

*A productive, working forest*

*providing measurable social, economic and environmental benefits  
for local residents and visitors alike*

## **Newsletter – August 2012**

### **Update**

It has been over a year since the last newsletter and at that time we reported that funding to purchase the Forest wasn't forthcoming and we were instead going to investigate leasing. Over the past few months things have turned full circle. We did investigate leasing and our work demonstrated to the Forestry Commission that their methodology for calculating a rental was flawed. It was suggesting astronomical rent values that no community would be able to afford. Thankfully the Commission accepted our evidence and they are currently reviewing their lease guidance. However, much bigger news came at the end of June when the Scottish Government announced the re-launch of the Scottish Land Fund. Overnight the potential to purchase the forest returned and we are now strongly pursuing this avenue.

Thankfully over the past 3 and a bit years we have developed a persuasive business plan and built a reputation amongst public bodies such as HIE, the Forestry Commission and The Highland Council such that they continue to be supportive of our endeavours. In fact all three of these organisations have provided us with

funds to contract with locally-based community development consultant, Lorna Campbell, to undertake the work required to complete Scottish Land Fund and other critical applications. Lorna will be working with us on a part-time basis through to March next year. She previously worked for

the Community Land Unit at HIE and has undertaken numerous contracts with other community groups and social enterprises. She brings a wealth of experience and contacts and, equally as importantly, is able to dedicate time to ensuring our funding applications are of the highest standard.

Funding is by no means assured and the next 6 - 8 months will be challenging for all involved, but after three years of 'plugging away' this is our best chance to secure Aigas Community Forest not just for this generation, but for the many to come. If you get the chance to participate in an event or make a donation to support the purchase please grab that chance and leave a lasting legacy for the residents of Lower Strathglass.



**Forest Open Day**  
**Sunday 26th August**  
**2pm - 4pm**

Treasure Hunt from 2pm  
Guided Nature Walk at 2.15pm  
Meet the Board and ask questions

Park at forestry road end, adjacent to  
Aigas Golf Course

## Why buy a forest?

We asked the community this question in the summer of 2009 and through public meetings and responses to a community survey you helped us develop this answer.

Aigas Forest has received little active management since the planting of the existing crop and there are currently no formal recreational opportunities in the forest. The Forest is large (285ha) and the opportunity exists to create 'zones' allowing different sorts of activities to take place in separate areas. With this in mind, Aigas Community Forest intends to change the current situation considerably by managing the forest actively for **Environment, Enjoyment, Energy, Education and Economy** with the economic activities underpinning social and environmental benefits.

**Environment:** Woodland management which will combine a mixture of replacement conifers, appropriate broadleaves to increase biodiversity and improve amenity, and small areas of open space for biodiversity enhancement.

**Enjoyment:** Development of a path network, wildlife viewing opportunities and associated visitor infrastructure taking advantage of existing key viewpoints. This is to include all abilities access and will take advantage of existing roadside/River Beauly access. Building on this, developing a range of cultural and heritage events and activities based around the community's close connection to the land.

**Energy:** Exploit renewable energy opportunities through the production of wood chip and fire wood for local supply; generating income and helping to reduce local carbon footprint.



**Education:** To provide a resource for local primary schools, Aigas Field Centre who run an extensive education programme for all ages, and others including Highland Council Rangers. Also to build skills within the community through a volunteering programme.

**Economy:** Use of the forest's resources to create or support local businesses and jobs and to produce a sustainable income source for the effective management of the Forest. Initially based on timber production and processing, with potential expansion to include holiday accommodation and woodland burials.

In the autumn of 2009, we put this proposal back to the community and asked you to vote on it. A terrific 65% of eligible voters responded in the community ballot with 93% voting in favour of purchase. We hope that despite the passage of time this support still exists and that together we can secure Aigas Forest for the community.