



Summary of key issues/decisions

- **Forest Acquisition**
 - The board has agreed NOT TO PROCEED with any major acquisition proposal of the Strathmashie Forest at present. It has also ruled out any lease arrangement of the Forest estate and trails. (See more details below)
- **Expanding Paths & Trails**
 - Discussions with Sustrans for assessing the feasibility of expanding off road paths and trails to “connect the hamlets” of Laggan, have been agreed -“Connecting Laggan”. The phase 1 feasibility study to determine possible routes has been delayed since April 2020 but discussions re-started in late August.
 - A plan to improve an existing steep forest trail in the Blackwood into an all abilities trail is likely to start in October 2020.
 - Providing a new “Blue trail” in the Laggan Wolftrax Trails. The Board has agreed that it CANNOT fund this development without a specific agreement with FLS on its future maintenance and agreement for public liability insurance. (See below for more details)
- **Forestry**
 - There has been very little active forest management allowed by FLS, for the Trust to participate in, in recent years – a known source of continuing frustration for many community members.
 - Overnight Camping/Campervan Trial – July 2020. Having consulted with local residents, the Trust objected to FLS plans to advertise unmonitored overnight campervan parking at Laggan Wolftrax and Pattack Falls. The FLS trial went ahead and is to be extended. This activity is unlikely to stop in the foreseeable future and the Trust may need to explore how to manage its impact in future months, on behalf of the community.

Key Actions items from last members meeting

- 1) Continue to explore options for acquisition or lease of the Strathmashie Forest. Concern was expressed by the Public Sector support bodies about the potential size of the acquisition, the capacity of the community and of the Board to undertake it. There also remain questions of public liability, health and safety obligations and any on-going maintenance of the existing trail infrastructure – regardless of any financial obligations possible. Agree to explore a revised Partnership agreement with Forestry on a project-by-project basis.**

UPDATES:

- a. Forestry & Land Scotland (FLS) wrote to the LFT board in October 2019, proposing an annulment of the 2004 Partnership agreement indicating no future viable or feasible management of the forest estate by LFT – as was written into the Partnership agreement. The FLS Proposal is to replace with a Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) focussed primarily on recreation and access to the forest estate and trails in Strathmashie Forest with a series of individual agreements tabled as required. Discussions have not re-started since COVID 19 emerged.
 - b. Requests to FLS in past 3 years for access to clearing any timber windfall in Strathmashie Forest for community use have been refused.
 - c. No commercial timber exists in the Trust’s own ownership with which to provide any future revenue stream & employment in “forestry”. It remains open to LFTFC to bid for forestry and related contracts. Our small size however, places us at a competitive disadvantage in any public procurement centrally decided by FLS.
 - d. The consequence of the above along with our present capabilities and limited resources suggest that the main source of on-going activity should be in “recreation and access” whilst “forestry” remains in potential scope.
 - e. Forest acquisition OR lease proposals have been discussed in depth by the board. Significant limiting factors have been i) the uncertainty of any financial support from the Scottish Land Fund and ii) the inability to secure insurance liability cover for ownership or lease of land which includes the Wolftrax mountain bike trails. FLS presently self-insure the trails. It is also known that FLS have been, and intend to be, very active in timber felling in the Strathmashie Forest (started July 2020), thereby also reducing any potential commercial returns.
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- f. The present board has therefore agreed NOT TO PROCEED with any major forest acquisition or lease proposals of the Forest estate and trails.
- g. The board has also reviewed its trading company's operations (LFTFC). With forestry contracts and operations minimal in the past 3 years, >95% of the trading company's revenue stream comes from the Wolftrax Centre café operation. In a normal year an estimated 30000 visitors use the paths & trails and centre – The COVID 19 situation has presented some significant challenges. Future revenue to support the Trust's Charitable objects remains dependent on 1) recovering community and visitor numbers using the café and related paths & trails and 2) a potential agreement to manage the existing FLS owned car park and related facilities. However both options are likely to be dependent on improvements to the existing "infrastructure" of the trails, paths and local heritage sites nearby in FLS ownership e.g. Dun Da Lamh.
- h. Other Activities: A grant was received for acquiring 3 e-bikes for the community to trial for any routine "commute" they undertake. This was in collaboration with the Laggan Coffee Bothy. The e-bikes can be loaned out from the Forest Centre to any resident, and have proved very popular from April to October with virtually all weeks booked out. A grant was also received from the SSE Community Benefit fund for £3000 to undertake design and pre-planning activities for a children's pump track.

2) Widen the access and scope of the forest and mountain bike trails to more users was noted and agreed, with the AGM indicating support to explore the development of a "Blue Trail"- albeit subject to discussions with Forestry.

UPDATES:

- a. From the Laggan Community Action Plan in June 2019, a key "issue" was improvement of the paths and trails in & around the Laggan area including in the Strathmashie Forest. LFT has agreed to be the lead organisation to facilitate this and a feasibility grant (£20k) has been approved from Sustrans to assess the feasibility of expanding "off-road" paths and trails to "connect the hamlets" of Laggan. Community wide engagement is underway. This project is on-going.
- b. Providing a "Blue MTB Trail" – Forestry Commission approved the principle of this in 2011/12 but with no funding mechanism. The Board has agreed that it CANNOT explore to fund this development without a specific agreement with FLS on its future maintenance and agreement for public liability insurance. The board views this development as CRITICAL to widening the scope of the Wolftrax trails to cyclists and walkers of all abilities.
- c. The Trust supported the Kingussie High School Rural Skills project with visits to the Forest Centre to explain and understand all the practical skills required in both forestry and building trails. This is being repeated in the present academic year.
- d. The Trust also supported cycling proficiency skills training with pupils from Gergask primary school in conjunction with Highlife Highland.
- e. In association with the Community Woodlands Association, a stretch of the path between the Blackwood and Feagour is to be upgraded to provide an all abilities path. This project is due to be completed by the end of 2020.
- f. Improve Trail and path interpretation boards around Laggan and Strathmashie Forest – these are mostly in a state of disrepair and in need of review and update at many sites. Funding sources are to be sought.

3) The present CNPA Local development plan has designated a site in the ownership of the Trust as a possible development site for future residential and/or business premises. The possibilities for this will continue to be explored in the coming year with the board happy to receive suggestions from members --- The board is aware of a survey undertaken by Laggan Community Trading to determine the local need for additional affordable housing and will await developments.

4) Highlands & Islands Enterprise and CNPA. In a post Covid 19 scenario, both organisations will be providing some strategic support (non-monetary) to assist the board to determine the most effective use of all the assets owned by LFT/LFTFC on behalf of the members and community e.g. present land holdings, present buildings (Wolftrax Centre and Woodshed) and how best to utilise these assets in the future.
