



Transition to rural resilience

David Blair presents a Transition vision for rural Scotland, and explains how the community forest project he is involved with will help revitalise his home patch in Argyll.

Imagine a sustainable future for rural Scotland: thriving communities with a strong local economy and social networks in a reforested land, where ecological restoration and broad scale reforestation support a revived rural economy and community empowerment.

In this sustainable future scenario, the encouragement of rural repopulation has taken the pressure off urban centres and allowed music and the arts to flourish. Forest crofts are widespread across the whole of Scotland and a thriving forest culture has developed. Soils have been restored and improved to grow healthy organic food by introducing compost, charcoal and rock dust. Houses are built by local people from mostly local resources, wood, stone and straw and are heated by woodfuel. Success and value are

measured not just in economic terms but equally with social and environmental factors.

People are able to live, work and play in their local area, reducing dependency on cars and transport. Individuals and communities are confident and empowered to take the future in their own hands and aspire to a sustainable, low-energy future. Community-owned renewable energy networks utilising wood, wind, hydro and tidal power make rural communities net energy exporters. Commercial fishing and trawling is banned in inshore waters and local fish stocks are building up again, creating a steady local supply.

The menu has changed and you can count food miles on one hand! Venison from Barr Liath, trout from the loch, wild mushrooms and berries from the forest, Annie's famous goat's

cheese and freshly picked vegetables from Tam's patch. It's a peaceful revolution! Localisation has replaced globalisation.

Getting there – a matter of resources

This future scenario may seem too idyllic to be true, but Transition provides a framework for moving toward it. The Transition process begins with a realisation that every aspect of our lives involves energy, and that currently virtually all of that energy comes from fossil fuels that are not only primarily responsible for climate change, but will inevitably become scarce and run out.

Building a resilient future involves reducing dependency on fossil fuels for energy and increasing use of local, sustainable sources of energy, food, fuel, building materials and

livelihoods. By localising the source of essential resources, environmental impact is reduced and resilience increased. Learning to use less and waste less by living more connected and meaningful lives. There is necessity and there is luxury – we need to understand the difference between the two. We need food to eat, clean water to drink and air to breathe, we need shelter and warmth and social interaction. These are essentials, everything else is a luxury. If we can derive that which we need to live from our local area then we are resilient and sustainable.

Essentially it comes down to resources. With access to land for growing food, the forest for fuel and building materials, open hill for deer and wind and the rivers and burns for water and power, rural communities may build a resilient future as custodians of their local environment and proactive members of its ecology. If a person wants an allotment they should have one, if they are ready for a croft, they should get one and be supported and encouraged to do so. Community empowerment is essential as it takes people working together to achieve a sustainable and resilient future.

Community forest ownership at Kilfinan

Kilfinan Community Forest, by Tighnabruich in Argyll, will help turn this vision for rural Transition to reality for local residents. The Kilfinan Community Forest Project began in 2005 following extensive community consultations, which revealed that a lack of affordable housing, jobs and economically active residents were key issues threatening the future of the community. It was also recognised that the community acquisition of an area of forest adjoining the village could provide a solution to these issues.

In 2007, the Kilfinan Community Forest Company (KCFC) was established as a registered Scottish charity with the aim of acquiring 452ha of Acharossan Forest from the Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) via the National Forest Land Scheme (NFLS). We commissioned a feasibility study, conducted a skills audit and a housing needs assessment, held a ballot, produced a business plan and employed amateurs to engage with the community.

We missed the Scottish Land Fund and were directed to the Big Lottery Fund (BIG). Having jumped through all these hoops we discovered that BIG are not willing to fund full market value community buy-outs from another public body (FCS). We found ourselves caught between FCS/Scottish Government requiring full market value and BIG not willing to fund it.

We tried other public funders with similar results and with our NFLS application window closing in January 2010, we had to find another way forward. We are now pursuing a phased acquisition, starting with the purchase of a smaller area (125ha) with funds raised by the community itself by January 2010. We then have five years to find the rest of the funding or a solution for the remaining area.

The community purchase of the forest will unlock the potential to offer:

- Local firewood delivery and woodchip supplies
- Sawn timber supplies
- Timber products such as kennels, garden furniture
- Forest crofts and small business enterprises
- Waymarked footpaths with picnic areas and stunning viewpoints

- Mountain bike trails and an adventure playground
- Access to beautiful mid-Atlantic oakwoods, lochans and open hill, home to red squirrel, golden eagle, black grouse and red deer
- Ecoburials in a sacred grove
- Pet ecoburials
- Jobs, skills development, training and self-employment opportunities



- Local produce from allotments and crofts
- Forest education and forest school
- Improved biodiversity and ecological restoration.

The forest has the potential to rejuvenate this rural community after the last 50 years of decline, allowing people to live, work and play here and reduce our dependency on fossil fuels and our collective carbon footprint. These initiatives will help to retain and attract young people and their families, giving some vital resuscitation to this community – it's our future!

We need to raise £130,000 by January 2010 to secure a future for our village, our community and our young people. If you can contribute towards our public appeal, make a donation, leave a legacy or wish to find out more, please visit www.kilfinancommunityforest.com or call 01700 811809.

David Blair is a Director of Reforesting Scotland and of the Kilfinan Community Forest Company.

Local wood for local benefit

- Burning coal produces over 1kg of CO₂/kwh, whereas burning logs produces 4g CO₂/kwh and creates local livelihoods.
- A conventional house emits hundreds or thousands of tonnes of CO₂ in its materials and construction, while a local timber-built house produces tonnes of CO₂, but also fixes tonnes of CO₂ while creating local jobs and training opportunities.