

**The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service**

The MBE for volunteer groups



LAIDE & AULTBEA
Community Woodland

**Presentation to the
Sunart Community
3rd November 2021**

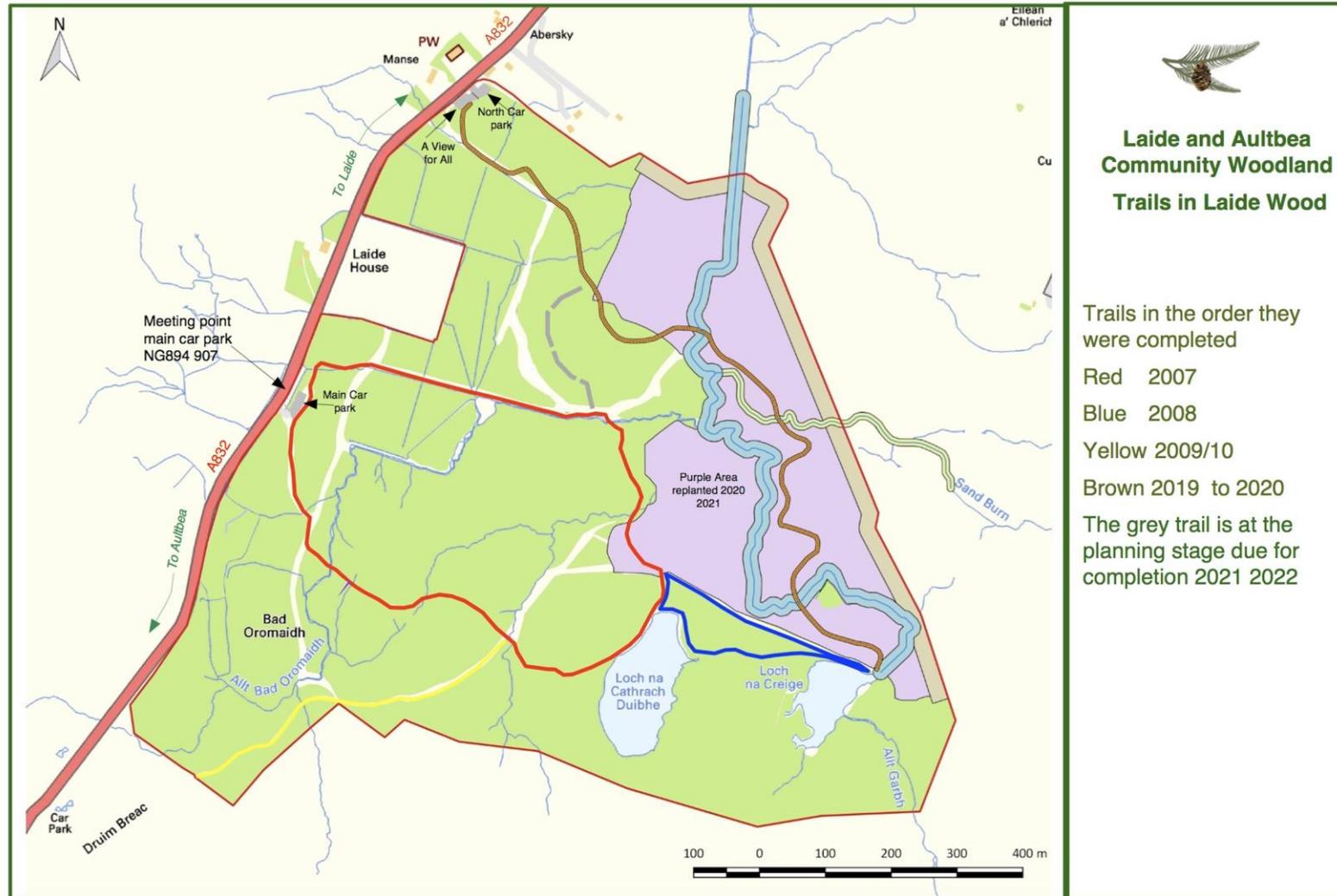


**Community Woodlands Award for
Small Community Woodland Group
2021 WINNER**

www.sfwa.co.uk

LACW extends to 86.6 hectares (214 acres)

