of this report is to provide an account of the FCS / BCT partnership that is of value to :

- FCS as a resource from which it can draw strategic lessons about the types of benefits such partnerships can deliver and the approaches involved in securing those benefits;
- BCT as an archive record of the partnership to date which can also be used to brief members of BCT who become directly involved in the operation of the partnership;
- others elsewhere who have an interest in such partnerships, as an example of how they can operate successfully to the benefit of both parties and the local and wider public interests they represent.

The report has three main parts to describe:-

- the background to the FC’s involvement as a land manager in Birse parish;
- the development and current operation of the partnership with BCT; &
- the potential of the partnership to continue to deliver further benefits;

These three stages co-incide with the changing identity of FC, then FE and now FCS and therefore these labels are used in turn in the three parts of the report.

It should also be noted that the “partnership” between the FC/FE/FCS and BCT is not a formal, legally constituted partnership operating its own finances. The legislation governing the FC does not allow such joint ventures. Therefore, while the FC and BCT have entered into management agreements and contracts that have legal standing, these are just agreements between two separate organisations. Thus, the term ‘partnership’ is used simply to reflect the level of co-operation in the relationship between the parties.

Part 1

Overview of the Forestry Commission's Involvement in Birse Parish, 1953 -2003

1. Background

In the 1950s, the government in the person of the Secretary of State for Scotland, became the owner of three sites in Birse parish so that the land could be planted up and managed by the Forestry Commission.

The three sites were Slewdrum Forest (155 ha), which was transferred by the Commissioners of Crown Lands to the Secretary of State in 1953, Balfour Wood (240 ha) which was purchased by the Secretary of State from Balfour Estate in 1956 and Easter Clune Wood (c.120 ha), which was also purchased by the Secretary of State around the same time.

At the time, each of the sites was open bare ground with only a few scattered trees. They were acquired so that the FC could plant them to support the longstanding government policy of building up a strategic national reserve of timber. The policy had been introduced after the First World War, with the establishment of the Forestry Commission in 1919 and the introduction of grants to encourage planting by private land owners. The experience of timber shortages during the Second World War had re-inforced the commitment to the policy and continued land acquisitions for the FC.

The three sites in Birse were small acquisitions by FC standards. Their combined extent was only just over 500 ha (c.4% of parish's land area). They were also each located in different parts of the parish. However, Slewdrum Forest adjoined the more substantial Blackhall Forest which the FC had acquired in the 1930s in the neighbouring parish of Strachan. Also, while Balfour and Easter Clune were relatively isolated, the FC had plenty of experience of situations where initial outlying acquisitions were subsequently developed into more substantial holdings through further acquisitions.

2. Slewdrum Forest

2.1 Transfer of Crown Lands

When the Forestry Commission was first established, legislation was also enacted to allow the transfer of Crown lands to the government. These lands made an important contribution to the early build up of the FC's estate in England and Wales. This provision continued in force until the 1961 legislation replacing the Commissioners of Crown Lands with the Crown Estate Commissioners.

The transfer of Crown lands was not important to the development of the Forestry Commission in Scotland, as there was very little Crown land in Scotland. This reflected the separate constitutional, legal and historical background to Crown land in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK.

Slewdrum Forest appears to have been the last Crown Common in Scotland at the time it was transferred to the FC and it is the only known example of such a transfer in Scotland. It may also have been the last such transfer in Britain before the 1961 legislation.

2.2 Transfer of Slewdrum

The transfer of Slewdrum Forest to the Forestry Commission was discussed between the Wars, but not taken forward because of issues over the rights claimed in the area by two local estates, Finzean and Ballogie. In 1932, these Estates won a major court case against the Commissioners of Crown Land concerning the salmon fishing in the River Dee associated with Slewdrum Forest. These fishings were (and still are) known as the Commonty fishings, reflecting that Slewdrum Forest was known locally as a Commonty, albeit 'the King's Commonty' (Dinnie, 2001).

In 1949, discussions were started again with the Estates over Slewdrum and agreement was reached in 1950. This was based on the Estates being given absolute ownership of the salmon fishing, river bed and islands, a 20 yard wide strip of river bank and right of access through the Forest to the fishings. In exchange, the Estates would give up the ancient rights of sheilings, fuel, timber and grazing which they claimed over Slewdrum.

None of these rights had been used by the Estates for many decades. Sheilings had long gone, peat was no longer cut, there were no timber trees and the grazing was not used by Estate tenants. The grazing was, however, still used by local flock-masters for over-wintering and as a result, part of the settlement was an agreement that the FC would not plant c.10% of the area, so that it remained available for such grazing.

The FC started ploughing and planting Slewdrum in 1958 apart from the reserved grazing area on the north and west sides of Slewdrum. It was not until 1978 that the last of the rights which were held over the reserved area were considered finally discharged and some planting undertaken there.

2.3 Links with Blackhall Forest

The area now known as Blackhall Forest adjoins Slewdrum Forest and was part of the former Blackhall and Glen Dye Estate covering c.12,000 hectares. That Estate was joined with Finzean Estate for 15 years in the early 19th century. This resulted from the Farquharson Laird of Finzean's marriage to the Russell heiress of Blackhall & Glen Dye. However, his debts resulted in the sale first of Glen Dye as a separate estate and then Blackhall in 1829.

Blackhall and Finzean were also connected, but not combined, by marriage in the 20th century when Joseph Farquharson married Violet Hay, a daughter of James Hay the industrialist who then owned Blackhall. Blackhall was sold in the late 1930s when James Hay's widow died a few years after Joseph Farquharson.

Blackhall Estate was purchased by the government for the Forestry Commission. While stories survive of local shepherds trying to burn off part of the FC's planting of Blackhall Forest in the early 1940s, the purchase has had interesting and positive long term consequences for rural

development in the area. This is because the FC only wanted the plantable land, so that the farms and crofts on the Estate were sold to the sitting tenants.

Thus, for more than 50 years now, the lower and upper halves of the Feugh valley (Strachan and Finzean) have had contrasting tenure patterns. The consequences are most clearly seen using the Shooting Greens road, where it runs between the two parishes, as a transect and comparing the settlement patterns on either side. The numbers on either side were similar in the 1930s.

On the west, Finzean Estate side, the long term decline in the number of occupiers continued from the 1930s onwards. This was because the tenants, as tenants, had to give up their farms as they became economically too small to be viable. The land was then amalgamated with other tenant holdings. As a result, for many years, only two households were left west of the road, each occupied by elderly widows. There are still only two households there, though now occupied by families working outwith the area.

On the east, Strachan side, when the occupiers' farms and crofts became too small economically, the occupiers were able to diversify as they were owner occupiers. In addition, not only did they not have to leave their homes, but they were able to provide space on their holdings for sons or daughters to build homes. As a result, the number of households has gone up to over ten and supports a wide range of local businesses, for example, two small caravan parks, a window making business, market garden, scrap metal merchant, and several other local trades (eg. self employed joiner, self-employed JCB driver).

The FC's involvement has thus, indirectly, made a very significant contribution to long term rural development in the area.

3. Balfour and Easter Clune Woods

3.1 Background

These woods were purchased off Balfour and Finzean Estates respectively and illustrate some of the wider features of such purchases from estates around the 1950s.

The estates were the smallest and largest of the four estates which had owned virtually all the land in Birse parish between them for over 100 years by the 1950s. Balfour and Finzean Estates were also owned by the longest established local landowning families. The management of the estates was also closely related, as the Cochrans of Balfour had been the legal agents for the Farquharsons of Finzean since the 19th century.

All of the estates in Birse had long traditions of estate forestry. However, in each case, this had suffered seriously by the 1950s due to the wider downturn in estate economics from the start of the 20th century, the wartime fellings for the First and Second World Wars and the impact of the 1953 Gale.

The Second World War fellings were particularly pronounced in Birse. It was one of the few locations in Scotland to have two of the thirty companies of the Canadian Forestry Corps that

were deployed in Scotland and contributed a disproportionately large share of the timber felled by them for the war effort. The impact of the 1953 Gale was also particularly severe in Birse and it was, for example, the area featured most prominently on the front page coverage of the event in the regional newspaper, the Press & Journal.

3.2 Post War Planting

It is recalled in Birse that more or less any stands of mature timber which had not been felled by the Canadians, were blown down by the 1953 Gale. At the same time, there were few young plantations maturing. On Finzean Estate, for example, there had been no commercial new planting or re-stocking in the fifty years 1901-1950. The Estate itself had been reduced in size by 50% in the 1930s with the sale of its lands outwith Birse parish (Lumphanan & Migvie) and in the immediate post war period, the new laird of Finzean nearly sold Finzean as well.

Against this bleak background, the Estates then came under pressure in the 1950s from the Forestry Commission to replant their felled lands in the national interest.

In response to this pressure, Balfour Estate sold more than half its traditional forest land to the government in 1956 and used the payment received to re-stock their remaining area of forestry. The land sold had been bare since being felled in the First World War to pay estate death duties, and became the FC's Balfour Wood plantation.

