

Aigas Community Forest

Coille Coimhearsnachd Aigeis



Update – June 2009

Recap

Earlier this year Forestry Commission Scotland notified Kilmorack Community Council of their intention to dispose of the 700 acre Aigas Forest. Under the National Forest Land Scheme (NFLS) the community have the right to apply to purchase the forest before it goes on the open market.

A public meeting was held in Kilmorack Hall on 25th March at which 33 members of the public turned up to hear from Forestry Commission Scotland, HIE Community Land Unit and the Community Woodlands Association. At the end of that meeting the audience voted unanimously to establish a steering committee and investigate the purchase of Aigas Forest for the community.

Progress of the Steering Committee

The Steering Committee have been meeting every two weeks since mid-April. On 19th May a formal notification of interest was lodged with the Forestry Commission and the tight timescales of the NFLS were triggered. The final application to purchase the forest must be submitted no later than 8th September. Before then the Committee need to:

- produce a feasibility study and business plan on how the forest will be managed for the benefit of the community
- have the forest independently valued

- run a ballot in which over half the community vote and the majority who vote say 'yes'

Applications for funding to support these processes have been submitted to HIE Community Land Unit and The Highland Council. These were both successful and, with a contribution from the Strathglass Community Woodland group, £12,000 has been raised.

Over 30 companies and individuals were invited to tender for the feasibility study and business plan. In order to select the best consultants an objective scoring exercise was followed up by interviews with short listed consultants. The contract has been let to Bell Ingram.

Over the summer Bell Ingram and the Steering Committee will be consulting with the community and other stakeholders to develop the feasibility study and business plan. As part of this study we are holding a public meeting on 29th June in Kilmorack Hall at 7.30pm. This will give you the opportunity to see maps and photographs of the forest and to input to plans for its future.

For more information or to be added to a circulation list for e-mail updates please contact the Secretary, Andrew Leaver at andrewleaver@aol.com

Q & A

What is the National Forest Land Scheme?

The National Forest Land Scheme or NFLS gives communities the opportunity to buy forest land in the ownership of the Scottish Government. In the case of Aigas Forest the Forestry Commission have identified the land as surplus to requirements and if the community can show various public benefits we have the option to buy at a price set through independent valuation.

What are the Community Boundaries?

In purchases through the NFLS the community boundaries are set by the interested community. At the moment the Steering Committee are identifying a boundary which will encompass a section of the glen on both sides of the River Beauly with a vested interest in the future of Aigas Forest. Our proposals will be on view at a public meeting in Kilmorack Hall at 7.30pm on 29th June.

Why would the Community want to own Aigas Forest?



The hope is that the Forest can be run as a social enterprise generating income for re-investment in the wider community. Income generated could be used for projects such as

footpaths to Kilmorack Hall, improved recreational access to the forest and restoration of native woodland. The feasibility study will identify if this is achievable.

How much would the forest cost?

At the moment we simply don't know. In mid-July the Steering Committee and Forestry Commission Scotland will jointly instruct an independent valuation of the forest and this will set the purchase price.

How will the Community raise the funds for purchase?

We are not sure exactly how this will be done. The current economic climate and recent changes to Scottish Government policy have made community acquisition much more difficult. But if we are granted the right to buy the forest we will have 18-months to raise the funds and we are already starting preliminary investigation of funding sources. The funders for this will be different from those targeted by Kilmorack Community Hall and so there are no fears of competition for money.

Who is on the Steering Committee?

A full list of names is provided below. All Steering Committee members are volunteers.

Graeme Scott, Crask of Aigas (Chair)
Lara McDonald, Kinerras (Vice Chair)
John Graham, Teanassie (Treasurer)
Andrew Leaver, Crask of Aigas (Secretary)
Steve Byford, Broallan
(Chair, Kilmorack Community Council)
Gavin Cormack, rep. Teanassie School
Calum Fraser, Kilmorack
(Director, Kilmorack Community Hall)
Mark Hedderwick, Ruisaurie
Philip Knott, rep. Aigas Field Centre
John Lister-Kaye, Aigas Field Centre
Peter Masheter, Aigas
(Director, Kilmorack Community Hall)
(Member, Kilmorack Community Council)
Mia Scott, Crask of Aigas
Alisdair Stewart, Crask of Aigas
(Member, Kilmorack Community Council)