



Sunart Community Company

Longrigg woodland - A feasibility and viability study.

Consultants brief

1. Introduction

The Sunart Community Company (SCC) is considering the purchase of Longrigg Woodland (87ha) in Strontian which has been earmarked for disposal by Forestry Commission Scotland. The acquisition would be dealt with through the Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS).

A working group has been established made up of local residents and supported by the local development officer(s). The working group is an advisory group for the project; SCC would take ownership and have responsibility for any future activity.

The site is technically part of the Sunart Oakwoods Initiative, a partnership of FCS and local partners, currently not active.

2. Funding

There is no commitment to purchase the asset. We are submitting a bid to the Scottish Land Fund (SLF) for stage 1 funding to undertake a feasibility and viability study. We anticipate submitting this to the **August 2018 committee**. Following completion of the studies outlined in this brief, if the project is viable, will deliver community benefits and there is community support for purchase, we will submit a bid to SLF for stage 2 funding for purchase and associated revenue costs.

3. Background information

Size: 87ha

Species mix: The crop consists of 40ha Lodgepole pine, 23ha of Sitka Spruce and 15ha of Japanese Larch, with a small amount of Western Hemlock and Scots Pine. The crop was all planted in 1972, with the exception of the Scots Pine in 1900.

Condition: The timber in the North West of the woodland is poor, windblow being extensive. Windblow has also begun in the lower sections of the woodland, making access via rides difficult.

Management: There has been no management in the woodland. Thinning has not been undertaken.

Access to site: Vehicle access is currently via Longrigg road and status of the road is being discussed with Highland Council with regard to suitability for forestry operations. The closest parking available is at the Ben View car park on Longrigg Road. Vehicular access within the woodland is not permitted.

The Community Company have contacted other nearby landowners, including the Ardnastang Common Grazings regarding potential access by a consultant. They have been informed that a Surveyor is likely to be crossing their land to both view the wood and to look at access. We are not expecting the consultant to pursue any negotiations with landowners but a view on alternative access options should be given.

4. Community view

- (i) SCC wish to explore the potential of the woodland for community benefit. Any proposal needs to be financially viable, both short term and long term and, ideally, should make a net contribution to the overheads of SCC. SCC is not in a position where it can financially support any activity in the woodland. However, we hope that the woodland can become integrated with activities in the area and be a community resource with wider benefits; so, the project is about more than owning and managing a commercial piece of woodland.
- (ii) The community has not articulated any specific needs with regard to activity they would like to see taking place in the woodland. The woodland is a physical backdrop to many people's homes but is not generally accessible. Some concern has been expressed by the visual impact of clear felling (whilst acknowledging that this may be necessary).
- (iii) The issue of displacement also need to be considered. There are a number of local contractors involved in firewood sales, woodland management etc. Proposals should complement local business and help secure them, not displace them.
- (iv) Options suggested to date for use of the woodland include (but should not be limited to): recreation (e.g. walks and trails), affordable housing(subject to planning), woodland crofts and woodlots, tourism (e.g. glamping, hutting, dark skies initiatives, , wildlife watching, artists cabins etc) training and apprenticeships, wood fuel and other timber products. However, we are also open to other suggestions that benefit the community and generate income. There has not been any specific consultation regarding the suggestions above so they will still require to be consulted upon with local residents.
- (v) Renewables may be an option if financially viable.

5. Valuation

The site was valued at £270,000 on 1st February 2018 by Neil Anderson RICS Registered Valuer | DVS – Property Services arm of the VOA

6. Scope of work

We wish to commission a consultant/team of consultants to undertake a feasibility and viability study. This will be undertaken in 2 phases (detailed below). Phase 1 will be followed by Consultation Work which will determine subjects of the more detailed work in Phase 2.

Phase 1

- A. Determine the value of the Timber Resource (Volume by species, quality, current market value)
- B. Identify the minimum area necessary for replanting in order to generate sufficient income to be financially viable and to meet FCS criteria on replanting after felling in order to determine what area remains for wider community benefit.
- C. Investigate access options using Longrigg Rd and assess technical and financial implications
- D. Advise on alternative extraction methods and costings for options e.g.
 - (i) Forwarding via Longrigg Road using smaller vehicles to a new transfer point out with the boundaries of the wood
 - (ii) Only extract highest value saw logs from the site, whilst retaining lower value timber for onsite processing eg for local wood fuel sales
 - (iii) lease woodland to interested local parties via woodland crofts or woodlots working to agreed management guidelines
 - (iv) Explore the costs & benefits of constructing any internal extraction tracks/roads over brash mats
 - (v) *Explore the costs & benefits of constructing an alternative access route, eg across Ardnastang Common Grazing.*
- E. Assess future management options alongside the viability of other activity that could take place as listed in 5(iv). These developments should be assessed against the following criteria:
 - financial (initial capital expenditure, ongoing revenue costs for projects and activities and potential income that such activities may generate)
 - funding opportunities
 - community benefit
 - employment opportunities
 - legislative (eg planning)
 - timescales
 - and other criteria as judged by the consultants to be worth considering.

Consultation:

- The consultants will keep in regular contact with the LDO's during the course of the work. Izzy Baker will be the key contact with Angela Williams as backup.

- The LDO's will assist with organising meetings and undertake any agreed work on the ground (eg distributing questionnaires)
- In addition to any site visits, the consultant will need to undertake suitable consultation to ensure all individuals who have an interest are able to input into the process. the consultant to determine suitable methodology. If questionnaires to householders/local businesses are deemed necessary to, these will be undertaken by the LDO's working with the consultant.
- The consultant shall also allow for presentations to be undertaken to the SCC Board of Directors, the working group, and also to the wider community. Timings of such presentations will be agreed with the LDO.
- The consultants will need to then allow for additional community discussion to go through options for the site.
- The consultants will consult with any stakeholders relevant to the project, in particular the Highland Council with regard to road access

At the end of phase 1 we will agree with the consultant which areas shall be followed up for more detailed work.

Phase 2

- A. Completion of a business plan including 25-year cash flow projection, focusing on the priorities agreed by the working group and SCC board following the consultation.
- B. Highlight funding sources, likely income generation etc and provide suitable report to support a bid to SLF stage 2, assuming there is community support for the asset transfer.
- C. The consultant will be required to undertake a final presentation to SCC board and other interested parties

7. Background Information available

- CADISPA Community Action Plan
- SCC Master Planning document
- FCS Felling Sequence Map
- FCS Stock Map
- Aerial photos produced by drone in 2017

8. Tender proposal

