

COMMUNITY LANDOWNERS AND THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Adapting to a 'Net Zero' Way of Life

Abriachan Forest Trust

COMMUNITY*
LAND SCOTLAND



Introduction

Scotland has declared a climate emergency and committed to becoming carbon-neutral by 2045. The community landowning sector is contributing towards this goal.

Community Land Scotland has commissioned research to document action that the sector is taking to address climate change. Alongside a report which looks at climate initiatives across the sector, six case studies have been produced.

Each of the case studies looks in depth at one asset-owning community organisation and how it is contributing to a particular climate action theme. The themes are: renewable energy generation; managing 'carbon sinks' like woodlands and peatlands; helping people to adapt to the effects of climate change, and; reducing emissions related to food, transport and domestic energy use.

Each case study also looks at the wider work of the community owner in relation to the climate emergency, and the diverse benefits that they are providing.

This case study features Abriachan Forest Trust (AFT), which manages a community-owned woodland near Loch Ness.

The case study looks at how AFT's educational activities are helping people to adapt to the needs of a 'net zero way of life' and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

The case study also looks at how AFT are addressing the climate emergency through their forest management practices and by promoting local food growing and active leisure and travel.

KEY MESSAGES

Community landowners:

- ✓ are trusted by local people and well-placed to communicate the importance of behaviour change and how this might be done.
- ✓ take holistic climate action. AFT is encouraging individual behaviour change while managing a forest that absorbs and stores carbon.
- ✓ provide leadership and coordinate local action. They enable people to get involved and work together to address local and global challenges.
- ✓ are helping to deliver a Just Transition to net zero. They integrate climate action with local needs and priorities.



Abriachan Forest Trust (AFT) manages 540 hectares of forest and open hill ground. It seeks to preserve access for local people, bring 'life' to a rural community experiencing depopulation and raise awareness around climate threats and actions. AFT works with and for local people, and welcomes many visitors a year.

www.abriachan.org.uk



The Global (Sustainable Development) Goals Trail. Photo: Abriachan Forest Trust.



Beehives in Abriachan Forest. Photo: Abriachan Forest Trust.

Addressing Climate Change Through Education

The Scottish Government estimates that 60% of the emissions reductions needed to achieve net zero will need to come from societal rather than technological change¹.

Behaviour change will also be needed if people are to adapt to the effects of climate change and thrive in the altered circumstances of a net zero way of life.

Education can encourage people to live more sustainably and help them make practical changes in their lives. Community organisations are in a good position to lead on climate education in their place because they enjoy high levels of trust amongst local people.

Abriachan Forest Trust (AFT) purchased the land from Forest Enterprise in 1998, in order to maintain access for local people. This was at a time when many woodlands were being sold to private owners and

there were concerns about people being excluded.

Over the course of more than two decades, the community-owned forest at Abriachan has become a hub for outdoor learning and recreation.

AFT feel that ownership of the forest has enhanced their ability to deliver their climate-related educational initiatives.

With control over the land, they are able to pursue their aims without needing permission from an external landowner. Income from the commercial use of the forest is being re-invested in community and public-benefit activities, and in employing core staff. All of this has provided AFT with independence and the scope to be ambitious.

AFT looks to reconnect people with nature

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“If you don’t kind of get that love and respect for nature you can’t really tackle climate change. You’ve got to get people to realise and connect with what we’re doing and why it’s important and how great it is Then through that, start working on the conservation and ... get into all this learning about why we’ve got to get these forests protected and more forests and more wild spaces looked after.”

Trish Matthews, Adult Learning Coordinator, Sutherland (collaborator of AFT)

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“If we get it across to everybody that comes to the forest that they have a personal responsibility. Because that’s where it starts, the choices you make. How often you use your car? Do you go abroad and do you fly? How much technology do you buy every year? What can you do to offset the cooker you bought? ... you try to create awareness without being ‘preachery’ and encourage people to make the right decisions.”

Christine Matheson, Company Secretary, Abriachan Forest Trust

¹ Scottish Government (www.gov.scot/publications/securing-green-recovery-path-net-zero-update-climate-change-plan-20182032)

and develop their love of the outdoors. The Trust believes that such connections are linked with people's capacity to take action to address the climate emergency.

AFT have been delivering activities for local children for some years now, encouraging them to design tree houses and bridges for example. Later, some of the children have pursued careers in engineering as a result, and some have stayed involved in the forest through tree-planting and other initiatives.

The Trust has recently created indoor and outdoor classrooms. Inspired by the Forest School concept from Scandinavia, it has initiated a programme of productive work for all ages.

After several years of training teachers in the Forest School ethos, the Trust has established a forest children's nursery on site. It works closely with schools and with the John Muir and Duke of Edinburgh Awards to engage children and young people in learning about nature, woodlands and climate change.

The educational activities are diverse, but all focus on bringing people together to achieve common goals through practical tasks. There is tree planting, drystone dyking and boardwalk and fence construction. Activities cover lifestyle topics around disposable consumer culture, recycling, energy efficiency and food miles.

