



Creating Pathways: The Blarbuie Woodland Project

at

Argyll & Bute Hospital

'It's a haven, its fresh air'

'A sustainable timber source'

'A way back into the
community'



“Having been involved with the Blarbuie Woodland

Project since its inception I have admired the hard work that has been put into this project by a dedicated team of workers. I am a firm believer that this is a first class project opening up paths with associated projects en route. It will be welcomed by hospital patients, the general public and also tourists for its recreational, educational and scenic value. This path will link up with other paths planned for the Mid Argyll area.

I am pleased to hear that a partnership

agreement is to be entered into with NHS Argyll and Clyde and other associated partners. This will enable the project to proceed from strength to strength. Many groups in the



area are now associated to this project and I would recommend it to others to become involved. Could I wish the Blarbuie Woodland Project good luck

Councillor Donnie MacMillan
Vice Convener, Argyll and Bute Council

The Background

During 2002 and 2003 a number of groups and individuals came up with ideas to develop the woods around Argyll and Bute Hospital - to bring training and employment opportunities to patients and others in the area, and to enhance the environment, and to bring health and social benefits to patients and other people in the wider community.



The groups and individuals saw that there was a resource and need and potential to establish a project that would meet wide environmental and social values, focused upon this one place. The place is the grounds and woodlands at Argyll and Bute Hospital, at Lochgilphead in Mid-Argyll – a one hundred and fifty year old long-stay hospital, managed by NHS Argyll & Clyde.

The initial ideas for woodcraft training, woodland management, and access to recreation and environmental experience came from individuals within the Tigh na Linne Garden Project, the Argyll Green Woodworkers

Association, the NHS Trust, and Woods for All:

The Garden Project (GP) is based at the Hospital and is managed by the Scottish Association for Mental Health – a Scottish Charity (SAMH). The Project provides training in horticulture to patients and other unemployed people, leading in most cases to Scottish Vocational Qualifications – although the benefits, outcomes and course durations have a certain flexibility to suit the needs of individual trainees. Since 1998 many trainees have participated in Woods for All activities within and outwith the Hospital, and GP instructors and trainees have made a considerable contribution to the achievements of Woods for All.

The Argyll Green Woodworkers Association (AGWA) is a Scottish Charity which promotes sustainable management and use of Argyll's semi-natural woodland. Its Argyll-wide membership includes woodturners, environmentalists, community activists and people with an

interest in native trees and woodland history. Members and committee members regularly demonstrate and teach traditional and sustainable use of woodlands and timber. Since 1998 members have been closely involved in actions and events organised by Woods for All.

The NHS Trust management set-up has changed over the years, and is changing again, but with no foreseeable negative impact on the resources relevant to this project. Several professionals and departments within the Hospital - and the Trust and Board - are supportive of the project. Since 1998 AGWA and Woods for All and GP have shared several woodcraft events with staff and users of Occupational Therapy at the Hospital. The Grounds Superintendent is a leading figure in the project.

Woods for All (WFA) is part of the **Scottish Charity Reforesting Scotland (RS)**, which supports social and sustainable use of woodlands. WFA promotes and supports the involvement of disabled

people and other excluded people in everything to do with trees and woodlands throughout Scotland. Users of GP and Occupational Therapy, and many disabled people in the area, have been part of WFA activities since 1998 – path work, tree growing and planting, woodcraft, woodland management, site surveys, travel, filming and publishing.

WFA has created strong links between its participants here in Mid-Argyll and in other parts of Scotland.

Lochgilphead Community Council (LCC) was welcomed as a fifth partner by the above organisations in late 2003.

Informal discussion among the above revealed a desire for regular woodcraft workshops at the Hospital, and improvement



of paths to allow greater access to the grounds and woods, and management of the woodland resource, and the building of a log cabin as a focus for experience of the environment. As discussion and ideas developed WFA proposed that a phase of in-depth research, appraisal and consultation was needed, and SNH in Lochgilphead were approached to fund this process.