There are two lochans and a cascade



Brief History of Laide & Aultbea Community Woodland

- The wood was originally owned by the Forestry Commission who planted mainly lodgepole pine in the 1960's
- Little management was carried out and the woodland was sold in 1993 and then changed hands several more times.
- The woodland was offered to the community in 2002 for £75k
- It was in a poor state, already storm damaged and the timber was of low value.
- A plan to purchase the wood was approved by a good majority of the community.
- Offers of help were made by many people

- In 2003 the woodland became the property of the community.
- A Company Limited by Guarantee without shares was formed and we were also registered in Scotland as a Charity.
- Our key charitable objectives:
 - To manage access to the wood, provide opportunities for recreation and to regenerate and conserve the woodland
 - To encourage community involvement in the management of the woodland
- The woodland is run by Trustees/Directors drawn from the local community and has a small but enthusiastic volunteer team and a membership of around 130.

Early Days

- The woodland was dark with many areas of tangled and wind-blown trees
- Large burns were discovered as well as two lochans
- The few existing trails were overgrown and water-logged
- Work focused on creating paths and trying to open up the woodland
- Equipment was basic; handsaws, picks, shovels and wheelbarrows
- **A word of warning!** Although many people had pledged their time, in reality less than 10% ever came to help

- Volunteers managed to cut a few very crude trails



In 2005 after 2 years of hard work a hurricane force storm ripped through the wood flattening whole areas of trees.



- This storm affected Scotland and Scandinavia resulting in a glut of cheap timber.
- Not only did damaged trees need to be removed but also stands of mature trees.
- The disaster was turned into an opportunity - new paths were created and 33,000 mainly deciduous trees were planted.
- **The clear-fell income did not cover the whole cost.**
- Grant funding was plentiful in those days (Highland Enterprise, Scottish Land Fund, Ross & Cromarty Enterprise and the Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme)



Opening up the wood and creating paths etc. continued by volunteers and LACW was officially opened in May 2007



More Setbacks

In April 2008 a fire caused by irresponsible muir burning swept across the neighbouring hillside and caught the south-east corner of the wood and quickly spread through the perimeter trees.



At one point the entire wood was under threat as the wind picked up. Fortunately, just when it was thought all would be lost, there was a heavy downpour and the wind changed direction halting the progress of the fire.



The impact of storms always has been, and remains a threat to the woodland and the aftermath requires immediate attention by competent volunteers to ensure the safety of visitors



Flooding is another challenge!

Trails are flooded and in the past bridges have been washed away.



Early day challenges were considerable but were overcome with determination and commitment from local people ably assisted by outside help including an NTS group and the Army!

By 2016 some volunteers having “done their bit” had moved on or retired. Some who remained demonstrated “volunteer fatigue”.

However, fresh recruits brought a new lease of life.



2016 to the present day

The last major element of our current Forestry Management Plan was the clear felling and replanting of compartment 4 (20.1 hectares)



The clear fell of Compartment 4 provided a net receipt of £38k

2017-2020 A New Trail & Replanting of Compartment 4

In 2017 a new 1.4 km trail was constructed through Compartment 4

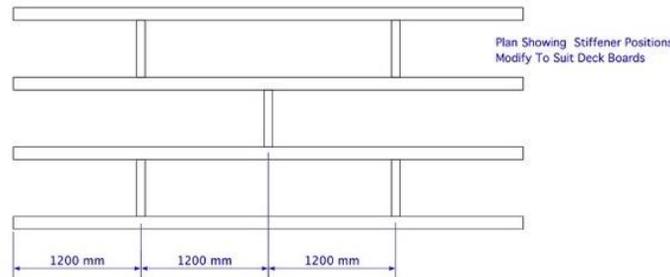
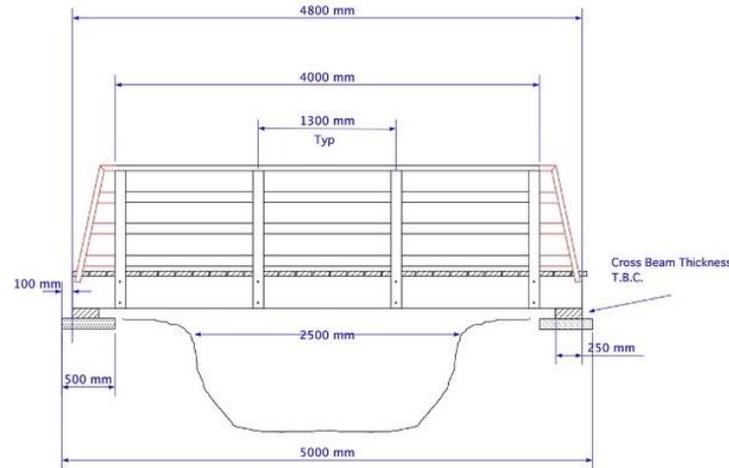
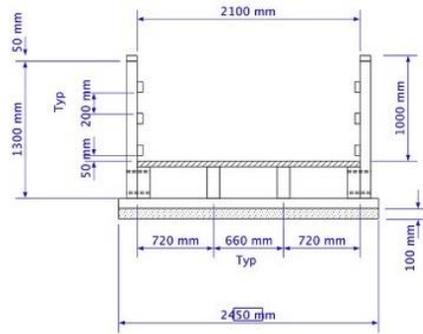
Half the trail was taken to “as-dug” condition

