

# Report on the Community Consultation Exercise



## Acharossan Forest, Tighnabruaich



**A potential forestry village: Affordable Housing, Jobs and Sustainable Living**

Carried out by Reforestation Scotland, Scottish Native Woods and the Argyll Green Woodworkers Association



August and October 2005

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## Background

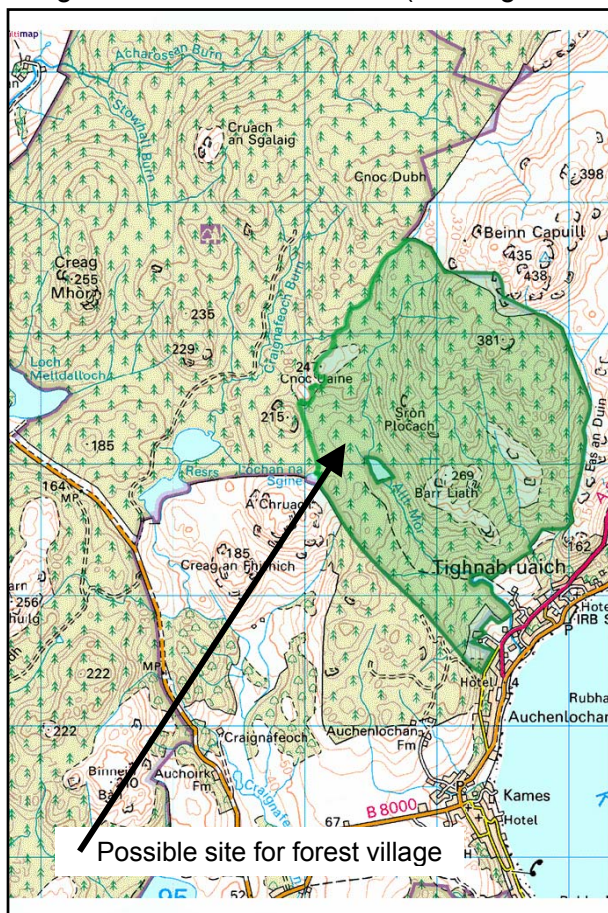
### *The Community*

The villages of Tighnabruaich and Kames are situated on the Cowal Peninsula. The villages have a population of approximately 500.

### *The Opportunity*

In June 2005 Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) launched the National Forestry Land Scheme (NFLS). The scheme provides an opportunity for communities and Registered Social Landlords (housing associations) to buy or lease National Forest

Land for public benefit or to provide affordable housing<sup>1</sup>. A lack of affordable housing and employment in Tighnabruaich and Kames has caused young people and families to leave the area, or prevented them from moving to it. There is some feeling that this is affecting businesses and the sense and structure of the community. The Dunbeag Project, Scottish Native Woods and Reforesting Scotland have been working to develop a model for addressing problems of housing and employment, through the opportunity provided by NFLS within a 500 ha area in Acharossan Forest. The public consultation events aimed to gauge interest and priorities of the local population, and involve them in this process.



### *Objectives of the Community Consultation*

Two community consultation exercises were held in August and October 2005. The purpose of the

consultations were:

- To inform people of Tighnabruaich/ Kames of the project and its possible opportunities
- To involve local people in designing the project to ensure that it addresses the needs and interests of the local community
- To gauge public opinion about the project – and specifically the opinion of key interest groups<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The scheme enables (1) communities to buy or lease National Forest Land where they can provide increased public benefits, (2) Registered Social Landlords (housing associations) and other housing bodies to buy National Forest Land to provide affordable housing, and (3) communities and others to buy National Forest Land which is surplus to requirements (surplus land is land that makes little net contribution to Forestry Commission Scotland's public policy objectives)

<sup>2</sup> A range of different 'interest groups' who would be affected by the project were identified during the consultation process. This included local tradesmen, young people leaving school and working adults, retired people who wanted to see the community come alive again, and retired people who wished the community to remain quiet and peaceful.

Reforestation Scotland, with the support of Scottish Native Woods and the Dunbeag Project carried out the community consultations.

