

Blarbuie Woodland Project

at Argyll and Bute Hospital, Lochgilphead, Argyll



First Progress Report

October 2005

This Report covers the first two months of full implementation from the beginning of August 2005 to early October and the time of the Public Launch. Prior to this we had been securing funding and agreements, producing a range of studies and reports and plans, and building up support and participation within the Hospital, other establishments and organisations and groups, and the wider community. Since 2003, there had been considerable work behind the scenes, in addition to the participatory work that we have been developing with groups. We began actual work with tools at the beginning of August, with a complete funding package and set of business plans in place. We had achieved all consultation and research and feasibility and planning through the support of Argyll and Bute Council Community Development, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Allen Lane Foundation, West

Highland Leader +, the Scottish Land Fund and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, most of whom are and will continue to be supporting the Project during ongoing implementation. Other funders are the Robertson Trust and Scottish Executive National Programme for Health and Wellbeing.



Old garden reclaimed for tree nursery

General direction is led by representatives of the Partner Organisations – Dave Bertin for NHS Argyll and Clyde, Phil Risby for Lochgilphead Community Council, Andy Crawford for Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH), Gordon Gray-Stephens for Argyll Green Woodworkers Association (AGWA), and Roddy Fairley for Reforesting Scotland (RS). Several others of these organisations are also involved in development and management, plus from time to time representatives of Argyll and Bute Council, the Forestry, SNH and others, plus Hospital Volunteers and Patients. On



Resource Centre group at Blarbuie

the ground on a more-or-less daily basis coordination and activity is managed by Patrick Harvey, Grounds Superintendent at the Hospital, Joanna Gladstone, Manager of the SAMH Garden Project at the Hospital, Gordon Gray-Stephens of AGWA, and Hugh Fife of RS. Background coordination and management and budget control is the responsibility of staff and Directors of RS. Part of the total funding package is a variety of contribution-in-kind by NHS Argyll and Clyde and the Hospital, and ongoing fundraising through sales and events; our specially produced Blarbuie Woodland cards are selling well in Lochgilphead and at events. There are some specific intended actions that are the subject of new funding applications.



Marking out the new path route



On August 4th we held a Workday and Site Launch with staff and trainees of the Garden Project, Hugh and Patrick and others, which was covered by the local press (see appendix). We began by cutting back branches that were overhanging the intended path routes with loppers and saws. In the afternoon we had a Partnership Meeting, which focused upon the current funding situation, the plans for the future, the prioritising of immediate work activities, the ideas for monitoring and evaluation, and planning for the Public Launch event to be held at the end of September. Ian Edwards, one of the RS Directors, had

travelled from Edinburgh for the meeting and Andy Crawford, Regional Manager with SAMH, from Glasgow. It was useful having Hospital staff Dave Bertin, Hugh O'Neill and Dr Rob Sandler there for the discussion on monitoring and evaluation of health benefits, that is to be assisted by Professor John Atkinson and Raymond Duffy, lecturers at Paisley University. It was also useful to have AGWA member Sid Wright there, whose knowledge and skills in woodland management and woodworking are considerable.

Over the next couple of weeks there were meetings to design a new leaflet and a Launch poster, to discuss the potential for the refurbishment of the empty Hospital house Ardmeanach (a collaborative project which may become an info point for the Woodland, an outlet for crafts and plants, toilets and catering, and provider of supported employment), a funding meeting with Duncan Baird of the Scottish Land Fund, and meetings with AGWA members. These AGWA meetings were extremely useful, adding detail to the plans for felling and milling and construction of buildings, seating and panels. Andy Parsons, for instance, is widely recognised for his skills in construction of benches and interpretive lecterns. With another AGWA person and nationally-recognised woodland expert,

Peter Quelch, we looked again at the trees for felling, along with Joanna and Holly of the Garden Project. Shortly after that Peter cut two hundred wooden pegs at Ormsary sawmill, and we staked out all the path routes. Towards the end of August we did more lopping and sawing – Hugh, Patrick, Garden Project, and Robert Smillie, Patient’s Council representative.

