



Stroud Woodland Co-op* - Directors report 2012-13

Overview

The last year has been all about the delivery of the action plan agreed at the last AGM. This has led to many exciting changes in Follywood:

- Thinning of larch, removing hung-up / dangerous trees and creating a clearing
- Generating material for benches, signs and the compost toilet
- Moving and assembling benches around the fire and the meditation area
- Building most of the compost toilet
- Planting many more new trees
- Creating a new path
- Clearing brash and ivy
- Making things for play – two new 'bouncy logs', a rope swing, bridge and trail

The cost of the forestry and materials came to £1,731, while additional expenses (FSA fees, insurance and accountancy) meant we spent £2,441 altogether. This was offset by member's voluntary annual contributions and donations for sawn planks of a splendid £375 (thank you!) and payment for a case study of £175, totalling £550. This meant a net spend for the year of £1,887.

We have also welcomed six new members.

Topics of interest

At the last AGM, directors were asked to consider a number of topics that had been discussed. These included:

- shares and organisations
- uses of timber
- firewood

and during the year the issue of additional woodland acquisition has arisen.

This paper sets out the directors' response to these topics.

Reminder of our objectives

Stroud Woodland Co-op was set up as an Industrial and Provident Society. This has a set of rules about how the organisation works. The legal 'objects' included in these rules are that we will carry on any business for the benefit of the community, including:

To realise the environmental, biological, landscape, economic, social, cultural, educational and recreational value of woodland ecosystems in and around Stroud as a resource for a sustainable community; and

To acquire, hold, steward, create, and manage woodland, land and property sustainably in trust for biodiversity, social enterprise, access and community benefit for present and future generations.

This then is the context for our thoughts.

Shares and Organisations

Members expressed a concern that organisations might be able to exert too much influence over the co-operative, although they would only hold one share per organisation. Currently there are two organisations who hold a share, these are Walking the Land and Stroud Common Wealth Ltd. Directors feel that the best way forward with this is to consider any application for shares by an organisation as and when they arise.

The market value of shares were discussed at a core group meeting in relationship to exchanging them. How should they be valued? At the original price of £500 per 100 shares? At an equivalent value at the time of exchange, taking inflation into account? Directors feel that the share price should remain at £500 per 100 shares.

Firewood

Follywood will not generate large quantities of fire wood. However, the initial thinning of the larches and the creation of the clearing have generated some wood that can be used as firewood.

A simple approach to processing suitable wood (left over after what is needed for the things described below) could follow the system used by the wood group at Hawkwood that has also been successful recently at the Lake at the Lawns and Ebley Linear Orchard. This involves one or more chainsaw operators (who can work in advance if necessary) cutting up the wood into suitable lengths. Then a work team can split, bag and move the logs. Each person involved (including the chainsawers) gets an equal share of the firewood produced. Non-chainsawing workers each pay £5. £20 goes to the chainsaw operator to cover fuel and wear and tear on the saw / clothing. Co-op members who are unable to do such work can make alternative arrangements with the work team. Any excess money contributes to Stroudwoods funds.

The directors suggest such a group is set up with the aim of processing the existing felled timber, including stacking wood for seasoning as appropriate.

Uses of timber

We have already made use of timber grown on site for benches, cladding the compost toilet, the play area and members have been offered the opportunity to buy some planks. This is on top of firewood for use both on site and as outlined above and the less obvious by-product of brash and brush which we have in many cases kept on site as habitat creation.

Folly Wood is of course a small woodland and has limited timber value. However, as an example of community woodland management it is desirable to tie production in with other community needs. So, for example, within any bio-hygiene restrictions prevalent at the time, we could advertise surplus timber being produced as we continue to fell, mainly larch trees over the years. Larch is a good timber for outdoor use – sheds, fencing etc. and could be sold to members or other interested parties. Its worth noting however that it was not considered economically viable by the contractor to remove the larch he recently felled at Folly Wood and so developing a market within our membership may be the way to go. This, as with the firewood, may mean we need space for seasoning timber, which carries some risks on an accessible site.

There are other species of trees in smaller number which could have a use, especially for garden and craft type uses, wood-turning etc. This will increase as the new trees grow and are managed. We also have some hazel coppice that could produce useful pea and bean sticks etc.

It is suggested that the fire wood group could take-on and oversee the wider timber management aspects of the woodland and establish processes for distributing any produce.

Further woodland acquisitions

When we looked at buying the land at Wick Street last year, it raised interesting questions that the directors want to discuss with the wider membership. Firstly it suggested that there is a willingness to buy additional woods and land. However, we felt at the time that two main questions need answering:

- ⤴ Why would we want the land? Can we prioritise the kind of woodland we want to buy?
- ⤴ How would existing and new members relate to each other? Would we all have shares in all woods that we own? Would there be a core group for each wood?

These issues are yet to be addressed in detail and can be discussed at the AGM.

* Stroud Woodland Co-op is legally registered as Stroud Woodland Community Benefit Society Limited