Half the trail was dressed with “Type one” aggregate as far as Sand Burn

This cost £21k



In 2018/2019 volunteers designed, milled the timber & built 2 bridges across Sand Burn on the new trail



Laidie Wood New Trail Bridge 7
Bridge 4800mm Lg useable width 2000mm

Larch Main Beams 4 x Req 300mm x 120mm x 4800mm Lg
Beams secured to timber Cross Beams with steel brackets, coach screws and CSK Screws

Stiffeners 5 x Req 200mm x 75mm (Or Similar) x 540mm Lg (approx)
Stiffeners secured to Main Beams with CSK Screws

Deck Boards 30 x Req 150mm x 50mm x 2100mm Lg
Boards spaced @12mm and secured to Main Beams with CSK Screws

Handrail Posts 8 x Req 100mm x 100mm x 1300mm Lg
Posts secured to Main Beams with 2 x 12mm coach bolts
Jan 2019 Handrails Modified
Lengths altered to suit

Toe and Handrails 8 x Req 100mm x 50mm x 4000mm Lg
Rails secured to Posts with CSK Screws

Concrete Pads 2 x Req 2450mm x 500mm x 100mm
If Practical dig out ground so that top of pad is level with top of trail

28/10/2018

Cross Beams 1 x 2450mm x 250mm x 100mm
1 x 2450mm x 250mm x 160mm

30/11/18





The new bridges allowed access so 16,600 trees could be planted in Compartment 4

18,000 mounds were created in June 2019



Tree planting was scheduled for October 2019 but due to weather conditions the trees were planted late 2019/early 2020

Species include alder, willow, aspen, birch, Scot's Pine, rowan, oak and hazel.

All trees have local provenance - seeds could be harvested in future.



The mounding, planter & trees cost c.£19k which was funded:

Forestry Commission planting scheme £7k.

Clear fell receipts £8k

Wood reserves £4k

Following completion of the tree planting the new trail could be finished.

February 2020 Awards for All confirmed £10k towards the cost of completing the new trail

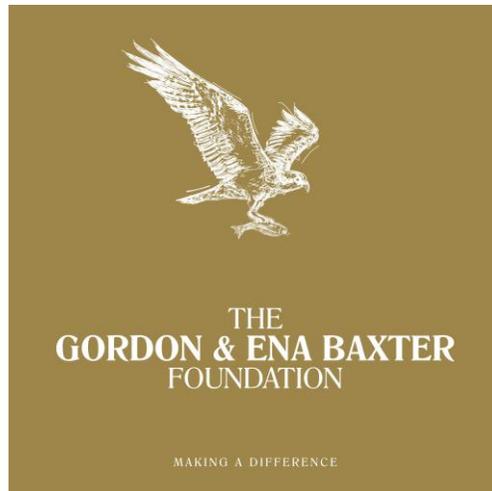


A local contractor completed the trail by 20 July 2020

The new trail cost £20k of which half came from the clear-fell receipts

The Contractor was asked to surface an extra area by the entrance to the new trail so an accessible picnic area “A View for All” could be developed

Successful funding applications in September & December 2020 to the Ena & Gordon Baxter Foundation and to Scotland Loves Local provided £5,000 towards funding for this project.