Finzean Estate had started an extensive re-planting programme in the early 1950s. However, the Estate considered that it could not afford to re-stock Easter Clune Wood which had been felled 1919, also to pay death duties. The Estate, with the Cochrans of Balfour as their legal agents, was therefore persuaded to sell the land to the government and it became the FC's Easter Clune Wood plantation.

4. The First 50 Years

4.1 The Establishment Phase

The FC had acquired all three sites in Birse parish before it began fencing, ploughing and planting any of them. The work started at Slewdrum, which was planted in 1959-62. Balfour Wood was planted in 1963-65 and the smaller Easter Clune Wood followed after that. While Slewdrum was protected by rabbit fencing, both Balfour and Easter Clune had deer fences.

All the planting was conifers, but the species composition used at the sites reflected their ground character. At Slewdrum, by far the most fertile and ecologically varied site, the species composition was approximately Scots pine 32%, Sitka spruce 22%, Douglas fir 17%, larch species 11%, Norway spruce 6% and Grand fir 4%. In contrast, at Balfour Wood, it was Scots pine 75%, Lodgepole pine 9%, larch spp. 7%, Sitka spruce 6% and Grand fir, Douglas fir and Norway spruce together making up the remaining 3%. The composition of Easter Clune Wood was very similar to Balfour with its predominance of Scots pine.

It is known that some of the FC's squads carrying out the work came from Birse and Strachan parishes, although the proportion of the squads local to the area is not known now. However, after the planting was complete, there was little involvement by the FC in the sites. It was more or less a case of 'closing the forest gates' and withdrawing from the parish for approximately 30 years until the 1990s, and the making of forest roads in the woods and their first thinning.

By that time, however, Easter Clune Wood had been sold back to Finzean Estate. The sale took place in 1984 under the Conservative government's policy of offering to sell certain 'outlying' FC woods back to their former owners where rights of pre-emption were held by those owners.

4.2 The Last Five Years

The harvesting of timber from Slewdrum Forest and Balfour Wood started in the 1990s. To date, over 50,000 tonnes has been harvested and the amount will increase substantially over the next two decades.

The FC's harvesting in Birse parish has been during a period when timber prices have fallen steeply and continued at an un-precedently low level. However, a return is being made on the earlier investment. The net income from Slewdrum Forest and Balfour Wood timber sales is estimated to have amounted to over a quarter of a million pounds so far. The harvesting has involved both the Forestry Commission's own staff and contractors from the wider Deeside area.

While the FC's local Harvest Manager is currently a resident of Birse, the FC has had very little contact with the local community during most of the 50 years in which the FC has been a land manager in the parish. However, during the last five years, a productive partnership has developed between the FC and community through Birse Community Trust.

This partnership has transformed both the local and wider public benefits of the Forestry Commission's involvement in Birse parish, and it is this partnership which is the focus of the rest of the Report.

Part 2

The Development of the Forestry Enterprise & Birse Community Trust Partnership, 1999-2004

5. Initial Contact

5.1 Background

Moves to set up BCT first started in autumn 1995. However, BCT's establishment was contingent on reaching agreement with two local private estates over the vesting of ancient shared rights over the Forest of Birse Community in the new Trust.

The discussions about this turned into protracted negotiations and a settlement was not signed until three and half years later in January 1999. Invitations were then immediately sent out to an AGM in February 1999 to elect BCT's first Trustees.

During the long negotiations, various project plans and grant applications had been developed on behalf of BCT for the Community pinewood and a number of other initial BCT projects.

By the time BCT became operational in February 1999, there had already been informal contact on behalf of BCT with the local Forest Enterprise (FE) District Manager about Balfour Wood. This contact had been initiated by BCT in December 1997, because of local community concern that Balfour Wood might be sold off in line with government policy at the time for smaller, outlying FE plantations.

The community had already seen one of the FE's three sites in the parish, Easter Clune Wood, sold. While that wood had been bought back by Finzean Estate in a private sale, it was known locally that Balfour Estate would not want to buy back Balfour Wood. There was a concern that there would be an open market sale and that, while the neighbouring Birse Estate might bid, there was a significant risk that Balfour Wood might be bought by a distant owner simply as a forestry investment managed on their behalf by one of the main forestry management companies.

The local concern was that the environmental management of the wood under that distant management, would not be as good as the new standards that FE was starting to apply in its own woods in the 1990s. Another particular concern was that informal walking opportunities would be more limited, when demand for such was increasing in the community due to the changing nature of the households in the Balfour Wood area.

5.2 Local Awareness

The initial informal contact with FE locally over Balfour Wood, was also based on local awareness that the FC nationally was starting to look beyond the economic and environmental benefits covered by the forestry legislation, and developing a much more positive approach to the social benefits of forestry, including greater engagement with local communities.

The FC's Forest Authority had introduced the Community Wood Grant Supplement in 1991 and Finzean Community Woods was an early example of such a scheme in a rural area. It involved c.15 ha around the main settlement in Finzean and had been developed in 1993-94 as a partnership between Finzean Estate and Finzean Community Association. Then, when BCT was established, it took over the management of the Woods due to difficulties for the Estate and Community Association to undertake adequate levels of maintenance.

Birse had also featured in the FC's milestone publication "Forests and People in Rural Scotland" (1996). The Bucket Mill is one of the photographs used in the booklet. However, of particular significance is its central landscape illustration and accompanying table about the ways people might be involved with forestry in rural areas. This was largely modelled on the Birse area.

The booklet was of particular significance because its Ministerial Foreword entrenched 'social benefits' in Forestry Policy for the first time. The branding of the booklet as part of the Scottish Office's 'Rural Framework' also highlighted the potential value of these benefits for rural community development.

5.3 First Meeting

In March 1999, within a month of its first AGM, BCT had contacted FE to arrange a first formal meeting between BCT and FE. The meeting was held in Birse parish in May and attended by the FE's North Scotland Regional Director.

The meeting was very productive. A number of important decisions were made at the meeting, including the key parameters for a management agreement over Balfour Wood to be drawn up and agreed between the FE and BCT.

The constructive nature of the meeting set the tone for a positive on-going relationship between FE and BCT. Several factors might be considered to have contributed to the success of the meeting, including:

- the exchange between FE and BCT of a range of useful background documents in advance of the meeting;
- the circulation of an Agenda and detailed briefing paper by BCT in advance of the meeting;
- the identification of realistic proposals and specific targets based on the recognition by each party of the constraints and requirements of the other party.
- the presence of the FE's Regional Director for the authority and momentum this gave to the various action points to be followed up within the FE following the meeting.

The May meeting was followed by a series of meetings (July, September, October...) and by the end of the year, the Management Agreement for Balfour Wood was close to finalisation and a range of other joint initiatives over the management of the Wood were already taking place.

5.4 Immediate Benefits

By the time FE and BCT had their first formal meeting in May 1999, a change in government had meant that there was no longer any imminent threat of Balfour Wood being sold.

There was, however, still considerable potential for the local benefits which could come from a management agreement with FE over Balfour Wood, even just considering amenity and access. Balfour Wood was still a typical 1960s plantation, planted “wall to wall” with Scots pine. The only exceptions were the burn-sides and other wet lands, which were thickly planted with Sitka spruce and other non-native conifers.

However, these potential amenity and access benefits were not the main reason why BCT prioritised Balfour Wood so early in its existence when BCT had such a wide range of other tasks to tackle.

BCT had another more pressing reason for wanting a Balfour Wood project at that time. BCT was very conscious that all the land management projects which it had taken on by the time it was established, were concentrated in the Finzean / Forest of Birse half of the parish. Thus, BCT had a vital need for a significant project in the other half of the parish as the new *parish wide* community group.

The points agreed between FE and BCT in May 1999 were sufficient to enable BCT to address this issue by having a Balfour Wood project in time for:

- its public launch on 15th June, which FE attended the launch in support of BCT and the Balfour Wood Project; and
- the first BCT newsletter, covering the period to the end of June 1999 and the first full account of BCT’s activities mailed to every household in the parish.

Thus, by the time most people in the parish became more fully aware of BCT, it already had an important ‘flag in the map’ in the northern half of the parish.

5.5 Strategic Gains

The agreement between the FE and BCT to develop a partnership over Balfour Wood provided much wider benefits than the immediate ‘flag in the map’ and prospect of in-forest improvements.

BCT used the community meetings it convened in the Birse area in 1999 to consult over Balfour Wood, to discuss community issues generally in that part of the parish. The community in the Birse area had no forum for this and BCT was able to facilitate through these meetings, the establishment of a local Community Association before the end of 1999.

The formation of the Birse Area Community Association (BACA) around BCT’s Balfour Wood Project, has been of important long term benefit to the area. It provided a focus for ‘community energy’ in that part of the parish that has continued to grow. Other community projects have followed, the most major being the purchase by BCT of Birse Kirk and Church Hall in the Birse area.

The safeguarding of Birse Kirk and Hall when they were being sold on the open market by the Church of Scotland in 2002-03, was an issue of parish wide concern. However, it could not have been successful without the strong presence of BACA.