## **The Participatory Appraisal Process**

### *Information about consultations*

Prior to the August public consultation exercise an article about the upcoming project and community consultation was printed in the Dunoon Observer. Posters advertising the event were distributed on notice boards throughout the village (e.g. on local shop and post office notice boards) prior to both events. As few people had noticed the posters prior to the August meetings, all households in the village were leafleted (with the help of local volunteers) to advertise the October meetings. In August, all parents of children at the primary school were notified of the meetings through notes distributed through the school. Prior to both meetings discussions were held with active members of the community council.

### *Semi-structured street interviews*

Over a two-day period (on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> August) the team carried out a series of semi-structured interviews with people on the streets of Kames and Tighnabruaich. All the people who were approached were given a brief background to the project and explanation of the PA. Informal discussions were held around a set of questions focusing on the use of the forest/ woodland or other local woodlands, the needs and issues surrounding affordable housing, involvement and interest of the people in the community, and initial thoughts on the project. People were encouraged to come along to the meetings in the evening and to the open day.

### *Public meetings*

Three public meetings were held in the evenings of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> August in the Kames village hall, and on 19<sup>th</sup> October in the Tighnabruaich Hotel. The meetings aimed to provide information about the opportunity provided by the project, as well as involving participants in discussions about the project. The meetings included:

- An overview of the possible project and the benefits that it could provide
- Question and answer sessions to provide clarification about the project
- Feedback about discussions with community members and outcomes from previous consultation meetings
- 'Participatory exercises' to identify development priorities of local residents – and the hopes and concerns of residents about the project
- Discussions about how to raise awareness and interest in the project, in the community

### *Public Exhibition*

The public exhibition was held in the Kames village hall during the day of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> August. The exhibition provided information about the geography and biodiversity of the woodland area, examples of timber-framed housing in the UK and Scandinavia, and examples of rural development linked to forests in Scotland. Representatives from Scottish Native Woods, Reforestation Scotland and the Dunbeag Project were available all day to discuss the project.

### *Open Day*

On 20<sup>th</sup> August a local resident, David Blair, hosted an Open Day at the Dunbeag Project to provide local people with an opportunity to visit a local forest-based housing and woodland project.

### *Focus Group Meetings*

On the 20<sup>th</sup> October a series of meetings were set up with key interest groups in the community. These 'focus group' discussions enabled residents to talk about opportunities and concerns of particular interest groups about the project. The following interest groups were identified during the public meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> August:

- Families with children
- Local businesses
- People with a personal interest in affordable housing
- Retired people

These groups were considered as likely to have strong interest in the project – either for positive or negative reasons.

### *Phone Conversations*

In addition conversations regarding the project were held on the phone with three interested community members, who had been unable to attend the meetings, and with the vice-chair of the community council.

## Outcomes of the Consultation Process

### *Public Meetings and Focus Group Discussions*

More than 100 people were spoken to during the consultation exercise<sup>3</sup>. This included teenagers, young and older adults, families, and retired people (both incomers and people who had lived in Tighnabruaich all their lives).

In summary:

- Most people consulted felt that the population of Tighnabruaich was ageing and that there was a lack of jobs and affordable housing. This was resulting in a sense that the community was gone or 'dying'. A 'timeline' of Tighnabruaich (see p.7) showed that in the last 50 years, 8 shops, a cinema, the forestry office, a hotel and regular ferry services had closed. Positive changes included the opening of the sailing school, the opening of the Cowal Way. There has also been an increase in holiday housing.
- A large majority of people spoken to were supportive of the project – and some local people already noted that they would like to be involved. They felt that the project could encourage more young people to stay and that it would support local businesses.
- A few people thought that Tighnabruaich/ Kames was fine as it is.
- There is some concern in the village about the nature of the project. In particular some people were unfamiliar with timber-clad housing and concerned about the lifestyle associated with living and working in forest.

