

# Aigas Community Forest

## Coille Coimhearsnachd Aigeis



## Update – August 2009

### Since our First Update

A lot has happened since our first Update was issued in June:

- Bell Ingram have conducted a community consultation exercise including a public meeting attended by 41 people at Kilmorack Hall on 29<sup>th</sup> June and a questionnaire delivered to all households.
- Bell Ingram have also completed a study on the feasibility of community purchase and management of the Forest.
- We have proposed a community boundary and had this ratified at the public meeting in June and have arranged for The Highland Council to conduct a postal ballot of the community, in which we hope to secure a 'Yes' vote in favour of community purchase.
- We have instructed the local District Valuation Service to provide an independent valuation of the forest which will be accepted as the purchase price by both us and the Forestry Commission.
- We have set in motion the process to create a community company which will be the vehicle for the purchase and management of the forest



### Outcome of the Bell Ingram Study

Bell Ingram were asked to conduct a survey to find out what local people wanted from a community owned forest and to look at the feasibility of community ownership and management.

The community study was based around five themes - Environment; Economy; Energy; Education; Enjoyment - and respondents were asked to rate the importance of these according to which they felt were the most important to the future benefit of the area. Environment

and Enjoyment scored the highest indicating that the community places greatest value in the protection and enhancement of the forest's ecology and in using the forest for recreation. Additional comments

supported this outcome with the most cherished aspects of the forest being the habitat, its peacefulness and its beauty; and activities such as walking, cycling and bird watching being the most common. When asked what improvements could be made, footpaths and tree thinning / native forest regeneration scored highest.

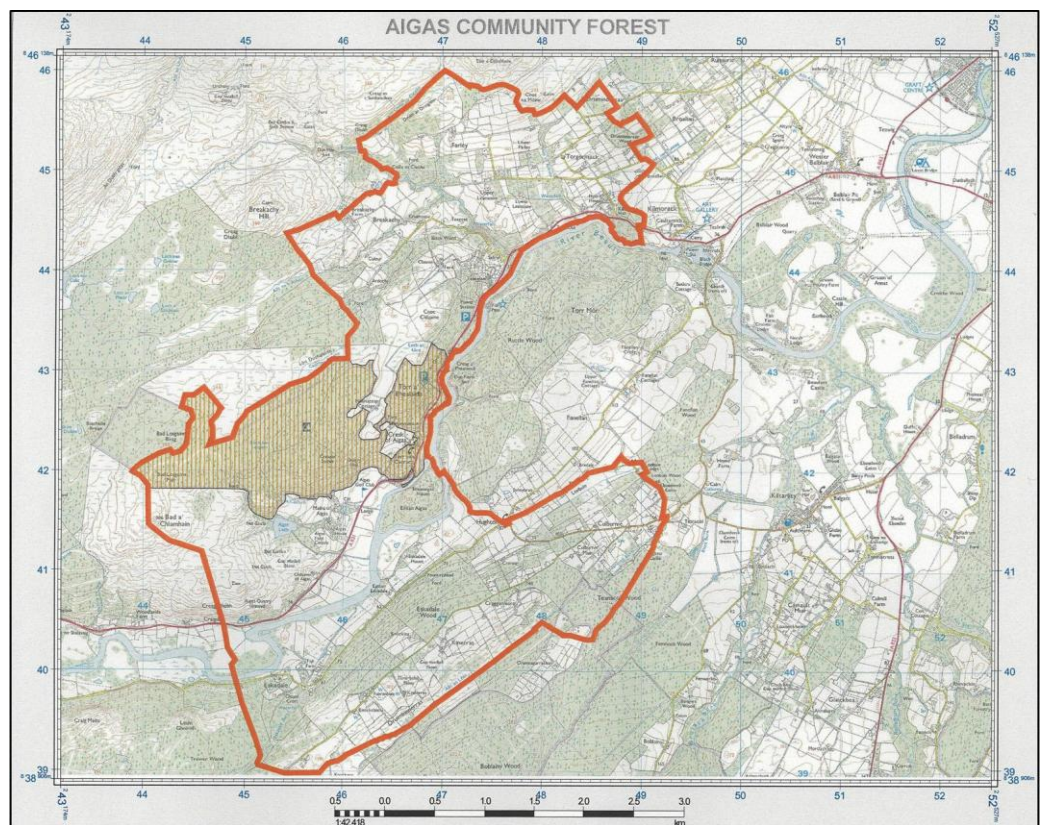
The feasibility study looked at two key things: Would the forest be economically viable? and Does the community have the skills and experience necessary to manage it effectively?

