

## DRUMLAMPH



### Summary

- Drumlamph Wood is in mid Ulster, to the east of the Sperrin Hills.
- The core ancient woodland area (oak, hazel and associated species) is 19 hectares surrounded by over 300 hectares of associated habitats, including scrub, raised bog and grassland.
- The wood is managed on a 999 year lease between the Woodland Trust and the individual owners.
- Carntogher Community Association runs the project.
- The Association is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status.
- The key aims are to preserve and enhance the fabric and character of the rural community.
- The woodland project began in 1998.

**Why ?** The Carntogher Community Association (CCA) was formed in 1992 to preserve and enhance the fabric and character of the rural community in the general Carntogher area of south Derry (two miles north of Maghera). Its plans, already partially realised, include an Irish language playgroup, light industry, community meeting rooms and office space, a multi-media suite, a cultural festival and hill-walking trails. An area of ancient woodland and associated habitats, known as Drumlamph (the ridge of the wild garlic) at the core of Carntogher was identified as having potential in the economic and cultural regeneration of the area.

The CCA was already up and running when the idea of managing Drumlamph for the benefit of the local community was first mooted. This has enabled progress to be made relatively quickly.

**Who ?** The project is for the benefit primarily of the people who live in the 14 or 15 townlands lying below Carntogher Mountain, an eastern outlier of the Sperrins. The area is fairly well defined by the mountain and the main roads. It is a rural area with

around 300 households, 1500 people. There has been a lack of community facilities although a new primary school was opened in 1997. The population profile is characterised by a high proportion of young people (42% under 19) and many old people with fewer in between. This is related to the high unemployment levels (21%) and this, in turn, is the reason for the CCA's existence.

The CCA is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. There are 14-16 Directors who are elected at the AGM. Small sub-committees with separate bank accounts are set up to deal with specific projects such as Drumlamph. There are 3 Directors on this group plus co-opted members such as the representatives of involved organisations. It is the CCA which will employ the project manager when that person is selected. There has been no need for a public meeting to initiate the project. The interest was already there and has been slowly growing. Constant feedback is given through close community links in such a rural area.

**What ?** The core area of ancient semi-natural mixed deciduous woodland extends to 19 hectares (50 acres) and is surrounded by roughly 300 hectares (750 acres) of associated habitats- hawthorn/ birch scrub, cut-over bog, marshy grassland, unimproved acid grassland, acid mire, new woodland, hedges and open water. The whole area was wooded at the time of the earliest maps, in 1609, although the plantation period in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries saw massive cutting of the oakwood for shipbuilding and Derry's walls.

One third of the total area has been surveyed and evaluated for its nature conservation value. It scores highly in terms of diversity, rarity, naturalness, fragility, ecological position, potential value and intrinsic appeal. The core woodland area scores even more highly. Botanical surveys have shown the wood/ mire area to contain a rich diversity of flora and fauna with 12 primary indicator plants having been identified so far. Very few introduced or naturalised species are found in the wood.

Of particular note are the diverse bryophyte community and the presence of the uncommon red squirrel and Irish hare. Important bird species present are the long eared owl, buzzard, peregrine falcon, sparrowhawk, grasshopper warbler and redstart.

The ancient woodland area is fairly open (60% canopy cover) and dominated by sessile oak and common alder with elm, birch, hazel, holly and hawthorn also featuring. Height ranges from 4 to 14 metres. It has been unmanaged for a long period of time and has been heavily grazed to the detriment of its species diversity. The scattered scrub is dominated by silver birch, hawthorn and whins. The cut-over bog has scattered downy birch, common alder and goat willow.

The proposed management for the ancient woodland is to exclude stock with new fencing, coppice the hazel, plant a small number of sessile oak, protect natural regeneration, retain all dead wood and manage 20% of the area on a non-intervention basis. The 23 hectares of birch scrub is to be managed by excluding stock, controlling bracken, planting sessile oak, retaining dead wood and cutting back 'leggy' scrub. The intention on the cut-over bog is to restore the bog and remove the encroaching trees. In addition, 13 hectares of adjoining land are to be planted as a new native woodland.