#### **Main priorities of local residents for the project:**

- More permanent residents
- Affordable housing
- Diversification of income-generating opportunities

#### **Main concerns about the project:**

- Practicalities of putting in sewage, water and access
- Apathy in the village and a lack of support for change from a minority
- Lack of understanding about the project

The results of the discussions and participatory exercises are detailed below. Information from public meetings and focus group discussions have been integrated:

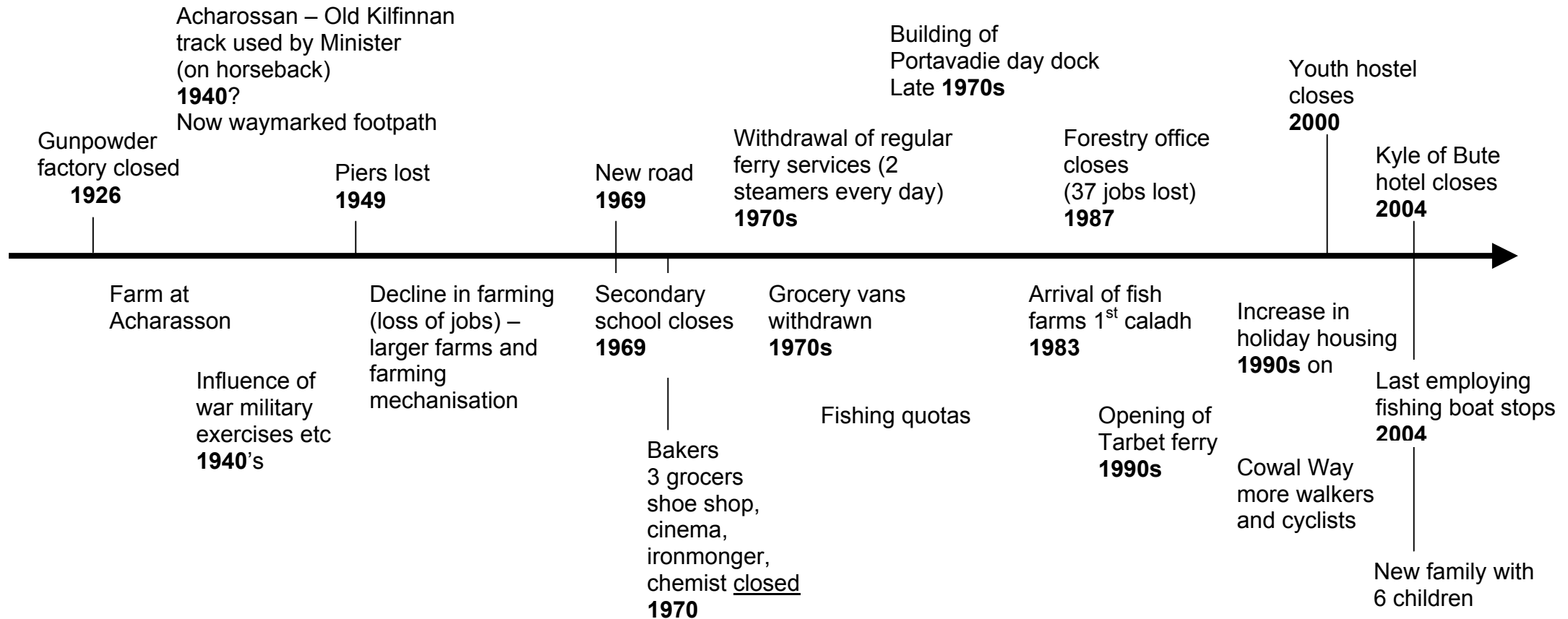
### *Changes in the Tighnabruaich area*

The timeline showed that many negative changes had happened in the village in the last 80 years – including closure of services and a decline in the population.

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<sup>3</sup> A total of 23 people attended the public meetings; 14 people attended the focus group discussions; 31 people were interviewed on the street; 55 people visited the exhibition and 3 discussions have been had by phone. In addition 60 people were informed about the project through the August community council meeting.

## Timeline for Kames/ Tighnabruaich (18<sup>th</sup> August 2005)





## *Visioning into the future/ Community priorities*

### *Community*

To have more permanent residents  
More residents: enough to cope with voluntary demands  
Balanced age structure  
Mair folk

...therefore have more affordable housing  
Houses locals can afford  
Houses that are affordable and energy-efficient

Public place we can all use  
Things to do for kids  
More things to do for kids!!! e.g. football, swimming, lots of sports  
Great school: it is wonderful and must stay – forest village will support this  
Grammar school

Things to do for adults  
Less apathy  
Enthusiastic people

Sustainable local jobs  
Improved skill base  
More local employment  
More shops: bakery, grocery – more products from local sources

Healthcare – getting to hospital, closing Inverclyde, reduced ambulance cover  
Access to doctors and hospitals – especially for emergencies  
Helipad!

