

Annual General Meeting of the Maryculter Woodlands Trust: Minutes

The annual general meeting was held in the Scout Hall, Kirkton of Maryculter on Wednesday 6th December 2017. 25 full members were in attendance (quorum 17) and a further 5 full members had completed proxy authorisations

1. **Introduction.** The outgoing Chair, Ed Thorogood, welcomed the members of Maryculter Woodlands Trust and gave a brief introduction.

2. **Minutes of Previous AGM (Nov 2016).**

Minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the 2016 AGM

3. **Matters arising:**

a. **Cycle path.** At the 2016 AGM members requested the Board to gather further information related to the cycle path proposals before offering members a vote on the matter at a future members meeting. The external group which asked us to consider the cycle path has not progressed the proposal and so the matter is considered closed by the Board.

b. **Constitution.** Some questions were raised on the constitution. The Board was confident that their interpretation of the constitution was proper and matched what was discussed with the lawyers when they drafted the constitution in 2013. The Board, nevertheless, took the action to obtain legal advice on the issues raised on the constitution at the AGM. The legal advice confirmed that retaining Ed Thorogood and Inga Milne as Board members for a further year was permissible under the constitution. The exercise incurred costs, but it was useful in flushing out some potential ambiguities in the constitution. The Board therefore worked with both the lawyers (Brodies LLP) and OSCR to revise the constitution. The draft constitution was sent (via email or post) to all 84 full members entitled to vote on the matter. The Board received 60 votes in favour and 0 votes against hence the new constitution was approved. The process was completed by end October 2017. The new constitution was sent to OSCR for registration, along with all the supporting materials, including all the voting responses from members. The Board has already received confirmation from OSCR who will now update their records.

4. **Chairman's Report of MWT Activities.**

The Chairman expressed his thanks for the support from the community during the past year. Many members of the community gave their time, energy and enthusiasm to work on the various projects, planting trees, clearing gorse, clearing paths, dragging hag etc. Events were well-attended and it was wonderful to see so many families taking part. The main activities in the year were:

- A storage container has been installed in the wood to store tools and equipment. It is still painted red but it will be covered with wooden cladding and surrounded with climbing plants. The storage container was kindly donated by Swire Oilfield Services and kindly refurbished by Hutcheon Services. It was then kindly installed by Freeland Freight Services (also a big thank you to CHAP Group Construction for their kind involvement)
- A mulcher was hired to tackle the hag left from felling in summer 2016. This created some new paths through the wood e.g. through the stand of larch trees
- Drainage pipes have been installed under the 'cliff' path at most of the points where it crosses the drainage ditches. Bill is particularly thanked for all his labours and engineering skills
- Over 1,000 native trees have been planted in the period with 1,768 planted since the purchase of the wood. We organised tree-planting events for the community and also for various groups including the AWPR CJV and Aberdeen Soup. Hundreds of native wildflowers and bulbs have been planted, many supplied by Hazel and Kees Witte
- Bird and bat boxes have been installed, courtesy of a grant of £1,280 from Meikle Carewe Wind Farm. A barn owl box was built by the Eagle Scouts (Tyler & Chad Nokleby) using some of the money from this grant
- Aberdeen University carried out a "bog core". A report will be issued early next year.
- A self-sown Lodgepole Pine has been turned into a climbing tree for children
- Diane Masson & family have transformed an old stump into a "money tree"
- Repairs were carried out to the wooden bridge after suspected vandalism
- The Maryculter Woodlands Trust was given a 'Highly Commended' biodiversity award by NE Scotland Biodiversity Partnership. We received the award in March at the James Hutton Institute.
- The trail cam has captured film of pine martin, deer, tawny owls, jays, woodpeckers and various dogs
- Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route has awarded us a grant of £20,000 towards the construction of a new forest road in the southern part of the wood. The AWPR has also allowed us to recover any materials discarded in their skips, such as drainage pipes.
- Meikle Carewe Wind Farm Community Fund has just awarded us another grant, this time to create a community orchard and tree nursery. The grant was for £4,050.
- Many community members supported us via direct donations or by attending one of our fund-raising events. The June gathering in the wood raised £301. The October Beerfest raised £200. The monthly work parties and summer working week were all well attended. All members are thanked for this support

- The International Eagle Scouts work party gave their time and energy to gather up all the remaining used tree shelters in the wood.