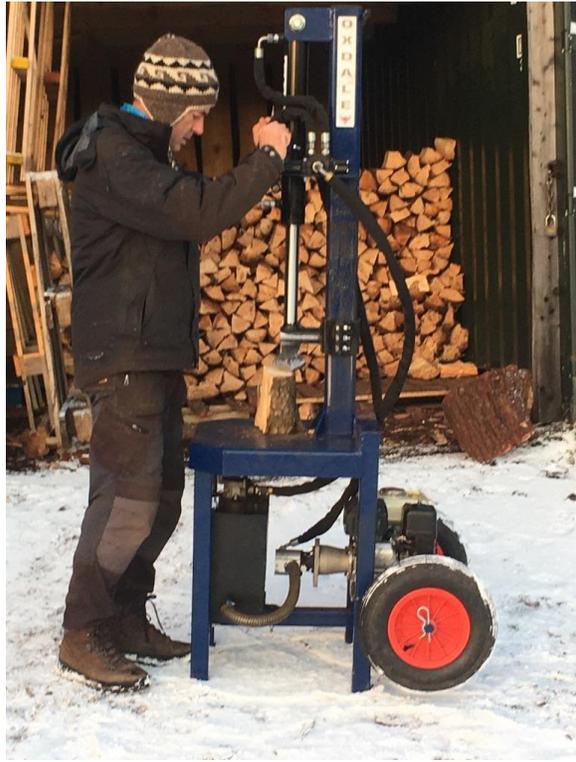
2021 News

January 2021

Despite Covid restrictions, the wood remained open for the community and some volunteers continued working in bubbles during lockdown. This ensured the wood was safe for users and the firewood sales could continue during a cold winter.



Volunteers at work in the wood



New and refurbished signs by one of the volunteers



February 2021

An application for funding to purchase materials to replace five bridges was submitted to the People's Postcode Trust



11th February 2021 once again saw the wood under threat from a fire which was started by irresponsible muir burning that afternoon.

The fire reached our eastern fence line with trees along the perimeter catching fire.





Once again the wood was saved by a change in the direction of the wind.

The next day volunteers helped stamp out flare-ups while fire crews doused hot spots.



March 2021

Encouraged by the views of Scottish Forestry about our planting programme and general forestry work we submitted an application to Scotland's Finest Woods Awards.



Scotland's Finest Woods Awards

Community Woodlands Award 2021



Success! £10,072 awarded for
bridge replacement programme

Construction drawings were prepared along with a timber cutting list.



Inverewe confirmed that their sawmill *could* mill and
supply the larch timber for all the bridges

Orders were placed for a drilling jig, ironmongery, a cement mixer and
materials.

April 2021

“A View for All” accessible area was created: the old “kissing gate” was replaced with accessible gate & the boundary re-fenced and recycled plastic accessible furniture installed ready for summer picnics!



New noticeboards & donation posts were installed in the main & north car parks.



Over £650 has been collected from the posts in the last 6-months



July 2021

We were shortlisted for Scotland's Finest Woods Awards and two Judges, Bob Dunsmore & Syd House, both with extensive forestry management experience visited the woodland and spent over 3-hours with us.

We were hopeful



August 2021

Beams and timber for first replacement bridge received from the NTS was marked up, cut to length & drilled ready for installation.



Bridge 4 was prioritised. When the burn from Loch Na Creige was in spate the old bridge acted as a dam causing flooding in the surrounding area.



The new bridge 4 was installed from 10th - 16th August 2021







24th August 2021 - filming for SFWA on a bright & sunny day



September 2021

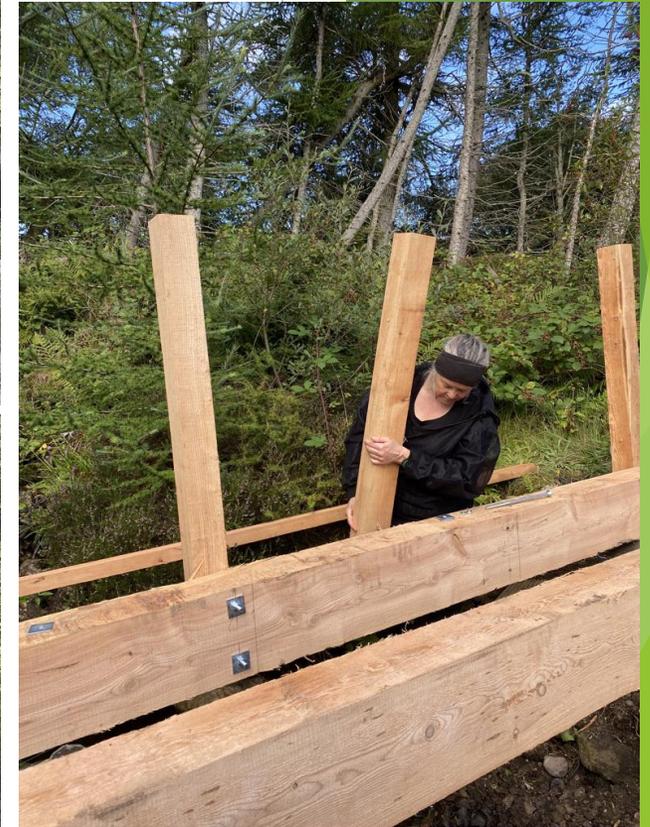
On the 10th September 2021 LACW was announced as the winner of Scotland's Finest Woods Award for a small community woodland