The Hospital is situated on the edge of the small town of Lochgilphead. At the heart of

Summary of Findings

The vast majority of organisations, groups and individuals consulted within and outwith Argyll and Bute Hospital agree that:

The Hospital Woodlands merit greater attention and use

Work is needed to upgrade access to these parts of the Hospital grounds

Patients will benefit in mind and body and soul from access to the woods and woodland activity

Users of NHS Services and Local Authority Social Services will benefit from access to the woods and woodland activities

The wider community of Lochgilphead and surrounds will benefit by having an extra open and public space, and opportunities for training, volunteering and employment

The Project will greatly enhance links between the Hospital and the wider community

There is great opportunity for environmental enhancement, treasuring the inherited designed landscape while encouraging the increase of native trees and plants and associated wildlife

There are needs and opportunities for training in woodcraft and woodland management

There are needs and opportunities for volunteering, training and employment in woodcraft and woodland management

There is potential for a variety of paths and trails within the woods and grounds, and paths and trails linking with other parts of the area

There is great potential for recreation and physical activity

There is potential for environmental education, interpretation and arts

There is and will be need for support to enable all people to access place and activities

Among Hospital staff, patients, trainees and members of partner and other local organisations there is the skill and knowledge to achieve the aims and objectives of the project

Agreement with the NHS Board, and its support, is vital, and achievable

This is an eminently fundable project

Funds for ongoing development could be raised through sales such as trees from a tree nursery, wooden products, and income attached to training and therapeutic services

Continuing links with the Local Authority, Forest Enterprise, SNH, the Local Enterprise Company, the Scottish Executive, the Local Biodiversity Partnership, and Voluntary Care Organisations, will be highly desirable

The present partner steering group – NHS Trust, GP, AGWA, LCC and WFA can move towards approvals, funding applications and implementation, though the exact nature of a Project

The Hospital and the Trees

Mid-Argyll, at the meeting of many roads and sea-routes, Lochgilphead has long been important as a centre in a wide scatter of communities. These days it is the administrative centre for the whole of Argyll and Bute, and an important base for business, tourism, and bodies such as Forest Enterprise, Scottish Natural Heritage and Argyll and Islands Enterprise. As well as the Hospital the area has several other establishments connected to health and care, such as a Day Centre, a Cottage Hospital, old peoples' homes and housing, a special school, a children's home, and various clubs and support groups.

The population of the Hospital has decreased considerably in recent decades.

This shrinkage of the Hospital population means that there are buildings and wards lying empty – strange echoing spaces amidst the sprawl of grand Victorian

architecture. The purposes and running of the Hospital are changing yet again, but the need remains, and along with shrinkage and change comes greater specialization and more targeted support.



The old woods - largely planted in the Victorian era - are now largely unvisited. There are two main blocks of woodland in the grounds, one of approximately 3 acres and one of approximately 4 acres. The former is on gently-sloping ground and consists

of close mixed woodland with high canopy, with some smaller more-recently planted trees and quite prolific regeneration, and some more shrubby areas with meandering paths, with one side bordering the main Hospital lawn and the other bordering fields and one-time sports fields. The other is on higher ground of exposed crags, with rough tracks, and consists of mature Scots Pine and Larch with regeneration

of Rowan and Birch. The wooded crag borders onto Forest Enterprise(FE) conifer plantation. Between the two areas of woodland is a part of Lochgilphead Golf Course, which extends out of and

beyond the Hospital grounds.

Discussion between the bodies and individuals, as referred to above, led to a project proposal titled 'Blarbuie Community Woodland Project (working title)'. Blarbuie is the name of the road on which the Hospital

The Project and Consultation

is located, and of the immediate area; the Gaelic name means 'Yellow Field', which would appear to refer to the yellow grass of this area. The proposal was then sent to a number of relevant organisations and individuals, and as the weeks went by (the beginning of 2003) the enthusiasm for and nature of the scheme grew and developed, and it was realised that an early phase of consultation was needed. The partners wanted to ensure the approval of everyone from the Hospital Management to the patients, from the Council and the Forestry to local societies and the local community. Scottish National Heritage were

approached to provide funding, which was duly approved.

The Consultation phase was set up to include Research, Appraisal and Feasibility. Appraisal – or Participatory Appraisal, or Participatory Forest Appraisal – is a means or approach regularly used by RS in support of Community

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Woodland groups, or aspiring groups. Through discussions and mapping exercises communities and individuals can express their ideas and opinions freely. It became apparent that the targeted or relevant community was both the Hospital community and the community of Lochgilphead and surrounding area – that there was a need to include the wider community and wider area in the proposals and in the process, while yet making sure that Hospital patients were enabled to participate at every level and every stage. People with literacy or mobility problems had to be enabled to participate, and staff and officials of the NHS Trust and other organisations had to be informed and invited, and all groups and individuals made aware of the proposals and process.



The Participatory Appraisal got underway in March. More woodland site visits were made by various interested people. Some of the Partners with knowledge of trees and plants made an inventory of the woods – though this is being extended as part of the project. The Participatory Appraisal has been of enormous importance, and the bulk and the vision of the responses is astounding. Added to these responses has been the huge range of information and ideas through the other means of consultation and research.



