

Morvern Community Woodlands (MCW)

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Annual General Meeting  
Achnaha Woods  
Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> August 2019, 7pm

*The meeting took place in the shelter in the woods.*

*Present:*

**Directors**

Veronique Walraven (chair)

Alasdair Firth (secretary)

Sally Semple (treasurer)

Bonnie Mealand

Annabel Lawrence

Hugh Morris

Annie Tordoff

**and**

Flori Lawrence (junior director)

**along with seven members of MCW, one junior members of MCW and one friend of MCW**

*Apologies:*

Linda Martin (member)

Minutes from 2018 AGM

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Veronique Walraven read through the minutes from the 2018 AGM and they were approved proposed Sally Semple seconded by Hugh Morris.

Chair's Report

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Veronique Walraven made her second report as chair of MCW. Her report was as follows:

In my report as chair I will first tell you what MCW has done this year. I will talk about changes in our directors, and I will talk a little about the future. It is always quite tricky because the year that I will talk about - which is from last year's AGM - doesn't quite overlap with the financial year.

In August last year, the same day as the AGM, Simon Dakin the horse logger and Tarzan moved a low of timber that had resulted from previous year's storms and windthrow and from dangerous trees.

There was a winter solstice in the woods on the 21<sup>st</sup> December.

Just before Christmas, we heard that our CRTB application for Killundine estate had been approved. This means that the community now officially has first refusal to purchase the Estate if it is put on the market.

In January the pensioners' firewood event gave a good workout for our many volunteers and resulted in firewood donations to around 25 local pensioners.

In February we trialled a hardwood auction of remaining left-over timber which hadn't been split or processed at the pensioners' firewood event.

In early spring Murdo Campbell did some drainage work around the shelter.

In April we did a Let's do Lunch, a stall at the Producer's market, and an Easter event/Eggstravaganza. This was also our first 'no waste' event.

In May Caroline Grindrod came to give a two-day workshop about regenerative grazing, looking at how can you farm and be kind to biodiversity, the soil and trees.

In June we had the School fayre where Flori and Iona, our youth representatives, made disks. There are still some discs available!

In July for the Morvern Games and Gala Week Eilidh-Ann Philips the ranger did a Golden Eagle Treasure Hunt in the Woods.

We have had several volunteer parties, not hard work but very useful. We installed a new gate at the bottom of the wood which will allow better access. This year we had some issues with the compost toilet. Someone was nearly locked in because the latch wasn't working properly and the toilet was out of use for several months as a family of wasps had made a home in the plastic casing of the toilet roll holder. Jake made a new bench out of wych elm to replace the old one (which was intended to be temporary). Future tasks will be some maintenance work on this shelter and we made a start on this.

MCW responded to consultations on Ardtornish Estate woodlands and the Scottish Forestry Strategy.

With thanks to the FC community grant MCW managed to buy new tools, including a scythe. A little storage unit will be coming soon and we are still discussing the location of this.

The 'Into Morvern's Woods' book is still selling through various outlets.

With regards to the future:

HIE has funded an economic appraisal for Killundine estate, which has now taken place. This is not a full feasibility study, as that will be part of the SLF stage 1 funding. The economic appraisal was done by Duncan MacPherson and co, and I will quote some of his conclusions:

*The above analysis has shown that community ownership of Killundine Estate can be a viable prospect where viability will be underpinned by the harvesting of existing forestry and planting new forestry blocks (Options B & C). The ability to harvest will depend upon the investment of £140,000 to create an access road and agreement with*

*FLS to use their road and pier. The value of the standing timber should mean that raising finance for the road either as a loan or in another form is not unduly difficult, and FLS have a record of facilitating timber extraction by private forest owners across FLS infrastructure. This study has modelled the income for a 5-year period but similar levels of forestry income can be forecast through further felling in each of the following three 5-year periods, and there is scope for considerable further afforestation as well. This level of income would provide significant surpluses for reinvestment in the estate. Other sectors will contribute smaller revenue streams but each are capable of operating at a surplus. The holiday cottages will produce a steady income stream but will need to be upgraded to enhance revenues and secure long-term use. Modest streams could also come from letting business/storage space. In the longer-term revenues may come from refurbished housing and new housing for affordable let. However, it is better to think of these as self-financing rather than contributing surpluses to invest elsewhere on the estate. The biggest management challenge arises from the current poor financial returns to traditional agriculture. It is questionable whether a farm tenant could be found to run a traditional operation, but it is likely that a number of tenants for smallholding or crofts could be found and produce a small but steady revenue stream, while achieving social goals of repopulating an area and ensuring continuing land management. In addition, land currently used for farming could be converted to woodland over the long term as an alternative and more sustainable use. Each of the options shows a negative cashflow in year 1 and there may be a community contribution required to fund the purchase, depending on whether or not the community is able to secure a discount from the seller on the purchase price of the estate. Neither of these should be an impediment to community purchase in the light of the potential revenue streams from the forestry operation. However, they are considerations that the community will need to weigh when making a decision on whether or not to seek to purchase the estate. In summary the community ownership of Killundine estate is a viable option that could generate significant economic, environmental and social benefits for the Morvern community for at least the next generation.*

There has been recent discussion about paths and access in Morvern. MCW with MCC would like to establish which paths we are currently losing. With this information we can come up with a plan.

