Report from the Chair period 1st June 2022 to 31st May 2023

This has been a very different year to the last when most detail contained in our long term plan came to fruition, a new phase and a change of emphasis is upon us and the aim from now on must be to look after and maintain what we have. However the basics will never change the management of a woodland is complex it requires a team able to multi task and most importantly to have the ability to perform forestry work safely. In the North of Scotland an understanding of seasonal weather, what it may bring and a strategy to deal with situations as they occur is essential to a safe and satisfactory outcome.

Additional considerations, like public access and charity status are complications we must always take into account. Fortunately as in previous years we have coped well and as a fall back position we have established a good relationship with the National Trust at Inverewe, recently having received assurances that if needed they would do their best to offer some help.

Most of the work we do is carrying out routine forestry tasks we are used to, but each year throws up new challenges, overcoming them is both interesting and satisfying for our volunteers a real sense of achievement when a problem is overcome and each test we pass is a small chapter in our journal of learning.

Working in a rural community we accept our potential for help is limited, a problem we have outlined in previous reports and at public meetings. The youth of the area tend to leave and pursue education or careers elsewhere, those of working age are already employed, many are self employed, a mixture of crofting, building and hospitality accounting for most. Retired or semi retired who have some spare time but wish to stay active will always be our most fruitful source of practical support, but this has its own problems, some move on and as people get older, whilst their spirit remains strong their ability to perform as they used to is reduced, re-location to be nearer to the needs age brings is inevitable for some. Although the number of regular volunteers is low we have managed well.

Basic maintenance has been carried out as usual,

Winter storm damage (less than we have experienced in some years) was dealt with efficiently.

Paths kept open and clear, allowing free access for the public throughout.

Clearing self seeding interlopers (mostly lodgepole pine) encroaching the newly planted compartment four has been addressed, although we acknowledge this will be a perennial problem, at least until the newly planted trees are well established.

The replacement of the five old bridges was started leaving only two to be constructed in the following year 23 – 24.

A tremendous effort on firewood production has delivered our best result to date placing us in a healthy and robust financial position.

Our trail system is now complete with paths to suit most needs and choice.

Any training requiring external verification carried out.

Equipment maintained and repaired if necessary.

During the course of the year, we have once again had to look seriously at the future and what it holds for Laide Wood. Our working party volunteers are at the lowest level since the wood came into community ownership, this is not entirely surprising and is a common trait amongst voluntary based projects especially those, which are long term. However I am confident the local community will always step up and provide what the woodland needs to sustain it as a Company Limited by Guarantee without Shareholders, a Charity Registered in Scotland and an important local amenity. As this year closed the number of directors who are automatically trustees stood at five and it is essential to maintain a viable board. All current directors are regular working party volunteers and whilst that is commendable it is not necessary and anyone wishing to join the board as an administrator would be most welcome. At the start of every financial year we take stock of what we need to do and set our priorities, as long as we don’t overstretch ourselves we will be able to achieve those aims and the more regular help we get the more we will be able to undertake. Involvement from the community in projects they would like to see completed would add an extra dimension and stimulate interest, which may lead to more taking an active role in management. Keeping the wood open throughout a global pandemic and its contribution to the health of those able to use it shouldn’t be forgotten or under estimated and it may well be needed again.

Coming to the end of this report I would like to thank the volunteers who put in the hard work in sometimes very difficult conditions, inclement weather and the physical effort which is sometimes needed to complete a task is always met with determination and good spirits, thanks to you the members who continue to support us, and to those people who regularly send in donations to help with administration and the projects we undertake.

Laide Wood is special, not just because it is a welcoming green space offering a wonderful experience, that is certainly special but so is your loyal support. Some of our members have been with us since day one, over twenty years and you all have seen the woodland develop and our ambitions grow. It has been nurtured through difficult times and now, thanks to you it attracts and surprises everyone who cares to walk the trails. We all should be proud.

Thank you,

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*John Rippin*

*Chair LACW*