

Community Woodlands Association Conference 3 October 2020

Questions from woodland crofts breakout session

From Ariane Burgess : I'm keen to know what legal issues - Scot Gov and Local Council Planning etc get in the way of people setting up and running woodland crofts - if anything.

Scot Gov (SG) policy is broadly supportive, woodland crofts have been regularly mentioned in the annual Programme for Government in recent years. There are a few 'historic' issues where wider policy or support systems haven't caught up with woodland crofts (eg some woodland crofters not being eligible for CAGS grants) but the Woodland Crofts Partnership (WCP) has engaged with SG and these are being addressed for the future.

Planning approval for houses on woodland crofts (indeed on any croft) can be a challenge but most Councils in the crofting areas have supportive policies towards crofting in their development plans and forestry strategies. These tend to be more supportive of the 'township' scale approach of community groups, than of individual prospective woodland crofters where the default position will often be standard 'housing in the countryside' type policies.

However, fair to say that in many respects the model is still fairly new and council officers and other public officials are still finding their way on all this.

From Donald McPhillimy : I'd like to bring up the issue of huts on forest crofts. I'm with the Thousand Huts campaign.

Hopefully covered in the session but e-mail me if not.

From Brendan O'Hanrahan : there haven't been in any 'common woodlands' yet, have there?

No. The question groups would have to ask themselves before doing this is, what additional benefit would be gained by putting a common area of woodland under crofting tenure (available to crofting shareholders only), as opposed to keeping it as a more traditional community woodland? (available to all)

From Colin Grant : Is there a defined percentage of the woodland which is acceptable to convert into sheds / buildings / grow tunnels?

Such 'development' would practically speaking need to take place within open space in the woodland. The UK Forestry Standard requires an element of designed open space in woodland, and the normal limit to this might be 10 or 15%. Obviously this should be designed for a variety of reasons that enhance the forest (rather than focused on development). However, the actual definition of

woodland itself (at least 20% canopy cover of trees, by area) means there is also plenty of scope for openings and glades in a woodland over and above formal designed open space.

From Brendan O'Hanrahan : pre-existing trees factor is surely a strong argument for community woodland ownership being best model for woodland croft tenure

Can be a key factor in making a woodland croft affordable – if the community has to pay a high capital value on account of the timber, they can't necessarily then give this away to the crofter. But because they legally own the trees even after the croft is let, the community can 'sell' them (in various ways) as they are used thus spreading the cost to the crofter over a period of years. Of course some new woodland crofts are harvested sites so this factor doesn't then apply!

From Serena Mason : How does the right to buy impact on continuity?

Hopefully covered in the session but e-mail me if not.

From Ariane Burgess : Are there any collective initiatives - like biochar production - sharing equipment and distribution of product.

Not yet, as far as I'm aware, but it is early days in terms of a 'collective' or township approach to woodland crofts – so far only North West Mull and Kilfinan have established multiple crofts in this way, and both sites were recent clearfell sites.

If anyone wants to follow up further on these or other points, they can e-mail me on info@woodlandcrofts.org – or have a look at our website where there is lots more info available <http://woodlandcrofts.org/>

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