Without a set purchase price it isn't possible to say if the forest would recoup its purchase, but Bell Ingram have indicated that if the community were able to raise the funds to purchase the forest, as many other communities have, the timber alone would produce an income to support the long term management of the Forest. There would also be opportunity to investigate income generation from activities such as selling logs and chips for fuel; woodland burials; eco-friendly tourist accommodation and renewable energy generation. Bell Ingram also feel that that the community does contain people with the skills, experience and enthusiasm to manage the forest. With this positive outcome to the feasibility study we have asked Bell Ingram to go to the next stage, which is production of a business plan.

## Community Boundary

It is a condition of the National Forest Land Scheme, through which we want to purchase the forest, that we set a community boundary and that everyone on the publicly available electoral roll within this boundary has a chance to vote on the potential purchase. The purchase can only go ahead if over half the community vote and the majority who vote say 'Yes'.

In setting the boundary we wanted to make sure that we included as many people as possible with a potential interest in the forest either because they live close to it or because it forms a major part of their view. It was important that this encompassed both sides of the River Beauly and as a result we moved away from traditional community council and parish boundaries. This led one member of the Committee to undertake a gruelling 2-day cycling expedition to find out which parts of the glen can see the forest. The photographs taken were then matched to a map and used to define a community based on postcode areas. This proposal was then presented at the public meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> June and ratified by the 41 people present.



The Aigas Community Forest community is shown in the map above and encompasses the following postcodes: IV4 7AD, IV4 7AE, IV4 7AF, IV4 7JJ, IV4 7JL, IV4 7JN, IV4 7AG, IV4 7AQ, IV4 7EY and IV4 7JR.

## Community Ballot

If you live in one of these postcodes, are on the electoral roll and have not asked for your name to be kept confidential then you are entitled to vote on the future of the forest. You should receive a ballot paper and reply-paid return envelope by 17<sup>th</sup> August at the latest and must return this by 27<sup>th</sup> August. Please return your ballot paper if you vote 'Yes' or 'No'. It is important that the whole community is heard.

In the run up to the Ballot we have planned some opportunities for the community to learn more about the purchase process, plans for management of the forest and the forest itself:

*17<sup>th</sup> Aug - 7.30pm - Kilmorack Hall  
Public Meeting*

Summary of the community survey and feasibility study and opportunity to discuss any aspect of the project.

*23<sup>rd</sup> Aug - 2.00pm -  
4.00pm*

*Aigas Forest Open Day*  
Combination of walks, the option to take a look for yourself and a chance to quiz some of the Steering Committee members. Parking at picnic area lay-by - follow the signs after Aigas Dam. Informal walks starting between 2.00pm and 3.00pm

## Q&A

**Do we know the cost of the forest yet?**

Unfortunately, we still don't. The process we are working through to buy the forest

has set timescales and the valuation takes place in the latter stages of this. We have now instructed the district valuation service and expect a response by 31<sup>st</sup> August.