Future Projects

Oldman Hill

The flank of the hill was clear-felled in 2012, after which FCS announced the sale of the wood. We were not allowed to work in the wood until we had completed the purchase (Jan 2016) hence there is now a lot of natural regeneration of sitka spruce. We will need to clear this sitka to create space for birch and other native trees. Three companies were asked to tender for the clearance of the sitka; one was selected. Work will start later in December

New Road

The generous grant from AWPR will be used to build a new section of road which will link the existing forest roads to form a 2.4km closed loop. We think this will make a big difference to many users, including joggers, walkers, riders and the Carriage Driving for the Disabled. It is hoped that the work can be started in the next two weeks but the time scale will be weather dependent.

Tree Thinning

A new thinning licence has been obtained from Forestry Commission Scotland. This will enable us to carry out the following works.

- Thinning (now overdue) of the immature spruce stands in the southern part of the wood. The trees around the 'tunnel' and the Scots Pine will be protected.
- Thinning the mature (non-native) Western Hemlock opposite Eastland Lodge. This will allow us to improve the parking area by the burn.
- Thinning the Sitka Spruce to the east of the Crynoch Burn and removal of windblown and leaning trees. We will not be felling any of the large spruce trees in this area – they are magnificent trees and in any case they are far too large for the harvester

It is hoped that the money raised from the timber sales will be sufficient to refurbish the forest road to the east of the burn.

After these works have been carried out we will have performed some maintenance in every section of the wood. Further thinning of the spruce will still be needed but not for a few years.

Insect Hotel

Stan Brooks, a mature student from RGU Gray's School of Art, has asked MWT if he can build an 'Insect Hotel' in the wood using timber donated by BP. He is already an established artist. Labour, materials and transport will be at no cost to MWT. The preferred location for the insect hotel is near the container. There were no objections from members so work will start on this in late spring 2018.

Treasurer's Report

A/c 1.9.16 to 31.8.17 Accounts ratified by Dean Turner

Receipts	£25,317
Payments	£20,381
Surplus	£4,936
Cash & bank balance at YE	£6,905

Receipts (total £25,317)

Grants	£1,840 (Meikle Carewe Wind Farm Community Fund)
Donations	£10,656
Fund Raising	£888
Income -Forestry	£8,933
Income - SSE Wayleave	£182
VAT Refund	£2,818

Donations included £5,000 from the Milne Family Trust (Balmoral), £300 from Ross Thomson MSP and generous donations from within the local community

Payments (total £20,381)

Legal costs (Brodiess)	£250
Insurance and membership fees	£342
Expenses for fundraising activities	£423

Expenses for charitable activities	£186
Mulcher / excavator hire	£9,038
Planting costs (stakes, collars, tools)	£2,177
Nest boxes and feeders	£1,271
VAT on timber/ log sales	£2,760
Director's loan repayment	£3,934

Resolutions (6)

These were discussed and voted on by the members

1. *That anyone of 16 years of age or over, resident in Maryculter as defined by the electoral ward SW1701, shall be eligible for Full membership.*

There was general agreement that this was a good idea and consistent with the educational purposes of MWT. MWT has 4 junior members resident in Maryculter and one of them is over 16. The timing of the resolution was seen as a little unfortunate as the new constitution was approved by members and sent to OSCR only a few weeks before the AGM. A second vote was taken to determine if members were happy to defer the proposed change until the next time that the constitution required an update (OSCR expect us to discuss our constitution on a regular basis).