The formation of BACA also had a wider strategic benefit for BCT and the parish of Birse more generally, by completing a pattern in which each of the parish's three communities has its own Community Association. This in turn, lead to further developments in the local 'community infra-structure' (see Appendix 2) and the many local benefits that have flowed from this.

5.6 Policy Delivery

For FE, the constructive relationship established with BCT at the meeting in May 1999 opened up the prospect of developing another community partnership with all the public benefits that can flow from these. These include the on-site benefits for the standard of the management of their woods in terms of community input and support. They also include a wider contribution to delivering rural policy and the government's commitments to local community development.

FE, by having a woodland in a prominent location in the parish and by being willing and positive about engaging the community, enabled BCT to expand from the Finzean half of the parish to the whole of Birse at crucial moment. Thus, FE's woodland has played a key role in the subsequent development of BCT as an award winning community business which has been held up as a model by Scottish Executive Ministers and other prominent commentators.

It should also be noted that the FC also played a fundamental role through its Forest Authority (FA) in helping BCT to even reach the initial point where it had viable projects in the Finzean half of the parish. BCT's Woodland Grant Schemes (WGS) contracts over the Commonty Pinewoods were BCT's first grants and provided the basis for the matching funding from the Millennium Forest for Scotland that enabled to BCT to expand beyond woodland management. The availability of the WGS funding depended in large measure on the patience and flexibility of the FA staff dealing with it, given the unique legal constitution of the Commonty and the protracted negotiations over years between BCT and the two private estates involved, before BCT's rights to undertake the WGS were established. That assistance was vital.

6. Management Agreement

6.1 Negotiations

The negotiations between FE and BCT about the Management Agreement for Balfour Wood went through several stages. At the start in May 1999, FE and BCT agreed to adopt 'a clean sheet of paper' approach and draw up an Agreement best suited to the circumstances in Birse.

At BCT's request, FE supplied copies of the main different types of written agreements which it already had with communities (eg. Laggan, Abriachan, Cairnhead). None of these, however, appeared suitable to BCT, which therefore drafted a 'framework document' outlining what it considered the potential form and contents of an appropriate Agreement for Balfour Wood.

FE responded to BCT's document by suggesting their favoured form from amongst the examples already supplied. To resolve a possible impasse, BCT expanded its 'framework document' into a draft Management Agreement and FE agreed to accept the draft as the basis of the negotiations.

The negotiations were a constructive dialogue to improve the draft Agreement, rather than either party seeking to advance its interests in a one sided way. The negotiations also benefited from lawyers being one stage removed, only being asked to comment on particular points rather than draft any of the Agreement.

In the end, only one word separated FE and BCT. The word was ‘social’. The first clause of the Agreement sets out the Agreement’s purpose and in the final draft, reference was made to “economic, social and environmental benefits”. FE were uncomfortable with the inclusion of ‘social’ as the forestry legislation only refers to ‘economic’ and ‘environmental’.

For BCT, as a local community trust, the potential social benefits were the central purpose of the Agreement, with the role of economic and environmental benefits also being in the final analysis to produce social benefits for either the local community or wider public.

BCT used the Ministerial Foreword from the ‘Forests and People in Rural Scotland’ booklet as part of its case for retaining the reference to ‘social benefits’ and FE fairly readily agreed. Thus the document was finalised in April 2000, just less than a year after the first meeting between FE and BCT.

Now, in early 2004, with the prominence of social considerations in the Scottish Forestry Strategy, it is easy to forget that ‘social benefits’ could still be an issue only four years ago.

6.2 Main Principles

A distinctive feature of the Balfour Wood Agreement in comparison to the other agreements supplied to BCT by FE, is that it is between BCT and Scottish Ministers as owners of the land. It is not with the FC, who only manage the Wood on behalf of Ministers. For BCT, it was natural and correct to have the Agreement with the land owner, as was the case with the various other leases and agreements that BCT was establishing locally at the time.

For BCT, there was an additional reason to involve Scottish Ministers directly. BCT was concerned as a new community group about entering an agreement with a large public agency, when the Agreement provided limited scope for enforcement against breaches of the Agreement other than ending the Agreement. BCT considered that Scottish Ministers would provide a guarantor of the terms of the Agreement, if BCT should have any difficulties at a later stage.

This position was re-inforced for BCT by having a Scottish Minister visit Birse and sign a Balfour Wood Declaration explicitly endorsing the commitment of Ministers to the Agreement and highlighting its main principles.

The main principles which form the basis of the Agreement include:

- a) That every aspect of the management of the area covered by Balfour Wood is within the scope of the Agreement;
- b) That all aspects of the management of Balfour Wood are to be decided jointly by BCT and FE on the basis of consensus;
- c) That BCT will have first option to carry out all the tasks and activities required to manage the Wood, subject to appropriate safeguards and accountability over the use of funds.

These principles have been central to the success of the Balfour Wood Agreement:- (a) ensures that FE and BCT will have a full relationship over the Wood; (b) ensures they need to work together and thus helps build a close partnership; & (c) ensures that the local economy benefits to the fullest extent by requiring each task or activity to be reviewed to see if it might be best done locally.

6.3 Model Status

The Balfour Wood Declaration by Scottish Ministers describes the Agreement as “a new benchmark for agreements with communities” and at the time, the principles above gave BCT a greater stake in the management of Balfour Wood than any community had achieved elsewhere. This meant that the Agreement became a model for others to follow.

However, the Agreement itself also provided a model document in its own right which could be readily used by others. It was drafted, for example, so that the only parts of the Agreement that made it specific to Balfour Wood are the references to BCT and Balfour Wood in the Preamble defining the parties to the Agreement and subjects covered by it. Thus, the names of a different community group and different site could simply be substituted instead.

Other features that make it a model agreement include its relative clarity and shortness compared to previous such agreements. The Agreement is barely three pages long and has the different components of the Agreement packaged into eighteen well defined clauses. The language is also straightforward in comparison to some agreements drafted by lawyers, yet it achieves this without sacrificing any of its robustness as an agreement (it was thoroughly examined by both sides’ lawyers prior to final agreement).

The economy of the ‘re-useable format’ of the Balfour Wood Agreement was illustrated in Birse, when FE and BCT signed the Slewdrum Forest Management Agreement to cover the other FE managed wood in the parish. The only changes required being the name of the site. The Agreement has also been used by FE elsewhere in Scotland (eg. Borgie, Laggan) with only small modifications (eg. the addition at Laggan of a clause to reflect the passing of the Land Reform Act with its community right to buy provisions).

Thus, while the Balfour Agreement has been good for FE and BCT in Birse, it has also earned both parties additional profile and saved FE negotiating time in some other places.

7. Working Together

7.1 Early Co-operation

By the time the Minister signed the Balfour Wood Declaration, FE and BCT already had a well established joint working relationship over the management of the Wood.

On the basis of the ‘good faith’ which was established between the parties from the first meeting, FE and BCT operated a twin track approach of developing the discussions about both the

Agreement and the management of the Wood at the same time. By September 1999, for example, when the BCT draft Agreement was accepted as the basis for the negotiations, BCT and FE were also agreeing plans for a wide range of improvements to the Wood.

This approach suited both parties. FE wanted, for example, to proceed with some thinning, while BCT was able to continue to build the momentum in the community over the project with site visits and wider consultations with the residents in the Birse Area and the Community Associations in the other parts of the parish.

The approach reduced the chance of frustrations building up with the inevitable delays at times in progress with the Agreement, which was mainly negotiated by correspondence. The approach also meant that there were agreed plans for the Wood by the time the Agreement was signed, rather than the signing forming the basis for starting to draw up plans.

As well as improvements to the woodland, the progress also included steps to develop the operation of the FE / BCT partnership. Thus, for example, as well as changing FE's entrance sign at Balfour Wood to include BCT, BCT's logo started to be used with FE's logo on all the maps and other branded documents related to the site.

FE and BCT were also ready implement a pattern of regular management meetings from the signing of the Agreement, with BCT providing the secretariat for the meetings. This role in compiling the agendas and producing the minutes was very helpful in building confidence within BCT that the partnership would develop in a fair and balanced way, rather than simply be driven by FE's interests.

These management meetings were busy from the start with work on a Balfour Wood Management plan and then Forest Design Plan, as well as the expanding range of management activities being implemented in the Wood.

7.2 'Demonstration Issue'

FE had delayed a thinning of the Wood which had been due around the time discussions started with BCT, so that plans for the thinning could be agreed with BCT. This led to the proposals being developed into the beginning of re-structuring the Wood and included clear felling the dense non-native conifers blanketing the riparian zone of the main burn in the Wood.

The advanced planning meant that the felling could go ahead soon after the Agreement was signed and brought a very conspicuous improvement to the Wood, including opening up a view from the Wood across Deeside. Amongst the other benefits, BCT's involvement in the pre-felling site meetings with the contractors both kept the community fully informed and established some higher on-site work standards from the contractors, as they knew they were being monitored by members of the community who visited the site.

Despite these discussions and some improvements, there were still issues about the conditional in which the contractor left the site at the end of the job. This was an issue felt as keenly by FE as BCT and led to a shared commitment to improved standards on the next major contract, which is currently being carried out.