A Global Goals Trail has been developed in collaboration with local artists, schools and the Highland One World group. This route through the forest is structured around the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Using the trail, young people are engaged in producing films and artworks and discussing how to engrain the SDGs in their everyday lives. QR codes on markers along the trail give people access to information about each Goal, its importance and the practical actions they can take to address it.

The children and young people who take part in these activities become secondary communicators. They take home what they have learnt and educate their parents on



Photo: Abriachan Forest Trust.

climate change, conservation and food growing.

These children and young people have also developed a sense of ownership over the forest, returning to check on the progress of their food and wildflowers and to learn more.

AFT also follows the Forest School ethos in engaging with adult groups, such as those with mental health issues, seeking employment or with experience of the criminal justice system.

People are given opportunities to take part regularly in forest conservation, gardening, cooking and craft work. Through this, they can develop practical and social skills, and a sense of belonging and ownership which is rooted in growing, cooking and eating food together. They also learn about how the work they are doing benefits the local environment.

The combination of practical, useful work and social interaction is key to AFT's approach. It develops feelings of achievement and belonging. It is also reported to have reduced people's anxiety

in relation to the climate emergency.

Health and social care professionals are keen for their clients and service users to take part in these activities, which provide them with opportunities to improve their lives and wellbeing which they cannot access through conventional public services.

AFT is primarily driven by the needs of its local community, but it also serves diverse communities of interest that have emerged through its activities over the years. These communities of interest are formed of people who share feelings of connection, pride and ownership in relation to the forest.

Just as with local children – who have passed their learning and their passion for climate action on to their parents – users from outside of the local area have been empowered to share what they have learnt with the people that they know.

The impacts of Abriachan's educational and social activities are extending far and wide.

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“The guys that were taking out these lodgepole Christmas trees the other day, they knew why they were doing it. It wasn't just for Christmas trees, they were removing lodgepole pine because it is not a native tree and would be re-planted with birch So they were learning, they were able to explain why they were doing it and they explained to their children why they're doing it.”

Suzann Barr, Trustee, Abriachan Forest Trust

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“Someone just passed the classroom and waved at us. He used to attend regularly with a group of young people who'd had really traumatic childhoods but there he is taking his own children out, showing them the trees he planted 10 years ago. It's great when we see others from the wider community developing a real sense of belonging to and pride in the woodland as much as ourselves.”

Suzann Barr, Trustee, Abriachan Forest Trust



One of a series of images relating to the Global Goals Trail at Abriachan Forest. This image features Sustainable Development Goal 17 'Partnerships for the Goals'.
Image: Abriachan Forest Trust.

Community landowners typically approach climate action in a holistic way and link it with the broader needs of their community.

AFT has recently won the RSPB/ NatureScot Community Initiative Award for its work to increase biodiversity, minimise carbon emissions and benefit the local community.

Management of Abriachan Forest is – in and of itself – a means of addressing the climate emergency. In 2017, **the forest absorbed over 4 million kilograms of CO2e** from the atmosphere, which is over a hundred times more than was emitted by the Trust that year.

This net contribution could be even greater in the future as a result of **tree planting** and **peatland restoration** initiatives. Firewood sold by AFT is considered to be a renewable and **carbon-neutral fuel**.

AFT's environmental ethos has been embedded across its operations.

For example, they use **biofuel** in chainsaws, have **paperless meetings** and support people to **cut down on personal car use**. They are **replanting native tree species** to enhance biodiversity, while maintaining a stock of commercial conifers to provide a sustainable income source. They consider environmental impacts when selecting contractors to undertake forest management work on their behalf.

Through a new **community garden**, AFT is helping people to acquire practical gardening skills and learn about food miles and the benefits of growing and eating locally-grown seasonal produce.

They are also providing **cookery classes and budgeting support**, and **distributing food** for home cooking.

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“The kids are pretty savvy about what they're eating and where it comes from. They go into the polytunnel and help ... and that's quite a natural thing for them to do.”

Christine Matheson, Company Secretary, Abriachan Forest Trust

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“In Branching Out we will be working with a group of 12 adults who have been referred by their CPN [community psychiatric nurse]; they will have been involved in growing and then harvesting vegetables from the garden to make lunch. They'd be learning how to budget, take produce home and then be able to make some soup and scones for themselves.”

Suzann Barr, Trustee, Abriachan Forest Trust

All of this has had knock-on effects on behaviour, for instance around the recycling and reuse of **household waste**; there have been large donations of garden and food waste to the Trust's own composting operation. Abriachan is cultivating 'Propaganda Gardeners' who are promoting local growing and buying to others.

A recent **climate literacy book festival** engaged a wider audience. A range of cookery, gardening and

environmental books were presented and there were diverse creative activities including poetry and making books out of fabric and other materials.

People also use the forest for **active recreation and travel**. A network of 40km of paths – including the Great Glen Way – traverse the woodland, attracting walkers and mountain bikers from near and far. The forest is used by local people for walking and picnics, and has a number of playparks.

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“When people are out in the outdoors there they're not so stressed. There's no pressure on them and there's all these little things you don't think about, like birdsong and things like that. That enhanced their experience of being outdoors and seeing wildlife, wildflowers, that sort of thing.”

Christine Matheson, Company Secretary, Abriachan Forest Trust



The community garden. Photo: Abriachan Forest Trust.

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