£1,000
awarded in
prize money

The Judges noted that “overall this was a very impressive community woodland”

2nd bridge replacement (Bridge 1) was installed 13th - 17th September





Firewood sales started on 25th September and will continue throughout the winter



Wind blown trees are cut into rounds
Rounds are carried to the trailer and transported back to the firewood store
Rounds are split into logs
Logs are bagged
Happy customers collect their firewood
We estimate 4.5 hours of volunteer time are required to generate one load



October 2021

On a wet and windy day, 3 of the regular volunteer team completed their LANTRA "All Terrain Vehicle" training



Ongoing tasks



'Minutes away from a Major Incident'



On the afternoon of the 11th February 2021 a sequence of events began that would later strike fear and anxiety into many of us living in the Laide and Aultbea area. A wildfire began out on the moorland and with the tinder dry ground and strong Easterly winds it was heading in only one direction, East towards the two villages. What we did not know at that point was what direction it would eventually take and just how close it would come to homes and property and ultimately our precious community wood.

A rather nervous and sleepless night for many followed and it wouldn't be until the next day that we discovered just how close to a 'Major Incident' we had come. Read on for the full report in 'A report from the Chair'.



A Charity Registered in Scotland number SC034434
A Company Limited By Guarantee without shareholders registered in Scotland No SC249676



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The Directors and Trustees of the Wood are very proud to announce that the 'A View for All' picnic area is now complete and ready for both locals and visitors to enjoy.

During the spring a new easy election of seating has been put in. The welcoming space in which to take in the untailed ridges

Will enjoy this to see your member to tag us em.



This finished 'View for All' picnic area.



It was announced on the 19th September at an online awards ceremony that Laide and Aultbea Community Woodland was the 2021 winner of the Scotland's Finest Wood Award in the small community woods category. This is a hugely prestigious award for us to have been given and is a testament to the hard work and dedication of all the volunteers who have contributed over the years and also to the support given to us by the local trust.

So to say on receipt of the Award, "It has been a journey, a privilege shared by us all, we've received from the Community, our members and you all, join us in celebrating this for our Community and our members whose

history and story behind Laide wood in an old Journal on September 21st. A link to which

www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/highlands/3485969/branching-out-how-a-community-changed-the-fate-of-a-fading-woodland/



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Book-keeping for Accountant to prepare year-end accounts

Liaison with Scottish Forestry



Scottish Forestry
Coilltearachd na h-Alba

Ensuring compliance with OSCR & Companies House regulations

Production of newsletters by one of our volunteers

Developments underway:

- A new website will be launched next month
- New trail maps are being designed by one of our volunteers
- A carved sculpture in the main car park to mark the achievement of SFWA
- Three more bridge replacements starting in the next week

Looking Ahead

- Continue to focus on forestry management to enhance the woodland.
- We will create new trails
- Longer term develop a seed nursery?
- To manage LACW in a sustainable way

Things to think about

Trustees/Directors

- Appoint Trustees who will bring some benefit to the wood.
- 4-years ago there were 11 Trustees - several did not engage
- Currently have 6 and definitely “less is more”
- Many tasks at LACW are done by volunteers who are not Trustees

Volunteers

- People have different motives for volunteering
- Volunteers give varying levels of time commitment and skill
- Much of the work is physically hard and carried out in poor weather - it's not for some people!
- You need a core of volunteers who are willing to get stuck in regardless of the job or the weather (or the midges)
- Bridges don't build themselves firewood doesn't appear by magic
- Remember less than 10%!