### *Infrastructure*

Re-adopted roads  
Sympathetic planning/ roads department

### *Tourists*

Encourage more tourists  
More stuff for tourists to do  
Want more spending tourists  
New ways to make money e.g. mushrooms  
Get rid of holiday houses  
Natural resources  
Outdoor activities  
Indoor activities  
Marine facilities to attract visitors  
More tourists  
The right tourism: in a limited way – get tourists out of cars  
More walkers on the Cowal Way  
Ecotourism














Biodiversity of Acharossan Forest (Example of poster at Public Exhibition)

### *Environment*

No midges  
No sewage on the beach  
Better managed forests  
Control of rhododendron  
Native woodland walks  
Using land resources to create opportunities  
More biodiversity  
Forest trails

### *What would we like from an affordable housing and forestry project?*

	Priority level
Affordable housing <sup>4</sup>	
More permanent residents	
Diversification of income <sup>5</sup>	
Chalets/ caravan for employment <sup>6</sup>	
More for kids <sup>7</sup>	
Roads re-adopted	
Health	
School	
Sustainability	
Transport	
Planning department	

#### **Others (in no order of priority):**

Tourism – ‘the right kind’  
Natural resources activities e.g. mountain biking  
Get rid of holiday houses  
Midges  
Festivals  
Sewage  
Lifestyle  
More facilities  
Public place  
Forest management (controlling rhododendrons, walks, biodiversity)  
Apathy  
Forest trails  
Shops  
Balanced age structure  
Disability  
Automation

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<sup>4</sup> Developing skills locally, grants to provide renewable energy, built with timber from forest

<sup>5</sup> Forest management, supporting existing businesses, building boats, local food, forest-related business, training

<sup>6</sup> Attract more longer term tourists, built with timber from forests, building wood chalets in the forest, providing services to maintain chalets

<sup>7</sup> Learning about the environment, football, swimming, sports, canopy walks, building tree houses

*How can we get it from this project? (with a focus on priorities)*

## 1. Affordable housing

### What would we like?

#### *People*

Existing families housed  
New people to come here  
Forest village  
Use local resources/ skills  
Being part of a community  
Right mix of villagers  
Right age mix  
Avoid mentality of  
Tighnabruaich vs. forest  
village

#### *Cost*

Housing costing less than  
3x income  
Favourable mortgage  
terms  
Future housing should  
remain affordable

#### *Type of housing*

Part purchase/ part rent  
Quality housing –  
insulation, low running  
costs, sustainable  
Mixed ownership –  
including rented, owned  
and shared equity housing  
Mixed sizes of houses –  
for singles as well as  
families  
Well-designed site layout  
and common spaces  
Garden/ allotment space  
Low-cost building  
Kids facilities



Public exhibition at Kames Village Hall

#### **Existing opportunities:**

Some young local people  
are interested  
Materials are available in  
the forest  
Unskilled labour is  
available  
Grants for CHP/ solar/  
hydro  
Land is available  
Local plan appears flexible  
Building with wood –  
warmer, better insulation

#### **Constraints:**

Money  
Planning restrictions  
Building standards  
Absentee owners who are  
not on electoral registrar  
who may not want change  
Argyll and Bute Council –  
roads and planning,  
sewage (SEPA), water  
treatment, road  
maintenance  
Portavadie: a martian  
failure and increased  
suspicion

#### **How can we take advantage of them?**

Set up training/ skill  
exchange  
Use cheaper local materials  
Using local timbers for  
structural purposes: will they  
need to be stress-graded  
Community self-build –  
“sweat equity”  
Grant/ loan cocktail  
Credit union  
Time bank being set up  
Good design  
Flexible design – for studios  
and semi-detached homes  
Define allocation

#### **How can we overcome them?**

Shared equity  
Professional help  
There are exceptional  
circumstances when less  
than 50% is acceptable  
Planning reform

## 2. More permanent residents

### What would we like?

#### *People*

More houses for local people  
To encourage families  
Lower cost of housing  
Less need for sheltered housing  
To attract more younger people back from Dunoon  
More younger people in the community