**If we don't know how much it's going to cost, how can we bid to buy it?**

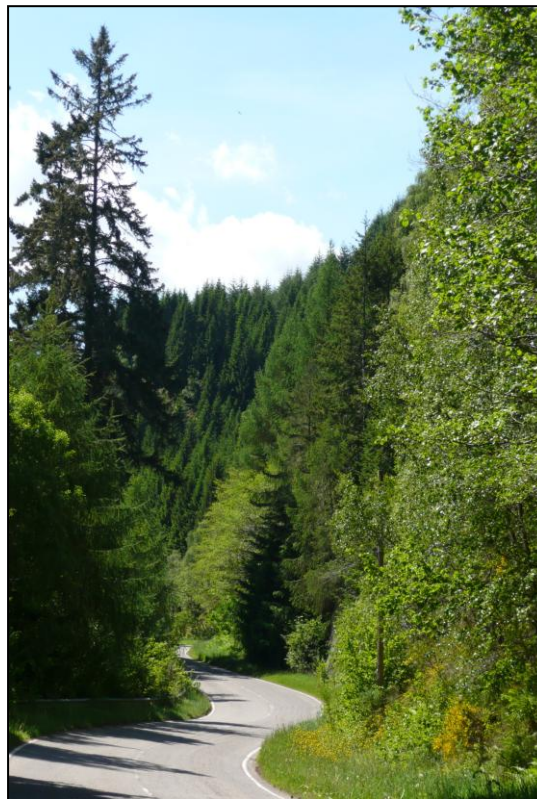
The National Forest Land Scheme application we will submit on September 8<sup>th</sup> is not an offer to buy the forest. It is an application to seek the right to buy at whatever price is agreed by the DVS. We then have 18-months to raise the funds. If we find the price too high or are unable to raise the funds we can withdraw at no further cost to the community. But if we don't submit the application then the forest will go on the open market and be sold to the highest bidder. It is unlikely

that the community would then have any say in its future.

**Where will we get the money to buy the forest?**

Unfortunately, we still don't know for sure. The political and economic climate is less supportive of community-purchase than it was a few years ago but during the 18-months we have to raise the funds this may change. It will be hard work to get together all the money but the existing committee are committed to trying and hopefully the rest of the community will be too.

The funders for this will be different from those targeted by Kilmorack Community Hall and so there are no fears of competition for money.



What happens if the result of the community ballot is 'No' or less than half of the community vote?

If either or both of these happen then we are not able to submit the NFLS application and the forest will be sold on the open market. It is important that you vote and we want you to vote 'Yes'.

Who will run the forest if we buy it?

We are currently setting up a community company called simply 'Aigas Community Forest'. This company will be a registered charity and it will be responsible for managing the forest. Everyone in the community has the right to become a company member and to vote on who should be a Director of this company. If you want to get involved in managing the forest then become a company member, attend and vote at the AGM and other open meetings, join the board, become involved and help make the forest a success. Look out for more information on becoming a member in future Updates.

Who is on the Steering Committee?

A full list of names is provided below:  
Graeme Scott, Crask of Aigas (Chair)  
Lara McDonald, Kinerras (Vice Chair)  
John Graham, Teanassie (Treasurer)  
Andrew Leaver, Crask of Aigas (Secretary)  
Steve Byford, Broallan  
Gavin Cormack, rep. Teanassie School  
Calum Fraser, Kilmorack  
Mark Hedderwick, Ruisaurie  
Philip Knott, rep. Aigas Field Centre  
John Lister-Kaye, Aigas Field Centre  
Peter Masheter, Aigas  
Mia Scott, Crask of Aigas  
Alisdair Stewart, Crask of Aigas

I can't make it to any of the meetings, how else can I get more information?

Contact any of the committee members above or go to our website [www.aigasforest.org.uk](http://www.aigasforest.org.uk) where you can download copies of all our minutes and other useful documents.

## Public Meeting

**Monday 17<sup>th</sup> August 7.30pm**

**Kilmorack Hall**

## Open Forest

**Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2.00pm – 4.00pm**

**Picnic Area Lay-by up the Glen from Aigas Dam**

**It's your Forest - It's your Vote**

**Vote Yes**

Supported by



and

