

AGM October 2022 Report from the Chair

When I start the Chairman's report I always have to remind myself this is a report covering our previous financial year with a little peep into the future if necessary so we start in June 2021 and it finishes in 2022.

I was surprised how much we had manage to achieve in this twelve month period so I hope you are all as impressed as I was.

It has proved successful year, we have come to terms with the challenges we expect when managing a project like ours on the North West Coast of Scotland, it will always be difficult.

Winter is a hard lesson but so far we have always come through with excellent grades.

The Late Queens platinum Jubilee was celebrated on the 2nd of June and a commemorative plaque was fixed permanently to a boulder adjacent to our fine stand of Scots Pine we had dedicated to the Queen's Green Canopy.

Towards the end of the month our firewood stores were full of split logs and we had a reserve of rounds taken from

seasoned logs, to back up our stocks as we moved towards the winter.

Ahead lay a full programme of improvements and fabrication, financed all or in part by restricted funding which had to be spent within the financial year.

Trails needed attention and wooden benches, repaired and re-stained. Piles of brash, which had built up over the years had been chipped and general tidying up was taking place anticipating the inspection following our application to Scotland's Finest Wood Award.

Using grant money carried over from 2020 21 we purchased all of the timber we required to replace the five older bridges, which had been in place for seventeen years.

The larch needed was sourced from the National Trust at Poolewe with whom we continue to collaborate, supporting one another when we can.

All the older bridges now required constant attention and repair, the obvious answer was to replace them.

By mid Summer two had been replaced and another completed as we moved into Autumn, the final two will be completed in this current financial year.

The engineering and fabrication of the bridges has been carried out to the highest standards, ensuring structural integrity, some would say over engineered, this was our intention, to ensure longevity, the extra care and money spent should give the two new bridges and five replacements a life of at least 30 years and all constructed by our own volunteers.

On the 17th September it was announced we had won Scotland's Finest Woods Award in the Community Woodlands Category beating some impressive opposition. A tremendous achievement winning one of the most prestigious awards in Forestry. It was decided to use the prize money to commemorate the award and we commissioned the carving of a large pinecone over 1.5 metres high with a slate plaque describing the award. This stands proudly on the trail as you leave the main car park in a clockwise direction.

Adding this award to our Queens Award for Voluntary Service means, as far as we are aware, we have now achieved the full set of awards open to a community woodland like ours, run entirely by volunteers.

October saw three volunteers undertake ATV training all successfully completing the Lantra Course. This gave us additional flexibility when using probably the most important item of the equipment we have, our Quad Bike. This 750 cc machine is our workhorse and used on many tasks we perform in the wood.

As we moved past Christmas the Winter Storms were very severe in both January and February.

Storm Eunice arriving on the coat tails of storm Dudley created serious damage with dangerous trees hanging over trails and fallen trees blocking routes. At this point there was a danger to the public and with regret we had to close the wood.

It took a mammoth effort by the volunteers working every day for over a week to clear obstacles and once made safe, the wood was opened again on the 21st February.

In March a postcode lottery grant allowed us to add two excellent interpretation boards one in each car park.

When the link trail was finished our paths system was complete, we now have over five kilometres of paths and trails.

The boards are up to date so will continue to show current information.

The artwork was designed by one of our members Lou Bramham who provided her services free of charge.

Our new website was up and running by April.

This is a tremendous improvement on the original website which had served us well and lasted over 6 years,

The new website is both user friendly for the members and Trustees, who can in-put information and bring the website up to date as things happen.

Firewood continues to be our only self generated income stream, sales for 2021 2022 totalling over £9000 and thanks to the volunteers who were prepared to put in many extra hours processing the storm damaged timber from February we had a good start for the Autumn Winter sales 2022 2023. Since we began selling firewood our prices have remained the same.

It has been suggested by quite a few people we should increase the price we charge but the Trustees have always seen this as providing a vital community service and given the current “cost of living crisis” and “fuel cost increases” we will be needed this year more than ever.

Finally to finish this chairman’s report I would like to share with you a concern I have personally.

We have a small regular group carrying out all duties required to keep the woodland safe and open to the public. They deal with everything both the physically demanding work and complicated administration. It is to their credit we have achieved so much particularly in the last year.

However my concern is, as Chair, “are we (by we I mean the community) expecting too much of them” and what would happen if those numbers were depleted for one reason or another.

Since the covid restrictions have eased we have seen volunteers take time away, having a well earned break for the first time in over two years.

When we lose some of our regulars we realise how much we rely on every single one and remember, some of us are not getting any younger.

So now, whilst the current trustees are still able to fulfil the tasks required, is the time to step back and take stock if Laide Wood is to continue to develop and survive well into the future.

Our aim for the last twenty years has been to develop and improve the woodland in the interests of conservation and recreation. We have planted over 60,000 trees mostly broad leaf adding to the biodiversity.

We now have a woodland of mixed species of various ages which we hope will be enjoyed by generations to come.

I believe now is the time to reach out to the community, we need others to get involved, regular volunteers with a variety of skills would be useful, but more importantly people showing commitment and enthusiasm.

If we can't find that from the Local Community, in order for the wood to survive, we will have little choice but seek a viable alternative in accordance with the conditions laid out in our Governing Document. That should be part of the journey we take over the next twelve months.

John Rippin

Chair