There was also another issue during the felling in autumn 2000 which resulted in strong complaints from the community at the time. This issue arose from a particular event and in the end, might be considered to have had a beneficial influence.

One day during the timber harvesting, three empty timber lorries went up the narrow and windy unclassified public road leading to Balfour Wood at the School bus time. There were therefore school pupils along the roadside at the various pick up points through the scattered community. The pupils were as young as five and according to parents, the lorries were driving up the road nose to tail at an excessively fast speed for the road.

Many of these parents knew that BCT was involved in the Wood as a result of BCT's consultations and therefore promptly rang BCT's Manager to complain about the risk to the children. He immediately contacted the FE's Forest District Manager who contacted the contractor's manager. He then contact his road hauliers and by the evening, an apology and re-assurances over speed and the avoidance of school bus times had been received by BCT and fed back into the community. The issue thus provided a very direct early example within the community of a useful new influence on local circumstances as a result of BCT's partnership with FE.

The issue also established an on-going dialogue between BCT and FE over issues associated locally with the standard of driving of timber lorries. These lorries are relative common in Birse both due to the on-going harvesting from the woodlands within the parish (estimated at c.10,000 tonnes annually) and because empty timber lorries traverse the parish as part of some of their wider routes up and down Deeside.

This dialogue has included, for example, FE supplying the community through BCT with the timber hauliers association's own guidelines and the local authorities preferred routes map. Following another local incident where a local driver was virtually forced into the ditch by 'speeding' timber lorries and which required an apology to be extracted from a different haulage contractor, BCT also raised the matter with many of the relatively small number of main individuals managing timber contracts in and around Birse. Several of these managers are either members of BCT as residents of the parish or else well associated with it through their work. These individuals are, through the contracts they award and supervise, a key route by which BCT plans to further improve the standards of timber traffic in the parish with FE's help.

Thus, while the original episode was useful in its own way at the time, it has also become a wider strand of on-going co-operation between BCT and FE.

7.3 Expanding Relationship

The number and range of management activities being taken forward together by FE and BCT over Balfour Wood expanded rapidly from the time the Management Agreement was signed in June 2000. These activities included all the different aspects of developing a Management Plan and Design Plan for the Wood, as well as the implementation of increasing action on site (eg. surveys, the thinning and riparian clearfell, removal of the deer fence...).

In addition, by the time that the Balfour Wood Agreement was signed in June 2000, discussions had already started between BCT and FE over Slewdrum Forest. Both parties had always anticipated expanding their partnership to cover Slewdrum as well, but this had been expected at a later date once greater progress had been made with Balfour Wood.

The earlier than expected discussions over Slewdrum were precipitated by a proposal from the FE's land agents in Inverness to sell an old ruined cottage on the edge of Slewdrum for a house site. BCT objected strongly to this and therefore sought a similar Management Agreement over Slewdrum as Balfour to prevent any such sale without BCT's agreement. BCT also made clear at that stage its longer term ambition to become the owner of Slewdrum.

A Management Agreement over Slewdrum Forest was readily agreed, but the ownership question was more complex as the site was not on the FE's disposals list and thus not one which would normally be sold. It led to a series of papers and meetings between BCT and FE, including visits to Birse by the FE's Chief Executive and the Scottish Executive Minister responsible for forestry, the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development.

The relatively intense pattern of discussions over the ownership of Slewdrum throughout 2001 did not produce an outcome and, after a two year gap, the discussions have recently started up again (see 11 below). The 2001 discussions did, however, make a positive contribution to the development of the FE / BCT partnership in Birse despite the lack of agreement. They led, for example, to more explicit recognition by FE and BCT of the benefits of their partnership and to wider recognition of the partnership outwith the parish.

The involvement of Slewdrum in the partnership also involved site visits and consultations locally, including proposals for site management improvements. Prominent amongst these were agreeing a revised Design Plan for the Forest and the pre-mature felling of young Sitka spruce from an orchid rich part of the site.

In addition to the active involvements over both Balfour and Slewdrum, wider aspects of the partnership also continued to develop. One aspect of this was visits to BCT by FE staff. In addition to the visits by senior staff over Slewdrum, the FE's North of Scotland Forest District Managers visited BCT for a training day. While that day was very useful for the FE and BCT, a visit to BCT by the local FE office for one of their staff away days was particularly valuable for creating a understanding amongst the local FE staff about BCT and developing personal relations between those working for FE and BCT.

The wider aspects of the partnership also included increasing co-operation to mutual benefit over topics of shared interest over FE's sites and BCT's own woodland involvements. These topics (as described more fully in 8 below) include capercaillie conservation, deer control and fire protection. There have also been a growing number of instances where one party has been able to help the other with a particular problem, for example, FE helping BCT to move some particularly large timber to Finzean Sawmill and BCT helping FE by engaging with another community group with which FE was in discussions, to explain to that group the merits of a management agreement with FE along the lines of the Balfour Wood model agreement.

8. Increasing Benefits

8.1 *Site Improvements*

Many of the site improvements which have been carried out at Balfour Wood and Slewdrum Forest since the beginning of the FE / BCT partnership, are improvements that FE is likely to have carried out in any event. However, the development and implementation of these and other improvements by the partnership has delivered additional benefits to both FE and local community in comparison to FE simply carrying them out themselves.

One part of this has been BCT's engagement of the local community in the project. This has produced useful local information about the sites and ideas for additional improvements. Local awareness about the project has also had other benefits, such as with the timber lorry issue described above (7.2).

More specifically, for example, BCT's positive relationships with the community and local estates meant it was able to handle successfully the negotiations with the neighbouring Balfour Estate about increased access over their land as a result of access improvements in Balfour Wood and also the liaison with the three neighbouring estates over the removal of the Balfour Wood deer fence. Similarly, BCT has handled other local issues successfully, such as a householder's concerned about their water supply which rises in Balfour Wood.

In addition, BCT has been able to provide local expertise for a number of specific tasks. These have included, for example, mapping a series of paths (using a BCT member who had previously produced an orienteering map of the Wood) and management prescriptions for the environment around the Wood's badger set (using a national expert on badgers who lives nearby and is a keen supporter of BCT). In another instance, BCT was both able to supply a local dyker to repair the Balfour Wood roadside dykes totalling 250ms in two lengths, and to facilitate the hiring of the dyker by the owner of a longer length of dyke between the two FE lengths, thus completing the transformation of the whole roadside.

Another example at Balfour which illustrated the 'multiplier effect' of community involvement, was the riparian felling down the Allansack Burn. While this happened sooner than might have been the case without BCT's involvement, FE's agreement to bring it forward in turn enabled BCT to include it as part of a BCT application for a parish wide "Rivers & Burns Project". This practical and relatively dramatic riparian improvement helped BCT's application to be successful, thus producing the many actions and benefits which the project subsequently delivered in the parish. In addition, following the riparian felling, BCT was able to supply planting stock and other materials to re-plant the area.

8.2 *Deer Control*

Another example that illustrates the productive nature of the partnership between FE and BCT, has been deer control in Balfour Wood.

This had become an increasing local issue in the years before BCT existed. FE did not maintain the deer fence once the crop was established and had little direct incentive to try and control the

deer in the Wood, as the trees were passed their vulnerable stage. The Wood was thus largely a safehaven for deer in comparison to the surrounding estate lands and the deer from the Wood were marauding into the neighbouring tenant farmers' fields damaging neap crops in particular.

The tenant farmers are, as local residents, members of BCT and raised the issue with BCT when BCT started to develop its partnership with FE over the Wood. They were also particularly concerned by the proposed removal of the deer fence round the Wood to benefit capercaillie, as they believed it would ease the coming and going of the deer to their fields even though the fence was no longer deer proof. BCT also had another direct reason to be concerned about the red deer using Balfour Wood, when BCT realised that these deer were travelling the relatively short distance south across Glencat to the pinewoods managed by BCT and contributing to the deer damage there.

BCT therefore urged FE to increase the deer control effort in Balfour Wood. However, while the FC tried, it had little success. The relatively small size of the site and its relative uniform tree cover across the whole area, both contributed to it being a difficult site for deer control and it was even more difficult for FE rangers to be successful just turning up on periodic visits.

In the end, it has been the opportunities provided by the FE / BCT partnership which have enabled the issue to be tackled successfully. It was agreed that BCT would take over the deer control in Balfour Wood under contract from the FC and guarantee FE a substantially increased cull in the Wood. BCT also undertook to deliver this at no cost to FE. BCT then sub-contracted a local estate to deliver the increased cull at no cost to BCT, being the local estate with which BCT already had a successful deer control arrangement over the pinewoods managed by BCT in the Forest of Birse Community.

This arrangement has substantially increased the cull in the Wood since it started in 2001. It has produced a win: win: win situation with each sector, public, private and community, benefiting significantly from it.

FE has benefited directly by substantially increasing the cull at no cost to itself and indeed, having its rangers available to spend more time controlling deer at other FE sites. FE has also benefited indirectly by the arrangement resulting in local discussions about deer management between the parties involved and these discussions leading to a new, more localised and forestry focused sub-group of the East Grampian Deer Management Group.

