

Blairbeg Community Woodlands Open Afternoon/Consultation Event: Sunday 19th February 16:00-18:30



Blairbeg Community Woods
Open Day and Consultation Event
Sunday 19th Feb 4:00pm - 6:30pm
Glen Urquhart Public Hall, Drumnadrochit



Scottish Land Fund
Ionmhas Fearainn na h-Alba



Delivered by
THE NATIONAL LOTTERY
COMMUNITY FUND



Highlands and Islands Enterprise
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Event widely advertised on Social Media (Save the Date posts in early January and then publicizing activities for the day), also Posters and Mail Chimp GURCA-Newsletter)

The Event Sunday 19th February – the weather was relatively wild and breezy, after a damp morning and better than forecast. Sunday in Half Term was chosen in part to try and tempt families out (however we were not particularly successful with that), turnout was deemed ‘good’ for Drumnadrochit and this event had a warm, upbeat atmosphere, lots of positive conversations and interest .

Groups Present – GURCA, Woodland Trust (Anna MacFie), Heritage Group (Josie & Fraser Mackenzie, Heather Johnstone), Trees for Life (Mollie Saunders), Disc Golf, Craigmonie Woodland Association (Toby Stainton and Dwynwen Hopcroft) and Abriachan Forest Trust (Sam Hesling and Suzann Barr), also Dr Calum Brown (Highlands Rewilding)

Refreshments – Carolyn Wilson and the Bite and Blether Volunteers (Barbara, Brian, Carol, Lyn and Nikki)

Woodland Tours – Gordon Watson

Disc Golf – Patrick Kipfmiller (Beech Wood Demos) and Nikki Kipfmiller (Hall).

Treasure Hunt – Suzanne Irvine (Beech Wood)

Paper Exercise - Info and survey Sheets 32 handed back on the day – Dominic Thierry and Mary Tiles on Front Desk.

Washing line ideas - Dan (Dan visiting all areas)

Story Telling – Fiona MacDonald (Susan Clark and Andy Griffin)

SURVEY RESPONSES

Q1 Woodland/BM Garden use in the last year or so?

Have you used, visited or wandered through any of the 3 plots of Woodland in the last year or so?

Yes: 26/32 (81%)

No: 6/32 (19%)

Majority of use was described as through Plot 3 (East-Beechwood) for access to buildings/facilities especially the Care Centre/Shop/Houses. Many respondents mentioned Dog walking /recreational walking. A couple of respondents used plot 2 (Blairbeg North) as a cut through and this was described as a 'safer' route than pavements when conditions are icy. A couple of respondents mentioned the existing Health Walkers Group using the woods for walking and two respondents mentioned running.



Q2 Bradley Martin Garden

The Bradley Martin Garden will also use the Hall to offer a wider range of events – what would you like to see happen with this space and how do you think it can benefit the Hall?

There was an obvious desire in survey responses to utilize this space for some form of Garden – Herb Gardens, Sensory Gardens, Floral Borders and a Community Orchard were all described. This included installing lunch/benches and perhaps some form of Shelter/Arbor/Gazebo so people could meet and fixed BBQs.

Gardening was seen as a way to bring children and older people together. A couple of responses mentioned that the Space could be used for children.

There was some interest in the area for a regular Farmers Market, Craft/Arts Fair and for Marquees/Stretch Tents to provide space for weddings and Festivals/Concerts.

A couple of responses mentioned the need for better parking for the hall and use of this space to provide that. One response felt it would be suitable to extend the Hall (at the loss of the trees!).

Q3 Groups

What Community Groups would you like to see using these spaces, Who would you like to see benefit from them?

Responses generally very inclusive and broad– very obvious that children/youngsters should be encouraged as well as accessibility for older/disabled members of the community. A couple of responses were clear that Locals not tourists should benefit from these spaces. The concept of a meeting area and possibly a simple covered/BBQ area was mentioned.

There was an awareness of some of the local Groups here in Glen Urquhart including the Heritage group (present at the Event).

Q4 Woodland Ideas

What are your ideas as to how the Community can use the plots, what would like to see happen with these plots?

