

## A PROPOSAL FOR SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY



A DWELLING BUILT FROM THE FOREST

# Forest Croft Communities

This document outlines the principal features of a Forest Croft Community. It suggests a way forward for people who want to live in a forest community as crofters and derive a living based on Agro-forestry. The link between those who wish to live and work in the forest and the forest itself should be restored. Affordable, ecologically sound housing for crofters and local people could be built from sawn timber produced on site. A diverse and sustainable economy could be developed which would provide both timber and non-timber products for local markets and beyond. The environment would benefit as a more diverse mix of more useful species replace the current plantings and invasive species are controlled. The Social benefits of rural repopulation, training opportunities, job creation and attendant revival of local services would benefit all who live and work in the locality.

## Introduction

At the Scottish Forestry Forum of 15<sup>th</sup> November 2004 the Minister Lewis MacDonald made reference to Forestry Crofts as part of a sustainable future for Scottish forestry thus placing them firmly on the agenda. The success of Forest Crofts is dependent on community and diversity. It will be necessary for a group of Crofters to work co-operatively, because of the nature of forestry, the land would be held by a community trust, the majority of which would be common forestry, managed collectively. A diverse mix of social, economic and environmental factors would ensure stability and therefore sustainability. It would be a dynamic solution, able to provide for its own needs and the needs of the local community and take advantage of ever changing opportunities. It would be sustainable, in that its survival is not dependent on any one factor nor would its activities compromise the future of the community or the environment. Its primary means of income would be from an Agro-forestry system, working with nature, which would be utilised to provide housing, foods, power and a secure income for the community. At the same time the environment would be managed to provide for the long-term needs of the community whilst encouraging natural regeneration to provide habitat for native flora and fauna, including humans. It is clear that Forest Croft Communities have a role to play not only in Forestry but also by contributing significantly to achieving economic stability, social cohesion and environmental sustainability for Scottish communities wherever they may be.

## Economic stability

The project has the potential to be hugely diverse economically which would give it the ability to function and succeed where traditional forms of forestry have failed. For example, it would be based around but not limited to:

### Renewable Energy

As well as being a sound economic prospect, renewable energy also has clear environmental benefits. There is great potential to generate energy not only for the needs of the Forest Croft Communities (FCC) but as a commodity. This could include wind, solar, hydro and bio-fuel including bio-diesel, wood-chip, fuel wood, AD and combined heat and power.

### Affordable Housing

It is envisaged that the skills developed in building a FCC could be utilised to provide low-cost housing for the local community built on land provided by FCS or the local authority. This would be an effective way of adding value to a marginal resource whilst providing much needed housing and reducing the impact of timber transportation.

### Foods

Growing organic food would be an important part of the FCC and any surplus could be sold locally providing larger variety of locally grown food. Foods could include mushrooms (wild and cultivated), salads, herbs and other vegetables.

### Crafts

Within the FCC, workshop space could be provided that would enable people to create a range of crafted products using the forest resource for its raw material.

### Education

The project would have education as a primary focus. This would take many forms including formal courses,

publishing books and articles and offering apprenticeships and training posts. It could also be used as an educational resource by schools and colleges and perhaps produce a TV program documenting the communities development progress. By encouraging more people into the area, it would also affect survival of local schools and other rural services.

### Retreat cabins

With the pressures of society, more people are feeling the need to retreat from the pressures of the modern world. In more remote parts of the forest where extraction is particularly difficult the timber could be used to create retreat cabins. This could offer a much-needed facility for people to escape the rigours of modern life and return to the simplicity of nature. This also supplies

a diverse source of regular income for the FCC which would be in a unique position to provide this service.

### Events and Conferences

The FCC could offer a facility for events and conferences.

### Seasonal products

There is an expanding foliage market across Europe that could provide valuable income particularly during winter months. This could include rhododendron for flower arranging, noble fir for Christmas displays and Christmas trees for a more local market.

Sustainable Development, what is it?