The private estate has benefited from the arrangement by being able to cull more deer and so increase the number of carcasses passing through its newly upgraded deer larder facilities and also support the Estate's new initiative of selling vacuum packed venison. The increased cull in the Wood has also benefited the Estate by reducing the deer using the estate's new native pinewood scheme lying in between Balfour Wood and the Community pinewoods. The Estate's ability to follow groups of red deer between the three locations, including coming in and out of Balfour Wood, has been a key factor in enabling them to increase the Balfour Wood cull.

BCT and the local community have benefited by reducing the deer damage in the farmers' fields to a more acceptable level and reducing the number of deer potentially causing damage in the Community pinewoods.

While BCT's reputation also benefited indirectly from its deliver of this successful arrangement, a further direct benefit for BCT has been the opportunity that the success has opened up for BCT to take over the deer control in Slewdrum Forest.

8.3 *Fire Protection*

The risks of forest fires in Birse, including a large landscape scale forest fire, are relatively high. Nearly all the conifer plantations in the Birse, including Balfour Wood, lie in a continuous north-west / south-east belt across the parish. Along the south side of the plantations is an equally extensive belt of expanding native pinewood, including large areas with scattered pine and deep heather and popular visitor sites in the Forest of Birse.. Then, to the south of this pinewood zone and occupying the south west quarter of the parish, are the grouse moors and muirburn.

This makes fire protection an important local topic and the benefits to BCT and FE of their partnership are illustrated by two examples related to this topic. The first involves fire signs and the second, the development of a strategic approach locally to fire protection planning.

When BCT became the manager of the native pinewoods in the Forest of Birse Commonty, it wanted to erect fire warning signs along the public road in the main areas used by the public. However, when BCT investigated the types of fire signs commercially available, it did not find any which it considered would be a suitable design. The idea then occurred of using the old style of fire sign which FE had used at its own woods and to supply to estates with woodlands under the FC's Dedication Schemes. The idea arose because there were two rusty examples of these signs, yellow flames leaping upwards from green trees against a navy blue background, at Finzean Estate plantations beside the road leading to the Commonty pinewoods.

BCT felt that these signs would answer its needs because they were attractive, had a good message, were readily recognisable to many people and would fit in with the traditional character of the 'cultural landscape' in the Forest of Birse. The problem for BCT was that signs were no longer made. However, BCT used its links with FE through the FE / BCT partnership to obtain the FC's permission to use the design for its own fire signs. BCT then had several signs hand painted and erected in the Commonty.

The new fire signs were much admired by visiting groups to BCT and when a land manager in one group enquired where he could buy the signs, BCT went back to the FC to obtain permission to produce and sell the signs commercially. BCT then developed a production process with the FC's own sign workshop at Fochabers, which had recently installed technology capable of manufacturing the signs at a workable price and was looking to increase its sales outwith the FC. Since that time, BCT has continued to sell fire signs. While the volume of business has been small, it has been roughly equivalent to the value of BCT's sales of buckets from the Bucket Mill. Thus the fire signs give BCT another distinctive line of business when each one helps.

The second aspect of BCT and FE's co-operation related to fire, has been in the development of a strategic approach for local fire protection at the scale of Birse parish and Glen Tanar. BCT played a key role in initiating this exercise and ensuring the involvement of FE. BCT had been surprised to discover that none of the estates thought to invite FE and that, while the estates each

had all the other local private land managers on their fire call out lists, none included FE. This appeared to be simply a legacy of attitudes going back to the 1950s and 60s, when the private estates saw the FC as a threat, both in terms of taking over estate land and its approach on issues such as deer and fox control. The involvement of FE in the group has resulted in much greater co-operation between FE and these estates, including co-ordinated fire risk warning systems and shared training in fire fighting techniques.

8.4 *Wider Aspects*

The partnership between FE and BCT started at Balfour Wood and expanded to include Slewdrum Forest. Now, for several years, FE and BCT have been working successfully together at each site to deliver increasing benefits local community and wider public.

The partnership has also grown to include working together on land management issues at a wider scale, as illustrated by co-operation over deer control and fire protection. These topics and others such as capercaillie conservation, are issues with which BCT is involved in its own right as the manager of the Forest of Birse Commonty Pinewoods. With these issues of shared interest, the FE / BCT partnership involves not just Balfour and Slewdrum, but the sites managed by BCT as well.

This co-operation involving all the sites, can benefit the management of each of the sites (less deer, less fire risk...). The co-operation also does not just involve generic issues such as deer management. There are now an increasing number of instances where FE and BCT help each other over specific problems. The assistance goes both ways, for example :

- FE was able to help BCT by moving some particularly large trees from the Commonty pinewoods to Finzean Sawmill. The trees were beyond BCT's normal capability and FE was able to draw on its pool of equipment.
- BCT was able to help FE by providing it with suitable local origin planting stock for Balfour Wood, as BCT was producing this type of planting stock for its own use in the Commonty.

An example of this co-operation has been the involvement of BCT and FE in the first ever parish wide group discussions in Birse of deer management and fire protection between all the main land holders. Each of the groups discussing these issues involve the local private estates, FE and BCT. In these discussions, BCT and FE are natural allies because of their shared "public interest" commitment; FE as a public sector body and BCT as a recognised charity. Each of BCT and FE also get additional benefits from the presence of each other. For BCT, for example, the involvement of the FC has a very beneficial influence on the balance of interests in the meetings. While the private estates in Birse parish are public spirited, there can be a significant difference for BCT whether a meeting just involves BCT as a relative new community group and small scale land manager, and a group of large scale and long established private estates, or whether the meeting also involves FE.

FE also benefits from BCT's involvement with these groups. In many ways, it is BCT that has involved FE and is helping to bridge the longstanding gap between FE locally and the Estates. FE also benefits over these matters from BCT's local knowledge and the wider relationships BCT has with each of the local estates.

In addition to the above levels of co-operation (on site, between sites, across all the sites), each partner is also helping each other at a wider strategic and organisational level. FE needs, for example, to contribute to rural community development as part of its commitments to the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Forestry Strategy. BCT helps FE with that. BCT, for example, has provided a partnership agreement which has been useful to the FC more widely, has helped FE identify a wider range of community development benefits which can come from such partnerships than FE had previously recognised and more generally, has provided FE with a model FE / community partnership, as illustrated by two Ministerial visits and this study.

Similarly, FE has helped BCT as an organisation and thus supported the wider contributions BCT makes to community development locally. The example of the strategic importance to BCT of the Balfour Wood project has already been cited above. Another example has been through FE contracting BCT to provide goods and services, whether the secretariat to the partnership, training visits to BCT or other directly woodland based items. The amounts of money involved have been small for both parties at an average of c.£2K a year. However, the payments have been strategically important for BCT, because BCT is invoicing FE for the goods and services and thus charging VAT on them. VAT registration is valuable to BCT. For BCT as a charity whose income is so dominated by grants, any VAT sales are very useful in helping maintain BCT's VAT status across all its whole operation. FE's business was especially valuable to BCT in its early years as an important proportion of all BCT's VAT charges, when BCT had yet to develop wider sales of goods and services.

It is thus a feature of the FE / BCT partnership that there is a symmetry of mutual benefits at all levels of operation from the management improvements in individual woodlands up to the overall operation of the organisations themselves.

Part 3

Potential Development of the Forestry Commission Scotland and Birse Community Trust Partnership

9 Underlying Factors

9.1 Community Capacity

Three basic factors influence the potential of FCS / community partnerships to continue to develop and deliver further benefits to the local community and wider public. These factors are:

- FCS's public policy commitment and associated provisions in support of such partnerships;
- the size, location and character of the FCS's woodland(s) within the community's area; &
- the capacity of the community to engage with the development of the partnership with FCS.

In assessing this latter factor, community capacity, three considerations are fundamental:-

- the nature of the local organisation which is partnering the FC;
- the vitality of the local community which that organisation represents; &
- the extent of any existing tradition within the community of woodland involvement.

In simple terms, the stronger and more effective the local partner organisation, the better the partner it will make for the FC and the greater the potential of the partnership. At the same time, the character of the wider local community of which the partner organisation is a part, will influence the potential of that organisation. An active and cohesive community which has a high capacity to act as a community in its own interests, is more likely to be able to maintain a viable and effective local partner organisation than would be the case with a declining and divided community, when maintaining such a body can be challenging for most communities given the vagaries of operating in the community sector. In addition, if there is a local tradition of community involvement with woodlands, then it is more likely that the community will maintain its interest in a partnership compared to other communities which have no such tradition.

An assessment of the situation in Birse parish, produces very positive indicators for all these types of social factors. As set out in Appendices 1-3, BCT is a successful community business to act as a strong local partner for the FC, the wider community in Birse parish has high 'social capital' for a community of its size, and the parish has an unusually rich forest heritage.

The exceptional results for all these factors in Birse parish are the special local circumstances that both lie behind the success to date of the FCS / BCT partnership and point to a strong inherent potential for it to develop further. In summary, this potential might be said to exist because:-

- there is an active community which has both a strong tradition of woodland involvement and an effective local community business to partner the FC;
- the local community business has both significant forestry management interests of its own and a wide range of other involvements to promote community development locally.