#### **Existing opportunities:**

Affordable housing project  
More people will lead to improved health care

#### **How can we take advantage of them?**

Build houses  
Build out of wood – use of local materials  
Getting management committee

#### **Constraints:**

Jobs. Jobs.  
Money  
Transport/ roads  
No child care  
At the moment perception by some that this will be a hippy commune, like Findhorn – need to get general public to understand the concept and what benefits there are in it for them  
Local apathy  
Timescale

#### **How can we overcome them?**

Set up locally run affordable childcare units  
Provide training  
Vetting applicants

**(See section below on interest groups)**



Local residents discussing the Project

### 3. Diversification of income

#### What would we like?

##### *Jobs*

Jobs/ income-generation opportunities  
Skills  
Supporting existing business  
IT/ Internet business  
Leisure industry (diversity)  
Better hotels (diversity)  
Growing food/ shrubs (plants for sale)  
Polytunnels/ greenhouses  
Wood crafts  
Forest management

##### *Lifestyle*

Renewable energy  
Something to keep younger generation in District  
Involvement with woodland  
Rewarding lifestyle  
Broadband for all  
Opportunity for a decent life  
More local organic food  
More bats to eat midges



Local residents at the August public meeting

#### **Existing opportunities:**

Building skills  
Forestry skills  
Training (e.g. through RUN)  
Green wood skills can provide some income/ employment  
Diverse incomes

#### **How can we take advantage of them?**

Use existing networks (e.g. RUN) to get training assistance  
Get grants/ advertising  
Use existing facilities better e.g. village hall(s)

#### **Constraints:**

Distance from markets  
People  
Lousy communications  
Forestry jobs contracted out and automated in the 80s - major cause of unemployment  
Council attitudes on sustainability, transport, tourist facilities, disability

#### **How can we overcome them?**

Double track roads  
Mend potholes  
Improve car parking  
Road signs  
Improve transport: using the forth as a conduit:  
Norwegian example  
Develop community transport networks  
Ambulance in Tighnabruaich

The following priority issues were discussed in less detail:

#### 4. More for kids: What would we like?

Something to keep younger generation in District

##### *Sport*

Sailing  
Football  
Indoor sports  
Mountain biking  
Mountain boarding  
Building tree houses  
Assault course  
Tree-top walks  
Flying fox  
Play areas  
Tree climbing

##### *Education*

Learning about environment  
Wildlife centre  
More pupils  
More teachers  
Nature trails  
Challenging kids e.g. outward bound

##### *Forest crafts*

Lighting fires  
Building boats

"The village needs something as things are closing down...we are thinking about moving to be near a better secondary school...the hostel [in Dunoon] is not a good option"

*Parent in Tighnabruaich*



Identifying priority issues

#### 5. Roads: What would we like?

Access  
Maintenance  
Upgrading roads  
Transportation

*Interest groups: Who will benefit and/or be affected by the project and how?*

**This group of people.....Could benefit in the following ways:**

Children	▶	More activities
Young people from here (16+)	▶	Available affordable housing Employment/ apprenticeship opportunities
Mid 20's to 40's	▶	More jobs
Families with young children	▶	More jobs Homes Better childcare opportunities Secondary education
Retired people	▶	Better health care
Some retired people	▶	Better and more dynamic community
People with disabilities	▶	Improved access Opportunity to learn new skills
School	▶	Opportunities for environment education School projects
Clubs and societies	▶	New members
Businesses in winter	▶	More all-year business
Seasonal workers	▶	Other opportunities
Existing local businesses	▶	More income More local people
Local tradesmen	▶	More jobs
Estates	▶	More employees
Wildlife watchers	▶	More biodiversity
Forest villagers	▶	Opportunity to live and work in the forest
People interested for the wrong reasons (Affordable housing for acceptable people...)	▶	

**This group of people.....Could be concerned about:**

Tradesmen in building	▶	Fall in property values
Local shops/ hoteliers	▶	Increased trade
Some retired people	▶	Disturbed peace and quiet
Disinterested group	▶	Not interested in project Do not trust project

