

Aigas Community Forest

Coille Coimhearsnachd Aigeis



Newsletter – January 2010

Community Ownership of Aigas Forest Approved

On 17th December 2009 Forestry Commission Scotland approved our application for the community acquisition of Aigas Forest. This is a significant step in the process which will result in community ownership and management of the forest. To get this far we have proven that a significant majority of local residents support community ownership; that the skills and experience are present to manage the forest long term; and that community ownership will provide substantial social, economic and environmental benefits to Lower Strathglass.

Following an independent valuation the purchase price has been set at £690,000. We now have 18 months to raise these funds and secure the forest. This is no small task but the steering committee are committed to success. Our fundraising campaign will target large public funders, charitable trusts and of course will involve some degree of local fundraising. We know that we are not alone in asking this community for support and so we will work closely with the Kilmorack Hall committee to avoid duplication. This is our first joint newsletter and on Friday 26th February we are holding a joint fundraiser - a family quiz night at the Hall.



Ballot Result

In August and October we balloted the whole community in two phases. This provided 321 people the chance to say Yes or No to our plans. Across the two phases there was a 65% return with a 93% majority saying 'Yes'. This is a considerable mandate for the community acquisition of Aigas Forest and was noted by the National Forest Land Scheme panel. Thank you for your support.

Our Vision

Our vision is for a productive, working forest providing measurable social, economic and environmental benefits for local residents and visitors alike.

To realise this vision we have identified a number of actions which we believe reflect the desires of the community as well as the reality of owning a forest. Our ability to deliver all of them will depend on the success of our fundraising and the economic climate at the time.

Actions related to Social Benefits

- increase and improve access to and recreational opportunities in the forest
- open up footpaths from Kilmorack Hall through Teanassie School To Aigas Field Centre
- provide information on the natural and cultural heritage of the area
- design and construct challenging all-ability tracks and activities
- establish an outdoor venue and accompanying programme of artistic and cultural events

Actions related to Economic Benefits

- manage and harvest the timber to produce working capital for re-investment
- add value to our timber before sale by drying and chipping for fuel
- establish a woodland burial site unique to Inverness and the south Highlands
- develop a small number of high end eco-cabins and tree houses to complement existing tourism businesses in the area
- investigate wind energy opportunities in keeping with our community ethos

Actions related to Environmental Benefits

- seek over time to encourage native regeneration of the forest whilst maintaining it as a working asset
- actively manage the forest to restore biodiversity and protect existing species
- work with Teanassie Primary School, Aigas Field Centre and other organisations to support wide-ranging environmental education for all age groups
- Provide hides and open up viewing points to allow locals and visitors to enjoy the wildlife and scenery of our forest



Q&A

Is the price of £690,000 a fair one?

Yes we believe it is. At the start of this process we were told that forests can go for anything between £1,000 and £2,000 per acre. Aigas is a 700 acre forest so the price is below our lowest estimate of £700,000. Bell Ingram have also confirmed that they believe this to be a fair price.

What happens if you don't raise the necessary funds in time?

If we fail completely the forest will go on the open market and sell to the highest bidder. The community would then have no right to be involved in future management. If we get close then we will negotiate with Forestry Commission Scotland

and see where that takes us. For the moment our target remains to raise the full amount in time.

How can I make a donation?

Please send any donations to our Secretary, Andrew Leaver, North View, Crask of Aigas, Beauly IV4 7AD. Cheques should be made payable to Aigas Community Forest.

Can I help with fundraising?

Yes please. We need as much help as you can give with our fundraising. Just make contact with any committee member if you have any ideas or come along to one of our regular events planned over the next 18 months.

Where can I get more information?

Contact Andrew Leaver or go to our website www.aigasforest.org.uk where you can register as a volunteer as well as download copies of all our minutes and other useful documents.