9.2 *Policy Commitment*

BCT and other local community groups are directly involved in the management of FCS woodlands by virtue of the FCS's commitment to improve the social benefits of Scotland's public forests.

This commitment has continued to develop positively during the five years of BCT's existence and its partnership with FC / FCS. Recent reflections of this at a national level have been the social components of the Scottish Forestry Strategy and the Scottish Executive's current public interest review of the Scotland's national forest estate as managed by FCS.

It appears that both the Scottish Executive and FCS are committed to continuing to increase the involvement of local communities with the forests managed by FCS and this, as with the inherent community capacity in Birse, is a fundamental factors underpinning the potential of the FCS / BCT partnership to be developed further.

The FC's involvement with social benefits has developed relatively rapidly during the last 10 years, for example, since the Ministerial Foreword to "Forests and People in Rural Scotland". This can tend to create a situation where policy commitments and the associated rhetoric at the centre, are often ahead of the organisational culture and staff attitudes at ground level. This is to be expected, but needs to be recognised. A useful parallel that has now worked its way through the FC at all levels, was the incorporation of environmental considerations into FC policies and management during the 1980s and 1990s.

9.3 *Organisational Culture*

When BCT was first involved with FE, it did come across some scepticism within FE about community groups – community groups can come and go, therefore it might not be worth investing too much effort in any particular situation until it is seen whether the group is a success. More generally, however, BCT has experienced a very supportive approach by FE where, if some local capacity is seen to be emerging, they engage positively with it to foster it and see what support can usefully be given.

BCT was also robust enough from the start to be able to counter the scepticism by wagering that it would outlast FC and, of course in the last five years, BCT has proved a model of constitutional stability in comparison to the FC/FE/FCS. In addition, the points about community capacity (9.1) reflect that, even should BCT itself run into terminal difficulties in the future, the community in Birse will remain a strong and active community with which to maintain the engagement through other means.

A more likely scenario in Birse is, not necessarily the demise of BCT, but a need for FCS to play more of a lead role in the partnership. To date, the development of the partnership has been driven by BCT with FE / FCS following along. Such a successful community lead may be relatively unusual, but reflects the special circumstances of Birse including the strength of the local woodland culture and forestry skills base (see Appendices). However, it is likely that there may be times when the local residents actively involved in representing BCT and the community

in the partnership, are less experienced and skilled than at present. It is possible, for example, that despite the pool of individuals with forestry knowledge and skills within the community, none of these individuals may be available to work directly for BCT at some stage.

In those circumstances, FCS could make a very positive contribution to community development by supporting and training BCT's representatives in the partnership. This will not only help maintain and develop the partnership, but also help BCT with its own woodland management responsibilities (eg. Commony Pinewoods). This would be particularly valuable in maintaining BCT's public interest priorities in its forestry management, especially when a partial vacuum in its capacity might result in its woodlands becoming managed more like the local estate woodlands and the different balance of interests which that would inevitably reflect.

9.4 *Staff Attitudes*

FCS staff at all levels have a clear commitment to environmental values and impressive track record of delivering conservation and amenity benefits. The same is not yet entirely the case with social values amongst all staff. This can be reflected in limited enthusiasm of some for local consultations over forest management, when they feel they know the changes required and how to implement them to a high standard. At a deeper level, if a community becomes more involved in forest management, some seem concerned about a loss of control and in particular, a loss of jobs.

These lingering attitudes may result from individuals who have been in areas where there has been limited community interest in greater involvement with FE's woodlands or where the nature of the community has made it difficult to engage with. However, examples are increasing, such as Birse and elsewhere, which show both that local community input can improve forest management and that it can lead to increased investment (including money through the community partner) and increased activity which supports jobs. In the end of the day, as has been the case with environmental benefits, delivering increased social benefits requires more staff time not less.

Within FCS as a whole, the mindset shift required to match the rhetoric of policy on social benefits has largely been achieved, but it has yet to be fully completed in the way it has already been for environmental considerations. The aim is no longer just 'better woodlands', but having the skill of using woodlands in a particular area to support sustainable rural community development in that area. One of the important benefits for FCS of its partnership with BCT, is the contribution it continues to make towards that new way of seeing the woodlands which FCS manages.

9.5 *Woodland Resources*

The FCS's woodlands in Birse parish amount to barely one half of one tenth of one percent of the FCS's total holding. While a substantial proportion of that holding may have limited potential to deliver major local community benefits, the Birse example is indicative of the scale of social involvement which FCS could have.

In any particular area, it will be the interaction between the size, location and character of FCS's woodlands and the capacity and interests of the local community, which will determine the potential for a partnership to deliver social benefits in the area. It remains under-recognised that a very high proportion of all the communities in rural Scotland which have developed an involvement in local land management, have started with woodlands and either a FC grant or FC woodland. This has been especially the case for communities outwith crofting areas.

To develop potential partnerships, the FCS and community body need to be innovative enough to find the forms of co-operation suited to the local circumstances. The FCS can supply ideas and examples that have worked from their wider experience elsewhere, including the processes that have been involved in developing them successfully. The local partner can identify what might work in their area from their knowledge of local needs and opportunities.

In Birse, while the FCS's woodlands are a tiny fraction of the FCS's total holding, they account for over 3% of the parish's land area. Their area of 400 ha nearly doubles the extent of the local woodlands which the community is directly involved in managing, given its existing management of the Commonly pinewoods (c.560 ha). The FCS's woodlands in Birse are also well located from BCT's point of view, as they are each located in a different part of the community (Birse and Ballogie) from the pinewoods (Forest of Birse). The pattern would have been even more complete (a major community woodland in each segment of BCT's geographically based logo) and the potential even greater, if the FC's Easter Clune Wood in Finzean had not been sold back into the private sector in the 1980s.

10. Three Levels of Benefits

10.1 *Improvements at FCS Sites*

The FCS's two sites in Birse parish, Balfour Wood and Slewdrum Forest, were at a very helpful stage of development for the start of the FE / BCT partnership. Both woodlands were planted in the early 1960s and had therefore become mature enough for thinning, but work to re-structure them had not yet started. There were thus established woodlands to work with and still time for the design plan for Balfour to be produced by the partnership and the one for Slewdrum to be amended by it.

Re-structuring and other improvements are now underway at both sites. However, these major changes at each site are still at an early stage. A core strand of the potential of the FCS / BCT partnership is, therefore, the continued co-operation to develop and implement all the management required to convert the sites into sustainable woodlands with quality timber, rich wildlife habitats, good path networks and high environmental amenity. The types of local community and wider public benefits that can come from this co-operation are already demonstrated by the partnership's existing track record at both sites and there is clearly scope for this joint site management to continue to produce these types of benefits for years to come.

10.2 *Involvement of All Sites*

A second level of co-operation which also has a track record of local and wider public benefits, is the way that the partnership has gradually started to involve both the FCS's and BCT's woodlands. This has happened to a limited extent so far and has considerable potential to be developed and deliver increasing benefits.

This level of co-operation has already helped with both site based problems (eg. BCT helping supply local planting stock, FCS helping move timber) and area wide issues (eg. deer control, fire protection). However, it has the potential to become a much fuller and more rounded forestry partnership. The woodlands managed by FCS and by BCT are of different and complementary character - from the Commony Pinewoods (Scotland's most easterly relic Caledonian pinewood) to Balfour Wood as productive pinewood habitat, the ecological potential of Slewdrum beside the Dee for native broadleaved woodland and public use, together with the award winning Finzean Community Woods and School Wood.

In addition to these 1000 ha of local woodlands spread across the parish, there are the Finzean Wood Mills – Bucket Mill, Sawmill & Turning Mill, all now fully restored by BCT and operating as working mills. These mills are an outstanding component of Scotland's forest heritage and offer tremendous scope for co-operation between BCT and FCS to the benefit of both organisations and the constituencies they represent.

10.3 *Locality Partnership*

The third level of benefits from the FCS / BCT partnership is its capacity to deliver benefits to:

- BCT that go beyond just forest management and help support its wider role as an organisation delivering local community development;
- FCS that go beyond just Birse parish and help support its wider role as an organisation delivering community development in rural Scotland.

The partnership has already demonstrated these types of more strategic benefits, for example:-

- to BCT of securing the Balfour Wood project in the north of the parish, the role of FE contracts in supporting BCT's VAT regime...;
- to FCS of BCT as a tangible instance of how FCS woodlands can contribute more widely to sustainable rural development (including the use of Birse for visits by Scottish Executive Ministers, overseas visitors and FCS staff), BCT's help improving FCS relations with local estates and with other communities elsewhere,...;

This third level of benefits is a particular feature of the FCS / BCT partnership, because it is still relatively unusual at a national level. However, it is a type of benefit that has only been considered to a very limited extent by the partnership and its potential to deliver further important benefits to both parties has yet to be developed.

