

**Asset Transfer Request made by Ettrick & Yarrow Community Development Company for the purchase of 173 ha of Gamescleuch Forest and the Ettrick Marshes**

**Representation received by email on 7 August 2017**

**Gamescleuch Wood Community Buyout**

I live in property which borders the land in question.

When I was first approached about this the hope was that the community would be able to buy the whole of Gamescleuch Wood. The main idea at that time seemed to be to restore the former Borders Forest Trust path which had fallen into disrepair and to undertake sensitive felling of spruce with native replanting where appropriate. Within the scheme, Ettrick School would be saved for community use.

I was broadly in favour of this plan.

The present business plan has been presented as having universal support but this is not the case.

Many of the residents and return visitors in this area, although keen to see some improvement to the footpath and boardwalk might be appalled at the amount of development planned for what is, in fact, only a small section of forest.

The following points concern me:

1. Profitability of company. The business plan is ambitious but to attain a viable return all sorts of schemes have been dreamt up which to my mind would end up spoiling the very thing they are hoping to achieve. In order to reach the projected level of income there could be overdevelopment of a sensitive area.

2. Future funding and long term subsidies.

Along with my husband and several members of the EYCDC I attended a community woodland seminar in Birnam. Almost without exception these communities, even after many years, still depend on a high level of subsidy, indeed one of these woodland communities was described – later at a public EYDCC meeting in the Boston Hall - as an exemplar of how to 'milk the system'. Can the future financing of the Ettrick scheme be realistic without continued subsidy?

3. Accessibility. The path is still being heavily used, especially during holiday periods and although eroded in parts is still perfectly passable for the able bodied. No mention is made in the business plan of opening the path for severely disabled and wheel chair users. If this were to be done to a suitably high standard, the cost of rebuilding would be considerably more but the only way forward if the wish is truly to make the walk and the forest accessible to all.

4. Red squirrels. Management needs to happen outwith the area as well to be effective. Habitat for the pine marten which preys on the greys must be looked after as well.

5. Do we really want mass tourism up the Ettrick? We already have Glentress nearby for this and EYCDC seem to be copying Glentress with their cycling routes and plans for forest cabins. The B709 has not the capacity for say, coaches or an increase in camper vans which would, moreover, have to contend with timber lorries.

As mentioned in the business plan, we already have 2 caravan parks and other holiday accommodation which bring business to the area,.

6. Litter. Witness the B709 after a sunny weekend especially after a cycle event.

7. Cutting in smaller coups. It is admitted that wind blow is inevitable using this method and the weather unpredictable. How can these smaller coups be felled 'sensitively' without disruption or

some damage to the ground? Cutting here and there over a number of years could in fact be more disruptive in terms of noise and constant disturbance.

8. Less impact while preserving the environment. (Annex 6/14) Some of this section of forest applied for - 'below the road' - is, in fact, managing itself well with little interference. Wildlife, both plant and animal, has adapted to conditions over many years and in my opinion should be left to itself for as long as possible.

9. The latest forestry plan from FCS has not been adhered to and it is wrongly claimed that the 'long term retention' issue has been satisfactorily addressed. The fact is that FCS had a long term felling plan for the forest - I'm assuming that FES has a similar outlook - while EYCDC's has designated felling plans within a 10 year timescale only.

There has been a surprising lack of consultation with the community as a whole and the map discrepancy glossed over as of little importance. However, the impact on our community could be considerable as it involves some small coups being taken out within a relatively short period from an area previously designated for long term retention. Also, replanting need not be a requirement in parts of the forest which are quite diverse already.

10. The proposals do not state how cyclists, horse riders and walkers - all using the high forest route - will all manage together, considering this is also a main road for timber extraction.

11. Renewable energy. There's no detail given here, apart from log burning/biomass. Local sourcing is a sensible idea; however, excessive use of wood burning stoves by residents could lead to poorer air quality.

12. Housing? Families? These seems to me to be vague, wishful ideas for a distant future.

13. Privacy and security issues for residents near the footpath. Although footpath diversion and better signage might be helpful it will never fully resolve these; moreover, there will be even more foot and other traffic at the Honey Cottage end should the forest road be accessed from here.

14. It is stated that the buyout will generate £875.000 for FES which it can invest in creating new forests elsewhere. This seems to contradict the sentiments voiced in business plan (1. introduction.)

It is surely better to retain the standing forest under present management than to encourage fresh planting on grazing land?

15. Lack of transparency. Generally, a feeling that these plans were kept from the general public until the actual CATS application had been made. Also, the information that the application had been made on July 7<sup>th</sup> could have been more widely circulated by means of the regular valley newsletter.

There is now very little left of truly wild land in Scotland that hasn't been affected by tourism. For instance, Skye has recently been in the news because in the summer visitors can outnumber residents.

While it brings income to some, tourism, even so called eco-tourism, can be at the expense of the environment including anyone who might want a quieter existence.

These marshes and the wildlife that depend on them are not in peril from housing, industry or draining. The flood plain was deliberately recreated to provide protection from flooding in the lower valley.

In my opinion grant money would be better spent on a community/landscape which is genuinely in distress.

Many of us would perhaps be satisfied with a more modest scheme, leaving Land Fund money available to be spent on other projects.

As the restoration of the footpath seems to be one of the main concerns locally, I wonder if other options, not involving a buyout, have been fully considered.

A community driven but cautious approach could be a part of the future of the valley and to work would need a very long term commitment. I hope that even if this buyout is approved some of the plans will be amended to better reflect the special conditions and delicate balance of the marshes and surrounds.