The article which appeared in the Argyllshire Advertiser following the Site Launch (the Advertiser has done us very well over the two and a half years of development) prompted a call from the teachers at Lochgilphead High School who run the Prince’s Trust XL Group, expressing great interest in getting involved. Before the end of the month Hugh went to the School to meet the Group, and soon after the Group were accompanied on a walk around the Woods. Clients of Lochgilphead Resource Centre, with Centre Office Anne-Marie, made a return visit to look at interpretive potential, and joined others in clearance and raking. Hugh also went to the Link Club (mental health in the community) to renew contact, and to the Wood Fair at Cairndow, a chance to build up involvement of known and unknown woodworkers, from charcoal maker Bob Black to the newly established woodturning workshop at Kilmichael. Back at RS in Edinburgh we concluded design for leaflet and poster (examples shown in

appendix) with Crispin Hayes, and having purchased a new external hard drive we began to create the Blarbuie picture archive.

More work-days were held in early September, including a squad preparing the Tree Nursery area ready for the strimmers. Patrick set up the cones and warning signs and the strimming got underway. We set up an account at West Coast Tool and Plant, and purchased hard hats, gloves and tools.



The Prince’s Trust group, continuing their weekly visits, joined patients in clearing rhodies and cutting branches along the path



Prince’s Trust group 'rhodie bashing'

route. With Hospital tractor driver Angus the strimmed material was removed from the Tree Nursery site. On the 19th we held a meeting to plan for the Public Launch, and the following day the Garden Project squad started work on preparing the site for the marquees. Hugh confirmed details for the Red Cross bus shuttle between Town





woodworking (using ash just cut the day before) and a participatory logo creation exercise. Councillor Donnie McMillan came, and Dr Grace Fergusson, Keith Miller and Helen Watt of the Forestry, Raymond Duffy from Paisley University, and the High School, and Argyll Supported Employment, and folk up from the town. The event was covered by the local press, and is the front page of the Hospital Newsletter (see appendices).

and Hospital. Isla and Marie and their Occupational Therapy group started work on the Blarbuie Woodland Banner, and our three tree fellers Sid and Sean and Eck started the felling with the cutting down – or pollarding - of the sycamore and ash ‘hedge’ that surrounds the Nursery.

We put Launch posters up around the town, and on boards on approach roads, and an advert in the paper. The Garden Project, Robert, Patrick and many others put a lot of work in setting up the SNH-supplied tents for the Launch, and bringing in seating and setting up displays. On the day itself – the last day of September - Hospital Volunteers ran the catering and helped elderly patients from the wards. There was music and

The following week the tree fellers felled some enormous fir and sycamore (Health and Safety vigilantly overseen by Patrick), the Prince’s Trust were back, and Professor Atkinson was introduced to the Garden Project trainees and staff, Hospital staff, and patients, explaining his ideas for self-monitoring, and walking the Woods with us revealing that – as a bonus – he knows a lot about trees. The second weekend of October was RS’s Annual Gathering – this



year in Galloway, and Hugh set up a Blarbuie display there and took the opportunity to talk to people from around the country who have an interest in becoming part of our Blarbuie Extension ideas. The following week we got Gordon and Peter back on site to refine our plans for milling





The Professor with Robert and Brenda



Foresters and woodturners

and processing of felled trees, and which should become huts and benches and which be left on the ground to be recycled by Nature. We also liaised with Donald McMillan of Hospital Estates regarding access for working vehicles. Following this squads were out hauling branches and stacking logs, and more patients were introduced to the site – **their** site, but long inaccessible, unwelcoming and barely known. An important and enjoyable part of

ongoing action is the recording of wild-life sightings, and we are pleased to discover that hedgehogs are back and that the red squirrel population is healthy. Photography, diaries, and sound recording will continue and grow as part of monitoring – monitoring wild-life, monitoring work and progress, monitoring health benefits and emotions experienced by everyone involved.

Hugh Fife



School group on field trip to Blarbuie



Spot the squirrel !

The Blarbuie Woodland Project is a partnership between the following organisations:



Celebrating the Launch with Hugh's elderflower bubbly

Hugh Fife, Woods for All, Reforesting Scotland,
62 - 66 Newhaven Road, Edinburgh EH6 5QB
Phone: 0131 554 4321 Fax: 0131 554 0088
hugh@reforestingscotland.org

www.reforestingscotland.org

Woods for All is an award winning Reforesting Scotland project that works towards access and inclusion. Reforesting Scotland is a Scottish charity dedicated to environmental and social regeneration through reforestation. Reforesting Scotland Journal is free to members, also available at many good bookshops.

dtp crispin hayes

words & photos hugh fife

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