- In favour of the resolution Yes: 21 incl 1 by proxy No: 2 (by proxy)
- Defer until next constitution update Yes: 25 incl 1 by proxy No: 0

2. *That the AGM be held on the second Monday of June, in-perpetuity.*

Members, and the Board, felt that it would be better to retain the current flexibility to select a date that most Board members could make. June is not an obvious month for our AGM as our accounting year ends 31st August. In the past we have held the AGM as soon as we can after the end of our reporting year - generally we manage a date in Nov/ Dec and then we submit our annual report to OSCR shortly thereafter. There was some discussion that holding the AGM in January might work better to give us more time to prepare the accounts

- In favour of the resolution Yes: 0 No: 27 incl 3 by proxy

3. *That all directors and co-opted directors of the SCIO publicly declare, and it is recorded in the minutes of the annual members meeting, any financial, controlling, or significant*

interest in any business, organisation or other charity that they are involved with and which conflicts with their ability to act on behalf of the SCIO impartially.

Hazel reminded members that Conflict of Interest clauses already exist in the constitution (Section 11). These clauses already exceed the OSCR requirements in this capacity. Nevertheless, the Board felt that they could do more to increase transparency. The chair suggested that they post the final minutes of every Board meeting on the website (currently only the AGM minutes are published). This was agreed by members.

4. That the gate at the Polston Road entrance be unlocked and accessible by all at all times during the hours of sunrise.

The Board gave the reasons for locking the gate:

- To avoid legal challenge. The MWT has the right to access the wood via Polston Road but only for 'normal forestry operations' (as stated in our Report on Title from Brodies LLP). Using Polston Road to access the wood for other reasons, such as leisure, is therefore open to legal challenge
- To protect residents of Polston Road from the risk of increased maintenance costs arising from extra traffic using the road (the road is privately owned and is maintained by residents)
- To provide security, both for the assets of the MWT and for Anne Massie (resident at Kirkton Cottage)

There has been a padlock on the gate for as long as anyone can remember and there was no further support from members to change this arrangement. A further factor was the operational burden of who would lock and unlock the gate at sunrise/sunset.

- The proposal was not supported.

5. Provision to be made within the environs of the entrance gate at Polston Road that those arriving by car or similar means, may park whilst using the amenity of Kirkton of Maryculter woods and sufficient provision be made that those of an assisted requirement or disability requiring access be accommodated by the Equality Act 2010.

There was a good discussion about access to the wood. The Board continue to look at options to improve access to the wood. Based on the feedback from previous members meetings and an online survey of members, the Board are focused on improving access at the road entrance near Eastland Lodge (burnside entrance). A surfaced area suitable for cars is already present at this entrance and it is accessible directly from the public road. Members expressed their support for the strategy of focussing access on the burnside entrance.

- The proposal was not supported.

There were some good discussions on how we might improve Buggy/ wheelchair access at the Polston Road entrance by redesigning the pedestrian entrance to the left of the metal gate. The Board will investigate further.

6. That the SCIO directors and its members actively support any representation to Aberdeenshire Council to adopt the right of access to the wood known as Polston Road

Adoption of Polston Road by the Council might be of benefit to the residents of Polston Road and Members felt that this proposal should go first to them so seek their support. Until that had happened this was not a matter for the Members of MWT. No vote taken.

Election of Directors

Inga and Ed stepped down as members of the board having each served a 3 year term. Nigel and Susan stepped down as co-opted Directors. Bill and Alice remained in place.

Nominations were sought to fill five places on the board and 23rd of November was given as the closing date for applications. Five members put their names forward. Under the new constitution members can immediately re-stand for election.

Nominee	Votes for	Votes against
Inga Milne	23	0
Nigel Astell	24	0
David Brainwood	21	0
Ed Thorogood	24	0
Susan Astell	20	0

There were 3 additional votes, registered by proxy prior to the meeting, in favour of all 5 nominees.

AOB

The subject of increasing the biodiversity of the wood was discussed and the inclusion of a pond as a future project was enthusiastically discussed.

Ed thanked the members for their attendance and input, and the meeting came to an end, although discussions continued with the help of the refreshments provided by Inga.