*“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”*

from the report “Our Common Future”

A great strength of this project is its potential to support rural communities and offer a diversity of opportunity for members of the FCC. From young people to senior citizens there would be opportunity for people to get involved in many different ways.

### **Affordable Housing**

In recent years there has been a lack of affordable housing in rural communities in Scotland as more homes are purchased as holiday properties. This leads to the breakdown of rural social networks. The FCC model is based on developing affordable housing from the local timber resource. This could be both for the FCC and also offered for sale or rent to the wider community.

### **Employment**

With its ability to be economically diverse and independent, the FCC would be able to provide employment for all its members. Due to its diverse nature a great range of employment possibilities would exist so no matter what age or ability a person had there would be appropriate employment. This would range from forestry work to building, craft production, growing food, education and social aspects of work. This would primarily be for FCC members but could also extend to the wider community.

### **Education**

There would be wide ranging opportunities for education. One of the central themes of the FCC would be to provide an educational resource and disseminate information about all aspects of its activities. This could be in the form of one day or residential courses offered with the aim of empowering interested individuals in all aspects of sustainable living. There would also be opportunity for longer-term apprenticeships where people could gain a deeper understanding of the full functioning of the community. The FCC could also provide a valuable educational resource to schools and colleges. There would also be possibility of becoming an education provider through the forest school network.

## **Environmental Sustainability**

A key element of the FCC would be to look after the forest resource with a long-term view towards improving the environment both in terms of the local ecology and the resources available for future generations. A principle would be to work with nature rather than against it.

### **Diversity**

Diversity, as an ecological principle, is the key to stability and therefore sustainability. In all aspects of the FCC, diversity would be encouraged. This would be both

### **Community Existence**

The erosion of a sense of community in the modern world has been well documented and many people have a yearning to recreate this. The experience of living and working together as a cohesive whole with appropriate roles for every member whether young or old is not quantifiable. The FCC would hope to engage the wider community and thereby strengthen community networks.

### **Voluntary Simplicity**

*“Live simply so that others may simply live.”*

The overdeveloped modern world now fosters dissatisfaction through excessive consumption. In order to truly embrace the ideals of sustainability, the FCC would encourage voluntary simplicity in its members. Subsistence has become an unfashionable concept in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century but the true meaning of it is to exist with what you need and leave enough for all other life.

### **Seasonal Celebrations**

As part of a sense of time and place seasonal celebrations would evolve that could foster a connection with nature, the earth and community. There could be festivals relating to different aspects of life and the seasons that would develop a spiritual connection and sense of place for the community.

### **Conflict Resolution**

People are people and conflicts will inevitably arise. There would need to be trained individuals with experience of conflict resolution within the community to assist in diffusing these situations.

managing the forest for improved bio-diversity and also increased diversity amongst the community members.

### **Stewardship**

The members of the community would have a responsibility as custodians of the forest resource. A long-term management approach would not only be for the benefit of human needs but for all life.

*“For my part I will not wholly fail in my task if anything passes through this night that can still grow or bear fruit again, for I am a steward of the land.” Gandalf –LOTR*

### **Community Composting**

In order to build fertility on the site for growing food a community composting scheme could be established. This would also attract a good source of funding.

### **Consultancy**

The FCC would develop diverse expertise in many aspects of sustainable living and environmental manage-

ment, which could be drawn on by other communities or projects.

### **Environmental Management**

Most of FC land is extensive monocultures of exotic conifer species. Over time the FCC would apply small-scale site-specific management using appropriate species for the locality. The result of this would be a more attractive and productive amenity woodland with a diverse ecological base. Management would involve more people on the ground and would minimise chemical usage and heavy machine dependency. A key element of environmental management would be to control non-native invasive species such as rhododendron and Japanese knotweed and pioneer non-chemical techniques.

*“It’s not easy being green” – Kermit the Frog.*

### **Summary**

A forest Croft Community will have long-term Social; Environmental and Economic benefits providing training and education opportunities; job creation and affordable housing whilst managing the forest resource sustainably.