Improving Paths was a common theme as was the installation of some seating/picnic tables . A common theme was these spaces providing an opportunities for folk/groups to meet, this came across as something people here valued.

Children were mentioned in many responses: the possibility of giving an area of the woods over for this; making dens, installing some play equipment were all suggested, and the example of Evanton Community Woods was given to support this. Co-operation with other groups including the 'Nursery', Community Children's Parties etc. would be a sensible approach e.g. a 'Fairy Trail' could be created.

A 'light touch,' keeping things simple at the start of this process was described. It was noted that maintenance of any installed infrastructure should be considered (Short term thinking could lead to poorly maintained structures in the future). Keeping the area tidy (and removing trip hazards) with some tree thinning and woodland management was deemed as appropriate, it was also noted that Bats, Squirrels and Owls use these spaces and nest/bat boxes could be installed. It was described as 'a shame to manicure the plots too much' and create something like a park. A couple of response described the ideas in listed Q5 as good and people clearly like and enjoy these spaces as they are.

Some planting of native woodland species /a community herb garden were mentioned. Unobtrusive signage would enhance the are including signage to identify trees and other plants. As with Q2 a farmers market possibly in a permanent covered area was mentioned.

Additional ideas included as archery, Forest Bathing, outdoor cinema and a wildlife pond and the appointment of a Woodland Manager (probably a volunteer).

Q5 Priority Ranking of 12 Suggested Activities, (also a list of ideas to trigger thinking for precious questions, should the respondent wish to revisit them. Q 2-4 Were deliberately 'open')

As part of the Application Process GURCA presented a range of ideas to the Land Fund, please can you put an number in the table below next to the opportunities 1. Highest Priority all the way to 12 Lowest Priority (you can rank as many of them as you think are important to you).

Its worth noting that responses varied here – not all respondents ranked all from 1-12, some left this blank – Also, it could be misleading that the Lowest Ranked activities are not popular Arts/Festivals were mentioned in Q2 and Q4 and Disc Golf was popular for those that tried in on the day. Some basic analysis of the ranking data has been made – the results broadly align with qualitative comments (Q1-Q4) the need to improve paths/active travel was clearly the highest priority as was something for Children and some form of Garden.

The processed data is on the next page:

Top 4 Priority Activities	Middle 4 Priority Activities	Lowest 4 Priority Activities
Paths/Active Travel	Outdoor Wellbeing	Arts Projects
Forest School/Toddlers	Dementia Friendly Woods	Festivals/Concert/Story Telling
Community Garden	Improving Biodiversity	Disc Golf
Nature/Sensory Trail	Heritage Trail	Other

Q 5 Simplified Data

Activity/Opportunity	Responses (total 28)	Total Score	Average Rank Score	Ranking
Dementia Friendly Woods	27	144	5.3	6
Paths/Active Travel	28	78	2.8	1
Art Projects	25	175	7	9
Forest School/Toddlers	28	126	4.5	2
Outdoor Wellbeing	26	129	5	5
Nature/Sensory Trail	24	122	5.1	4
Disc Golf	24	193	8	11
Improving Biodiversity	27	152	5.6	7
Heritage Trail	24	166	6.9	8
Community Garden	27	130	4.8	3
Festivals/Concerts/Storytelling	23	182	7.9	10
Other	7	83	11.9	12

Washing Line Feedback

This was an opportunity to add some creative suggestions for these spaces, these most were typically activity based and many aimed at Children/Young People:

Activities described included – Green Employability Courses for Young People (16-25), Meditation, Bug Hunts, Nocturnal Wild life club, Disc Golf, Archery, Winter Light Festival, Summer Garden Party, Forest Bathing, Community Woodbank collection, John Muir Award work, collaborative projects with Abriachan Forest Trust.

Infrastructure changes included – The Ruins in Plot 2 to be a ‘bandstand’ for music/festivals, Tree House, Story Bothy, Wildlife Pond, Dog Poo Bins, Community Woodbank, Fruit Trees and Herb Garden (near to the Hall), Meditation benches/Spaces. With the Viking Ship in Loch Ness an exhibition space was mentioned and the desire to ‘Think Big’.