We are aware that currently MCC/MCDC with financial help from MCT are hoping to arrange community consultations about a community plan. MCW feels that Killundine plans can tie in with these ideas.

In the summer MCW was approached by RSPB who want to do a peninsular-wide project which focuses mostly on the removal of rhododendron, but might have much wider implications. They are looking into grant money now. Their case looks to be fairly strong, partly because of previous consultations. One of our inputs so far has been our strong recommendation that one of the outcomes should be the creation of jobs.

## Changes in directors:

Claire Manthorpe and Bonny Mealand stepped down at our last AGM while Hugh Morris and Annabel Lawrence joined us at that AGM. Bonny rejoined us in January. Nick Tordoff left in February, Tim Barnes left in March, Sam Firth left us in July, and Annie Tordoff joined us in July. Our sincere thanks to all of our directors past and present - we couldn't do it without you. We currently have 7 directors, but we can have more directors. For a better representation of our community, we are particularly looking for younger folk and for men. So if any young men (or anyone else) want to join our board, please let us know. There is usually cake at our meetings!

## Treasurer's Report

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Sally Semple made her first report as Treasurer. She noted that MCW carries out multiple activities most of which require funding, even though individual amounts are often small. The bank account has a balance of around £3000. This is a suitable amount for maintenance of Achnaha which costs around £1000/year. However, with the aspiration to take on future projects, a balance this small could have cash flow implications unless carefully managed. Therefore, projects like Killundine need always to be accounted for and costs paid up front. She summarised the accounts for 2017-18. The drainage and clearing maintenance project ran over two financial years and was funded from two different sources; some work remains to process the timber from the dangerous trees felled and this will form part of the wood for pensioners' firewood with any surplus being sold, probably by public auction. Thanks are due to Morvern Community Trust and Ardtornish Hydro Fund for their support. The ongoing project with Killundine has been set up so that all costs are covered by grants and work will not be undertaken unless prior funding has been secured. This project will therefore break even. The drainage and clearing maintenance project will also break even. Achnaha wood will recoup a small amount from timber sales, but this will not be enough to offset the insurance costs in this financial year. Donations boxes are bringing in a small but valuable income. Members highlighted the importance of the woodland booklet to the accounts.

The accounts were adopted. Proposed Annie Tordoff, seconded Hugh Morris.

## Achnaha Woods

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Alasdair Firth gave a summary of the work that has been carried out over the past year to ensure Achnaha is both financially viable and well managed. A new management was written and approved by the directors and this has now also been approved by Scottish Forestry (the successor organisation to Forestry Commission Scotland). This means that MCW can apply for grants through the Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme, which should deliver a small but reliable cash-flow for woodland maintenance. The plan will see continuity of management of the woods with no major changes proposed but with scope to restore around 1ha of the lower wood to native hazel and oak woodland from its current

dominance by sycamore. This sycamore could also be sold for timber. In the rest of the wood, *Chalara* ash dieback is seriously affecting the ash trees with almost all the saplings infected. Older pole stage trees and mature trees are also now being infected, though some appear to be more tolerant than others. This disease is likely to alter the species composition of the wood and the previous plan to move the wood from sycamore dominance to a more diverse ash/alder mix is no longer viable. Therefore, the new plan proposes some thinning of the sycamore, which should improve conditions for woodland ground flora, particularly bluebells, and *ad hoc* felling of sycamore and ash when they are dangerous. An annual assessment of all the trees in the wood, as well as browsing levels, is carried out, as well as checks after strong winds and storms.

Achnaha hut needs some maintenance and new posts have been cut from Norway spruce in the wood to replace the rotten ones on the open north end. These are awaiting installation.

#### Killundine

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Alasdair Firth recapped some of the work on the Killundine project. As Veronique said, the initial financial feasibility carried out by Duncan MacPherson of Campbell Stewart MacLennan has shown that Killundine could be viable under community ownership. An application to the Scottish Land Fund will be submitted. If approved, this will lead to appointment of consultants who will carry out detailed feasibility and community consultation work. This work would start in late October and be completed by the New Year.

#### Any Other Business

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Discussion on potential to co-opt directors from younger members of the community.

**The AGM ended at 8pm**