A simple example is provided by the Finzean Mills. While there is clear scope for practical co-operation between FCS and BCT over the operation of the mills, this would also deliver wider strategic gains for each organisation:-

- For BCT, the conservation and continued operation of the mills is an essential task expected of it by the community. However, for BCT, the mills are its most technically challenging commitment and potentially greatest liability. The support FCS could readily provide (eg.

engineering skills, health and safety advice,...) would thus, not only help conserve a major component of Scotland's forest heritage, but make an important contribution to sustaining BCT as an organisation with all BCT's other contributions to local community development.

- For FCS, contributing some expertise at the mills, is not simply helping conserve a unique part of Scotland's forest heritage. FCS's direct involvement through the partnership becomes a valuable part of FCS developing its wider role in the conservation of Scotland's forest heritage, as it builds on early initiatives such as its project on Scotland's 100 most important Heritage Trees. The involvement would thus benefit FCS as an organisation at a useful strategic level.

The example of BCT's ownership and operation of the mills can also be used to illustrate BCT's wider role locally and other potential strategic benefits for each organisation. The survival of the mills has been due to BCT's initiative and BCT's role in the conservation of these national assets, is an example of a local charity doing a job on behalf of the wider public. It has also been a task that it would have been extremely difficult and very expensive for an outside public body (eg. Historic Scotland) or NGO (eg. National Trust for Scotland) to take on. It is an example of BCT's role as a local service deliverer on behalf of public interests. Many of BCT's other projects and the public benefits they produce, can also be viewed in the same way.

In that role, BCT has positive relationships with a number of public bodies in addition to FCS over BCT's wide range of projects (notably HS, SNH and the local Council, but including others). Amongst these relationships, however, it is only BCT's one with FCS that is seen and operated by both parties as a 'partnership', as opposed to simply on-going contact. While this position stems from FCS's position as a land manager in the parish, it highlights that FCS could play a lead role amongst the public bodies with which BCT works. This would provide strategic benefits to both organisations:-

- for BCT, as 'just' a local community group, it has not proved possible to bring its public sector partners together to develop a more co-ordinated and integrated approach across their range of shared interests in the parish, when such would enable BCT to deliver the public interests they represent more effectively and also support its own development.
- for FCS, using its contacts and greater influence to perform the lead role, would provide it with a very valuable example of it being the lead public agency co-ordinating sustainable rural development at a locality scale, at a time when public policy increasingly requires this type of co-ordination (eg. community planning) and when FCS has too often traditionally been seen as one of the more peripheral public bodies to involve in such approaches.

This example illustrates how the third, strategic level of benefits offered by the FCS/BCT partnership, is based around each party gaining wider benefits as an organisation and recognising the needs of its partner organisation for such benefits. There is considerable potential at this level for a positive synergy between FCS using BCT to secure public benefits and BCT using FCS to secure local benefits.

To release this potential, one key development is required – a change in the relationship between FCS and BCT over Slewdrum Forest.

11. Existing Opportunity

11.1 *Pilot Initiative*

BCT identified right at the start of its partnership with FCS, when Slewdrum Forest was first mentioned, that it wanted to buy Slewdrum Forest on behalf of the community. It is a site with which the community has had strong connections because its history as a local common. The Forest is still referred to locally as Slewdrum Common and had previously been seen as 'belonging to the parish', like the Forest of Birse Common over which the community still has rights. The local view is that if the Crown was giving away the Forest now, rather than in the 1950s, it would have been to BCT not the FC.

A series of detail discussions about the proposed purchase took place between BCT and FE during 2001 and in these discussions and associated papers, BCT set out the basis of its proposal and the important local community and wider public benefits it would deliver. However, despite interest at the highest levels of FE and a Ministerial visit related to the issue, no progress was possible due to the GB wide policy of not selling FC woodlands to community groups (or others), if the woodlands were not on the FC's disposals list. Discussions were resumed, however, in early 2004 given the possibility that there might be scope in due course for the sale of Slewdrum to BCT, to be a pilot initiative following the Scottish Executive's review of Scotland's national forest estate.

The purpose of the proposed sale is to strengthen the FCS / BCT partnership and the arrangements will be carefully structured towards this end. Two important parts, for example, of safeguarding the existing public interest in the Forest will be that:

- The Forest will continue to be subject to a formal long term agreement requiring consensus between FCS and BCT over its management as at present, but with the position of the parties in the agreement reversed to reflect the change in title holder.
- The FCS will continue to be able to fell and sell the existing commercial crop of non-native conifers in the Forest in line with a ten year design plan and retain all the income from the sales.

These arrangements reflect that the FCS / BCT partnership will continue over both Balfour and Slewdrum after the sale and have a new symmetry with each party owning one of the sites and being the management partner on the other. This pattern will have significant benefits for the partnership because of the better balance of interests it creates between the parties. However, the greatest benefits for both local community and wider public interests, will be at a more strategic level from:

- the impact of the change on securing the future of BCT's own forest enterprise; & in turn,
- the way this will underpin BCT's capacity to contribute further to community development.

11.2 *Enhanced Capacity*

BCT already owns a number of local properties– Birse Church, Birse Community Hall, Finzean Old School, Finzean Sawmill and the Bucket Mill. These properties are of considerable importance to the community and also have a significant market value (over £300K). However,

they involve barely 3 ha of land. The acquisition of Slewdrum Forest, covering 160 ha., would be a major increase in the BCT's interests and its capacity to deliver both local community and wider public benefits.

The acquisition would transform the community's involvement with forestry. At present, while BCT is directly involved on behalf of the community in the managing over 1000 ha of woodland at five sites spread across the parish, it owns none of the land. This position seriously undermines the extent to which BCT can develop the community forest enterprise and secure its long term future. In contrast, the ownership of Slewdrum would give some 'solidarity' to the somewhat 'virtual' nature of BCT's essentially time limited involvements on other people's land.

There are some parallels with the position which BCT was in at Finzean Old School. While BCT had a secure 25 year lease at a £1 a year if asked, BCT went to the length of buying the Old School. This was because, without ownership, BCT could not justify the major investments required in important improvements because of the time limited nature of the arrangement and lack of compensation at the end. Ownership allows BCT to make long term decisions and make the investments because it is developing a long term community asset.

Similarly, the ownership of Slewdrum would enable BCT to justify investments in forestry skills and equipment for use in Slewdrum, and benefit from these across all its woodland management involvements. This, together with the new focus provided by the commitments of ownership, would enable BCT to achieve a critical mass in sustaining and building a long term community forestry enterprise in Birse. Ownership of Slewdrum will dramatically increase the chances that the community will still be directly involved in managing its existing sites in years to come.

The consolidation of BCT's forestry enterprise will also make BCT a stronger partner for FCS in continuing to develop and deliver public benefits. The positive fit between their contributions (for example, local knowledge / wider expertise, small scale detail / larger operations) will be reinforced as they pursue their shared public (local / wider) interest agenda.

11.3 *Sustainable Rural Development*

BCT has made a wide ranging and important contribution to sustainable rural development in Birse over the last five years. This has all grown from an initial platform of woodland projects. The ownership of Slewdrum and boost it would give to BCT's forest enterprise, would strengthen the Trust's overall operation.

One indicator of this is simply the increased level of activity that would flow from the ownership of Slewdrum, when adequate activity levels are crucial to maintaining and developing the operational capacity of a community business like BCT. Forestry is also particularly useful to BCT in this respect, as it is a land use which offers scope for a wide range of site management and community orientated activities. Slewdrum, in turn, has particular potential because of the existing community associations with the site, its ecological diversity and other development opportunities.

BCT is the central component of the social economy in Birse and the empowerment of BCT through a pilot initiative over Slewdrum, would help maintain that role at a time when the

Scottish Executive's interest in encouraging and supporting the social economy and social enterprises is developing rapidly.

11.4 *Final Observations*

At this stage, it is not clear whether BCT will become owner of Slewdrum Forest and therefore, whether the additional benefits outlined above will be realised. If the transfer does not take place for whatever reason, the FCS / BCT partnership will still have the potential to deliver continuing benefits. However, there will be a serious loss of momentum and a significant danger that BCT's involvement in the partnership could weaken, if there is a negative result to all the investment which BCT has been encouraged to make over an extended period in the proposed purchase.

BCT has been at the cutting edge of the FCS's community partnerships and the transfer of Slewdrum Forest as a pilot initiative would enable continued progress. It is the potential of that progress which is a key distinctive feature of the BCT / FCS partnership and one which has underpinned its selection for this case study. The BCT / FCS partnership stands out because of the breadth and depth of benefits it delivers on a very economical basis. Clearly not all community partnerships will equal its achievements, nor necessarily even aim to. What BCT illustrates is how far such partnerships can go.

The illustration provided by the FCS / BCT partnership is not limited to the literal facts of its story. Birse opens up a wider insight into further ideas of how FCS community partnerships could be used to support sustainable rural development to match the circumstances in different localities.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Strong Local Partner

There is no established set of measures for assessing the potential strength of a community body as a local partner for the FC. However, it is likely that BCT would score well on a range of accounts.