### *Engaging the community*

During the October public meeting there was some concern that the project may not succeed due to a misunderstanding about the project and apathy in the community. People at the meeting agreed that they wanted to raise awareness and increase understanding for the project, gain community support and commitment, and obtain funding. It was recommended that the project should develop more information for the community about the affordable housing (modern and high quality), job opportunities, and identifying the impact on existing businesses. There was a fear that negative rumours about the project being 'another Findhorn' could result in lack of support for the project. It was suggested that community members could help to raise awareness and provide information about the project through:

Leaflet/ fliers	Word of mouth	Celebrity endorsement (David Bellamy)
Leaflet drop network	Local meetings	Short film for screen machine
Local newspaper Dunoon Observer Oban Times Media coverage (gaelic speaking) Website	Community Council  Engaging the school Dunoon hostel	Business support
Ways of raising awareness in the community		

### *Semi-structured Street Interviews, Phone Conversations, Public Exhibition and Open Day*

A wide range of issues were raised during discussions with community members during the consultation. Comments made during these discussions are given below:

#### **Support for the Project**

It sounds like a great project  
People of Tighnabruaich need this project – even if they don't realise it  
Great project. Sustainable local jobs. Affordable housing  
Great idea. The practicalities in this area will be enormous  
A good project – absolutely necessary to have local community on its side  
If it goes ahead it will be good for kids because there will be lots to do for us kids!!!  
Great project to help keep TB alive  
Support anything which brings back life to the village  
Well worth supporting

#### **Concern about the Project**

Are you from Findhorn?  
6 years ago we had a petition – we didn't want another Findhorn  
Can see benefit for individual but have problem with community

### **Affordability**

Nurses and teachers can't afford to live here  
Local people can't compete on the open market with people looking for holiday homes

If there were affordable houses young people would stay – even to take lower paid jobs

How much is affordable?

There is definitely a great need for affordable housing here!

Affordable housing needed

### **Access to Housing**

I am a single woman with no children – will I be a priority for affordable housing?

There is a need for sheltered affordable housing, not just Abbeyfield

We're okay for a house but our children have no chance

How to people get to choose to be involved in the project?

Sounds like a great project, but how will they remain affordable within the existing market for houses?

Please included rented property

### **Use of Woodlands**

We use woodlands for walking and cycling every day

More people. Eco-holidays. Craft holidays.

Guides have environmental ideas

Nature trails and tree top walks

### **Lack of Interest**

I own a house, it does not affect me!

Needs energetic folk to drive

Apathy

Project should be built up from the community

People are against change

### **Employment**

It is all very well having affordable housing but we need jobs aswell

We need more people with handy man skills and gardeners

Training for builders is a good idea

Sustainable employment

Used to be 37 jobs in the forestry now there is 1

I would like to work in building...there are not enough building apprenticeships

### **Type of Housing**

It could be great if they are not factory made houses but have character and fit in with the local environment

We need some housing that is not mass produced



### **Community Survival**

If people keep moving away I am afraid the school will close down

Fifty years ago the village was much more vibrant!

If people had affordable housing they could afford to take lower paid jobs. At the moment they leave.

Without affordable housing the village will die

### **Planning**

Access to the site may be a problem

Will the reservoir provide electricity for the whole village?

Who is going to pay for it?

Will it get approved by planning boards?

### *Comments from holiday visitors*

- As a visitor I found this very inspirational. It would be a great tourist draw, also the idea/ model could be employed in our Yorkshire hill farming area of Nidderdale. Many thanks and good luck
- Keep up the good work
- The idea (and the people behind it) sounds great, the more communities who work/rest and play together, the better. Good luck, I will be back in a few years to see the results!!

### **What next?**

As a result of the community consultation there is a feeling that there is support for the project and some interest locally in being involved. There is also a need to provide more information about the project – particularly with respect to the affordable housing component and for greater involvement and promotion of the project by the community council and local interested residents. There is also a need for the community to take ownership for this project. The next steps are:

- Establish a Community Steering Group to drive the project. The Steering Group should be representative of the 4 key interest groups that have been identified during the community consultation exercise.
- Project partners (Community Steering Group, Community Council, Scottish Native Woods and Reforesting Scotland) to work together to raise awareness and understanding about the project.
- Project partners to undertake a feasibility study and develop a business plan for the project. The feasibility study should seek to address all the issues and concerns raised during the community consultation exercise. The report should provide the community with the information required to make a sensible decision as to whether or not to proceed with the project.