

### **Eco-tourism Amenity Building Latest Design**

Since planning permission was awarded in April this year, we have been working to discharge the planning conditions. Until we have done this, no work that relates to the planning permission can take place. The most significant of these planning conditions is the requirement to widen access onto the A87, which is not only expensive, but can't start until Transport Scotland have reviewed and approved the design (at our cost!). We've been told that the review process is underway, and meantime we have been working on the building warrant for the amenity building which will accommodate showers, a kitchen and a lounge for guests, as well as the washroom, linen cupboards, storage, and an outside washing-up station. It will be constructed entirely from timber – as much of our own home-grown timber as possible – and will make the most of solar energy for hot water.



#### *The latest drawings from our architects*

A few weeks ago engineers came to look at the underlying ground conditions where the building will be sited. Fortunately, they concluded that the underlying ground was firm enough to avoid a deep (and expensive) concrete foundation. This gives us the flexibility to design the floor to suit renewable heating; and we've chosen a lightweight concrete floor with underfloor heating, which works much better with renewable water heating systems.

### **Finance & Community Shares**

The scale of the eco-tourism business has presented many challenges, some of which have been difficult to overcome, and as a result development has been slower than we would have liked. One of these challenges has been financing the project; we knew from the beginning that the bulk of finance would need to come from a mixture of sources, including grants and loans.

As we've worked through different options over the last couple of years, we've taken advice from a range of advisors and spoken to different development trusts and community woodland groups, as well as banks and mortgage companies. Going through this process has had many advantages – our ideas, our business plan, cashflow forecasting, and just about everything about the business has been reviewed and scrutinized by many different people, some of whom are very experienced in business development. While some suggestions have been made which would improve our plans, all have concluded that the business proposal is a very viable one, which has been reassuring. Although we could access loans from banks, the interest rates on offer and structure of repayments has not always been very attractive. Offering Shares in the business is a way to overcome these financing challenges. Community organisations across Scotland are increasingly using Community Shares to finance larger-scale developments such as hydro-schemes or large building projects. It's a cheaper way to access finance, but it also allows people with an interest in community driven work to invest in the future of their communities. After a lot of discussion, we recently decided that Community Shares is the best way to raise the finance for the eco-tourism business. Our first task to achieve this is to set up a new organization to administer the shares, as shares can only be administered by a specific legal entity called a 'Community Benefit Society'. So an application to form 'Glengarry Community Benefit Society' has been lodged with the Financial Conduct Authority. Next we will draft a Share Offer Prospectus explaining in detail exactly what shareholders are buying into, the mechanics of how interest payments are made, and crucially, the difference their investment will make for the community. Once this is complete and has been approved, we will launch our share offer in the next few months, and it'll likely be open for investment over a 4-8 week period. Making sure this is the right way forward for us, and getting it all ready, has been a substantial amount of work. However, we have received excellent support from Community Shares Scotland (part of the Development Trusts Association) and once we have the structure set up to offer shares, we think this is the way forward for other larger community developments that Glengarry may benefit from. The next edition of our newsletter will provide more detail.

## **Asset Transfer Panel Decision: Ardochy Forest**

Forestry and Land Scotland have approved the community's request to transfer 47ha of land at Ardochy Forest into community ownership. Our project has gained widespread praise, and the decision notice commented: "The CATS Evaluation Panel advised that Glengarry Community Woodlands has presented a compelling vision of woodland crofts and that this is an innovative proposal which will allow the demonstration of wider benefits to other communities".

However, we can't proceed with any work until we have a decision from the Scottish Land Fund - about our application for the purchase price of the land and the cost of some of the early-stage development work. We expect this to be soon, and the first task will be to instruct our solicitors to agree the terms and conditions of the sale. We have taken the time to develop this project very carefully because it pioneers a new model of community ownership. Once it is established, there is no doubt of the significant contribution it will make to the community and in addressing the local, regional and national housing crisis.

## **History Project**

With all the changes proposed for the community woodland, we are keen to record the history of the site around the Depot for posterity. Many people in Glengarry worked at the old Depot when it was owned and run by the Forestry Commission, and we would like to record people's memories and old photographs. Please get in touch if you have any information or old documents that could be interesting.

## **Spotlight on the Board**

We are starting a new feature for our newsletters called 'Spotlight on the Board' which gives Board members the chance to say something, starting off with one of our longer serving board members Bruce Kocjan.

*'Recently a local resident asked me if I was the "Mushroom Guy" to which I could only answer "Yes!" but there's much more to my work with Glengarry Community Woodlands.*

*I've been involved with GCW since 2014 when I became the chair of the steering committee which initially organised purchase of the community woodland. I retired from the GCW board about 6 months after the purchase and the GCW Ltd company*

*formed. After a year or so of helping out in the background, I was invited back to the board.*

*As well as my place on the GCW board, many of you may know me from my work with Tom on the kids groups and family events run in the woods. Until the recently, I helped Tom organise and run the Easter and Halloween events, organised and led the annual Birdsong and Mushroom walks, as well as doing session work on both the Into the Woods and Junior Rangers groups for school kids during the holidays. Add in the courses on Green Woodworking and you'll see that the community woods has kept me very busy! I've lived in Invergarry since 2006 after accepting a job with The Highland Council as a Great Glen Way Ranger. I've held that job for the last 15 years, working with schools, leading wildlife and history walks as well as keeping the long distance route up and running. A part of this is my great interest in environmental education and outdoor learning, especially for children and young people. The community woodland gives us a great opportunity to provide education and entertainment to many groups within the community. Engaging people with the environment around them brings an extra layer of experience to living in the Highlands, which feeds into our interaction with the local area in all sorts of ways, from where to go for a walk to how we respond to local development. Since it was formed GCW has tried to look at the development needs of Glengarry as a whole and, with our small patch of land, address them as best we can. Problems common to many rural communities such as ours include affordable housing availability and employment for local people. Between our eco-tourism project (aimed at providing local employment as well as income to support GCW's less commercial projects), and the Ardochy purchase (intended to provide affordable housing and croft land to allow alternative income for crofters) GCW aims to address these as well as we can. Sometime in the years to come I'd like to look at Glengarry and see a sustainable but productive community in control of it's development, with a drive to provide work for young people and space and encouragement for people's interests to grow and be shared.'*