BCT has a number of positive constitutional features as a community organisation. As a company limited by guarantee and recognised *charity*, BCT has a *robust* legal structure and *transparent* accounting. BCT is also fully *democratic* as all the directors or Trustees of the company are elected by members of the community without, for example, any Board members appointed by other interests. BCT is also *inclusive* with everyone on the electoral registers for Birse parish a voting member of the Trust for free without any subscription, and responsible for electing the Trustees who run BCT on behalf of the whole community.

Another positive feature is that the objectives in BCT's constitution are set very broadly, as represented by BCT's overall purpose: '*to promote the common good of the inhabitants of Birse parish and deliver wider public benefits*'. A broad or holistic purpose such as this potentially makes a group a more viable partner than a narrowly focused or single interest group, because of the greater operational flexibility it provides. In addition, the relative small amount of BCT's business which is involved with its FC partnership (an average of less than 5%), reflects the extent of other community development with which the FC contacts through the partnership. Thus, small but vital support for BCT through the partnership can have a high degree of *leverage* in the other community development it is helping to sustain.

In addition to BCT's constitutional character, its operation since it was established in 1999 also demonstrates its potential as a partner. During its first five years, BCT has taken on a wide range of projects to address local issues and develop local opportunities. It has delivered extensive local and wider community benefits, won awards and been described as a *model* community initiative by Scottish Ministers and other prominent commentators.

One of the positive features of BCT's operation, is that it achieves high *participation* by members of the local community. One straightforward indicator of the level of participation that, after five years, over a quarter of the adults in the parish have been to a BCT AGM and nearly 50 % of the 260 households in the parish been represented at one. However, residents are involved with BCT and its work by BCT in many different ways and most weeks, people from around 10-15% of local households are directly involved with BCT in one way or other.

Another feature is BCT's income strategy, as this is based on only raising money outwith the parish to avoid competing for local funds with other groups within the community and thus potentially taking money away from, for example, the local school, village halls and churches. BCT thus acts as an inward *investment* company and in its first five years, has brought over £600K into the parish to use behalf of the community.

BCT also operates a policy of spending as much as possible of its expenditure locally and has spent over 50% within the parish and around 75% in the parish or immediately surrounding area. This expenditure is also spread quite widely within the community, involving around 50 self-employed and other local business in any one year. Thus, BCT not only secures significant external funds to deliver its projects and their benefits, it also delivers additional benefits by circulating the money local. This *circulation* underpins other local employment.

One indicator of the *effective* way in which BCT operates is its impressive *track record* of successful project delivery. While these projects span for example from archaeological conservation to broadband service provision, the fact that BCT has extensive *land management* involvements other than the local FC sites is a positive feature of its potential as a FC partner. BCT is directly involved in the management of ten other sites in the parish ranging in size from the 3,750 ha Forest of Commonty down to the Ballogie Soutar's shop on a fraction of an acre. These land management involvements make it a more *capable* and *experienced* FC partner than a community body whose only or main land management involvement is a FC site.

A major feature of BCT's land management credentials and one that is central to the potential of the FC / BCT partnership, is the extent and nature of BCT's own involvements with *forestry management*. BCT manages a nationally important native Caledonian pinewood, three nationally important wood working water mills and award winning community wood (Scotland's Finest Woods Award 2002) and school wood (TV show award 2004).

If any community group has its own forestry involvements, it is likely to increase the potential of a partnership between that group and the FC. Firstly, it reflects the group's own interest and engagement with forestry, which will help sustain the community's part in the partnership. Secondly, it offers scope for the partnership to involve both community and FC sites with the further benefits that can come from that.

The case of BCT offers particular potential in these respects because it has such relatively extensive forest management interests (the pinewood managed by BCT is larger than the FC's two sites in the parish combined), its direct involvements also include utilisation (the mills operated by BCT) and most of its sites are of national importance.

Appendix 2 Active Local Community

There are no established set of measures to assess what constitutes an active or healthy local community. However, the community in Birse parish for which BCT is an agent, would be likely to score well on a number of accounts.

The parish has four main parts: the three scattered rural settlements of Finzean, Birse and Ballogie and the largely uninhabited Forest of Birse covering over a quarter of the parish's total area of c.125 sq.km or c.50 square miles. The total population of the parish is c.725 (c.5 persons / sq.km) shared between c.260 households. Half the parish's households and population are in Finzean.

This population level is a positive indicator. The population had been declining in Birse at every census for 150 years until the 1980s and the current population of 725 is 25% higher than in the 1970s. With this increase, the profile of the community's age structure has also improved. In the 1970s, over a third of residents were 60 years or older and the school rolls continuing decline. Now, 20% are over 60, 56% between 18-59 and 24% under 18 years old. One reflection of this is that the only surviving school in the parish, which had a roll of less than 20 in the 1970s, expanded in 2003 from two teachers to three as its roll had reached 50.

The level of local community activity is indicated by the fact that, in addition to BCT, there are around two dozen other community groups and clubs in the parish. These range from community associations and councils to the school board and PTA to a wide varied of hall user groups (eg. Friendship Club, Under Fives Group, Badminton Club...). In addition to operating and supporting this relatively high number of groups for 260 households, residents of the parish are also active participants in groups and clubs based at the Deeside Community Centre just outside the parish in Aboyne.

The social infra-structure of the community is also well developed. Thus, each of the three settlements has its own Community Association as the hub of its own identity and social life. The two halves of the parish then each have a Community Council dealing with external consultations and representation of the local views in those contexts. The whole parish then has BCT as the local community business to develop and implement projects on behalf of the community. Finally, these six representative groups meet at least quarterly in the Birse Parish Liaison Group to ensure co-ordination and co-operation between the overlapping interests they represent.

This group structure alone reflects the relatively high level of participatory local democracy in Birse parish. The number of elected BCT Trustees, elected Community Councillors and elected Community Association Committee members involves at any one time around 8% of the adults in the parish from c.15% of the households in regular discussions about the community's affairs.

Another positive underlying indicator of community cohesion in Birse, is the relatively high level of local kinship ties. Over 30% of the households have a direct kinship tie (father/mother, brother/sister, grandfather/grandmother, uncle/aunt, nephew/niece) with another household in the parish.

Thus, as illustrated by the various measures above, BCT is just one reflection of Birse parish's high 'social capital' for a community of its size.

Appendix 3 Rich Forest Heritage

While the high social capital of Birse parish has been an important reason that BCT has developed so rapidly and successfully, so the parish's rich forest heritage reflects that it is not chance that BCT has such a strong portfolio of forestry interests.

The nature of what is meant by 'forest heritage' and the richness of Birse's forest heritage are demonstrated by the combination in the parish of three nationally important features:-

- The native pinewood that still survives in the Forest of Birse Community and Glen Ferrick, which is the most easterly and one of the largest remnants of Caledonian Pinewood in Scotland;
- The three 19th century water powered wood mills that continue to operate within the pinewood area and which have no surviving equivalents elsewhere in the UK;
- The ancient rights over the pinewood in the Forest of Birse Community that are used to harvest trees from the pinewood to supply the mills and which are an unique set of rights in Scots Law

These three features and their continuing integrated operation, is an impressive aspect of Birse parish's forest heritage and one which is given added interest by the fact that it is the local community through Birse Community Trust which holds the ancient rights, manages the pinewood and operates the mills.

There are also, however, a wide range of other components to the parish's forest heritage. A number of which are also of national significance and many of which compliment each other. These are described in a recent report on 'The Forest Heritage of Birse Parish' (BCT, 2004) and can be illustrated by the following list:

- The Gaelic derivation of the parish's name, 'Birse', means 'well wooded'.
- The former status of the Forest of Birse as one of Scotland's Royal Hunting Forests.
- The records that exist about the management of the Forest of Birse during the medieval era up to the Reformation and its deforestation in the following 150 years.
- The evidence that inhabitants paid part of their rent during the medieval period, not just in firewood, but also wood turned goods (reflecting that the mills are part of a long tradition).
- The distinctive set of sheiling sites that can still be traced in the Forest of Birse and which, as with Norwegian examples, involved relatively large wooden summer houses in woodland.
- The long tradition of estate forestry in the parish and the detailed local studies of this.
- The particularly prominent contribution from the parish to the timber felled in Scotland during the Second World War by the Canadian Forestry Corps.
- The similar prominence of Birse in the impact of the 1953 Gale.
- The presence in the parish of the current tallest Scots pine tree in Britain (Queen of the Firs).
- Two entries for Birse in the recent publication on the "Heritage Trees of Scotland" (Queen of the Firs + the Twin Trees of Finzean).
- Other named trees in the parish with historical and cultural associations.
- The Scotland Finest Woods Award (2002) for Finzean Community Woods.
- The relatively large and rich extent of native woodlands in the parish, as reflected in Birse being one of the four parishes in the Deeside Forest.

- Birse parish having, through BCT, one of the most diverse and prominent portfolios of community woodlands projects of any community in Scotland.

Another particularly important feature of the parish's forest heritage is the number of residents directly involved with forestry. This is detailed in the BCT report (*op.cit*) and at present includes members of over 10% of the parish's 260 households. On top of this, two residents who help BCT's woodland management, the local individuals working in three furniture businesses in the parish and more than half a dozen local joiners who live in the parish.