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Tree Inventory

Within the woodland strip close to the Hospital Lawn (what we now call the Low Wood), there is about an even mix of Deciduous and Coniferous. The older trees of the Low Wood are about a hundred and fifty years old, but there is an



attached part that comprises smaller trees and shrubs and, interestingly, some species that were not known in this country at the time of the first planting. In the larger and older part of the Low Wood the high canopy is of Corsican Pine,



Scots Pine, Larch, Beech, Sycamore, Silver Fir, Elm, Norway Spruce, Redwood and Common Lime. The lower canopy is of Norway Maple, Ash, Cypress, Holly and Whitebeam. In the younger bit attached to the Low Wood there is Wild Cherry, Hawthorn, Ornamental Crab Apple, Western Hemlock, Mediterranean Cypress, Sitka Spruce, Larch, Escalonia and Giant Cotoneaster. Throughout the Low Wood there is regeneration of Cherry, Hawthorn, Holly, Ash, Rowan, Sycamore, Beech and Silver Fir. The groundcover is of grasses, mosses, Golden Saxifrage, Wild Hyacinth, Sanicle, Ground Elder, Wood Anemone, Wild Garlic, Pignut, and Celandine.

The High Wood is on a dramatic crag of hard smooth rock. The bare rock is interlaced with growth of grasses and heather and blaeberry, where – a hundred and fifty years ago – Larch and Scots Pine were planted. Under and between them there are many Rowans, and some Birch and Holly. One part of this crag – ‘The Druim’ from the Gaelic for ridge – has

been quarried, and on the steep rock face of the old quarry there is considerable regeneration of Rowan, Birch and Ash. At the back of the ridge there is a

wet area bordering the Forest Enterprise Sitka plantation, and here there is Sallow Willow and Common Alder.

Conclusions

The principles, purposes and aims of the project are as described in the Summary of Findings. From these it is concluded that there are four main components to the project:

- Access and Recreation
- Training in Woodcraft
- Training and Volunteering in Woodland Management
- Environmental Enhancement and Understanding

1. Access and recreation includes the upgrading of paths, the placing of railings and seating, provision for activities, and provision for health, safety



and comfort.

‘Lots of mud and water on tracks’ ‘I didn’t know I could get there’ ‘The river is attractive but not easy to visit’ I would like a place where I can get to on my own in a wheelchair’ ‘Tactile signs’ ‘Maps for routes’ ‘Benches’ ‘Shelter’ ‘Adventure trail for people with disabilities’ ‘Archery’ ‘Tree houses’

2. Training in woodcraft is focused upon a permanent workshop building, but also involves outdoor activity. The purpose of the building is to house traditional equipment and modern machinery, with professional trainers and supervisors and support staff, for regular training of patients, young people and people from the wider community.

‘I’d like to be involved in making things out of wood – woodcraft is what interests me most’

‘Sheltered, safe, supervised workshop with machine and hand tools for all levels’ ‘Making benches’

3. Training and volunteering in woodland management crosses over with woodcraft, and access and environment, but has distinct components such as hedge-laying, felling of timber for use, ‘Coppicing’ ‘Collecting firewood’ ‘Collecting of tree seeds for propagation, to selling of saplings’.

4. Environmental enhancement and understanding means ensuring the conservation and increase of wild plants and creatures, and interpretation of the environment, and environmental education for everyone. This includes taking into account ‘Dumping and pollution’ and the need for ‘gently educational informative information’.

‘We like looking at the flowers and the hills’ ‘Red squirrel occasionally seen’ ‘Nice trees, chanterelle mushrooms’ ‘Names of birds on panels’ ‘Observation hide’
Some complimentary and artistic ideas are:

‘Waterfalls and bridges’
‘Large musical instruments within the woods’ ‘Making sculpture from felled trees in situ’ ‘Education links with schools – footpath links with schools’ ‘Framed viewing points’

The main actions on the ground in the first three years:

- Upgrade and extension of path network, to be as accessible as possible
- Create path links with Kilmory, and Core Path Network
- Placing of railings and seating, and signage
- Creation of sheltered woodcraft workshop, with equipment and machinery
- Felling of dangerous & obstructive trees
- Building of cabins for study and observation
- Establishment of training and volunteering programmes
- Management and enhancement of the environment
- Creation of a tree nursery
- Creation of woodland arts and recreation facilities
- Creation of accessible interpretation





A copy of the full report which this leaflet summarises is available free of charge as a pdf file. Please email Hugh Fife as below.

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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

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