At LACW Unrestricted Funding is needed for:

Purchase & upkeep of:

- All Terrain Vehicle
- Trailers
- Logosol milling machine
- Log splitter
- Chipper
- Chainsaws
- Material for path repairs
- Fencing
- Information & interpretation signs

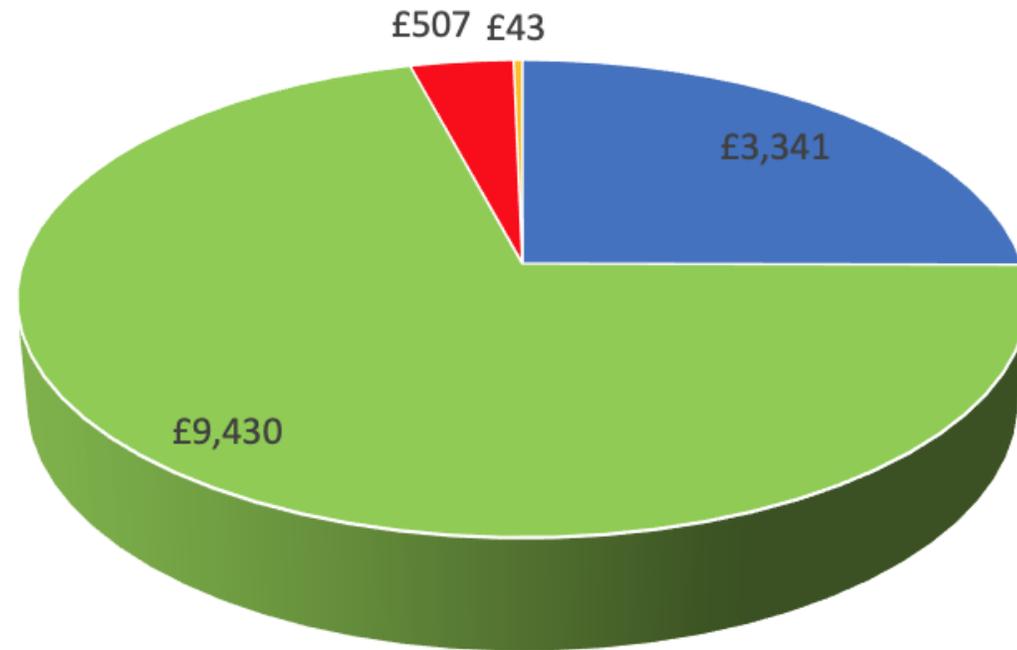
Admin. & General Costs:

- Insurance
- Co.House/OSCR compliance
- Office expenses
- Newsletters
- Training

Managing the wood's Finances

- Our aim is to raise enough revenue to cover operating costs, contribute to new developments, match-fund grant applications & have enough reserves for emergencies
- We aim to keep reserves of c.£20k
- In the last 2 years our unrestricted income has been c.£26k giving a net contribution of £6k to reserves
- Restricted income over the last 2-years has been £37,400 used solely for projects

2020/21



- Donations & membership 25%
- Firewood sales 71%
- Gift Aid 4%
- Deer management

Firewood sales represent our main source of unrestricted income (71% in 2020/21).

Sales from our Firewood Club & honesty bags has increased from £1,700 in 2017/18 to to £9,430 in 2020/21.



Membership

- Optional
- Low cost
- Life membership is a bad thing!
- Make it easy to join - from online website

Donations

Obvious donation posts on the ground

Online using a platform such as PayPal

Claim Gift Aid

Members

Donors

Promotion

- Website
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Local press



Events

- Pre-Covid, we organised community events such as guided bird walks or seasonal activities such the Children's Easter Egg hunt.
- We partnered with local schools and the Highland Ranger service
- Events were useful at first to increase awareness of the wood but turned out to be time consuming and expensive (insurance)

There will be **disappointments** and **setbacks** but our work makes a difference

- our accessible trail has opened the wood up to many more people
- People have described the wood as “a lifesaver” providing breathing space away from busy family or working lives.
- Friendships develop as people meet up to walk their dogs together
- People regularly use the trails for exercise to keep fit
- People enjoy watching wildlife from the hide and taking photographs

Our Chair's favourite quote (Anonymous)

“A community grows strong when old men plant trees whose shade they will never sit under”.



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for Voluntary Service**

The MBE for volunteer groups

Thank you for listening!



LAIDE & AULTBEA
Community Woodland



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2021 WINNER

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