Overall the objectives for the site are:

- to protect and enhance habitats, linking existing sites of conservation value
- to restore and restructure ancient woodland through planned management, making a contribution to the delivery of the UK and local Biodiversity Action Plans
- to provide access for quiet informal recreation
- to enhance the community aspects with guided walks and local participation

**Vision ?** The long-term vision for the project is to bring the woodland and other habitats back into a healthy condition. The oak woodland of Carntogher shown on the ancient maps, survived until comparatively recent times and forms part of the history and culture of this part of mid Ulster. Indeed, the symbol of the county is the oak (Derry means oakwood). It is believed that local people feel good about the landscape being looked after and it will contribute to the growing feeling of self-confidence.

There are many objectives for the project, intertwined with the overall objectives of the CCA. These are:

1. The supporting of local jobs through the management activities.
2. The development of tourism related jobs, both directly, in the form of guiding, and indirectly as bed nights.
3. The development of environmental education through an on-site classroom, hides, bird and bat boxes and interpretation panels.
4. The provision of informal access.
5. The production and processing of hardwood timber from the new woodlands in the form of coppice materials, charcoal, rustic furniture and ash hurling sticks.

The protection and restoration of the various habitats is the primary objective.

**How ?** The project began as an off-shoot of the CCA's rural regeneration policy. The structure was already in place with a tight administrative structure. This impressed potential supporting organisations such as the Woodland Trust and the Dept of Environment as well as funders such as the HLF.

Agriculture is in a poor way and with an ageing farming population, alternative ways of managing the land are on the agenda. Since the initial group of owners signed 999 year leases to give up control of their land in exchange for up front compensation, there has been a flurry of interest from adjoining landowners. It is hoped that the area of the project will expand in the future. Local people used to visit the woodland more often in the past than of late and there was feeling that it had become more inaccessible through flooding of the wetland and tracks.

The **milestones** have been:

1. Carntogher Community Association was set up in January 1992.
2. A full time Gaelic Athletic Association youth officer was in post for 3 years and stimulated youth activity and confidence.
3. A new state of the art primary school was opened in September 1996 and has 120 pupils. The local Irish language school will form a unit within the school in 2001.

4. Discussions with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the Woodland Trust (WT) were initiated in September 1998.
5. Discussions with landowners took place in December 1998.
6. Discussions with the Dept of Environment (DoE) began in early 1999.
7. Also early in 1999, the Moyola Valley Development Partnership provided funding for an environmental audit.
8. The environmental audit was carried out by a local ecologist and accepted in April 1999.
9. The HLF application was finally completed in June 1999
10. Funding was confirmed in August 1999.
11. Contracts were signed between the Woodland Trust and the landowners in January 2000.

Some **challenges** have emerged as a result of bureaucracy, but this has gone fairly smoothly due to the experience of the group members in completing forms. The HLF had to appoint someone in Northern Ireland before the application could be submitted. The HLF sent out two forms and the group filled in the wrong one, so the application had to be resubmitted. The **solution** is to stay calm and build experience.

**Greatest achievements ?** Obtaining HLF funding to purchase the land has been the highlight. The complementary relationship between CCA and WT was commented upon. The WT's experience in woodland management and access to funding has been of great help to the CCA with its personal contacts with the landowners and other interested local people.

**Sources of help and advice ?** The skills found within the group are impressive:

- Personal networking and knowledge of how local people think
- Knowledge of funding mechanisms and funding bodies
- A good working relationship with the main players
- Knowledge of the culture and history of the area
- Financial appraisal
- Administration. Already the group has a tight administrative structure with computerised systems, well organised accounts and a part-time secretary

The group does recognise its limitations and brought in the following skills from outside:

- Ecological survey and management planning from the environmental consultant
- Funding application and credibility from the Woodland Trust
- Land conveyancing from a local solicitor
- Group structure design to set up CCA from the NI Community Development Association

CCA has found WT to be a sympathetic organisation to work with. WT did the first HLF application. HLF was apologetic and helpful after its mistake over the forms. The tone of DoE was cool at first when it was pointed out that its audit of significant woods had missed out Drumlamph. However, it soon warmed up and since then their managers and surveyors have been supportive and approved substantial funding. The Environment and Heritage section is understaffed and feeling the pressure of

cutbacks. The main funders to date have been HLF and DoE. There has been no training of local people in practical or management skills.

**Future activities ?** The project will probably grow as other owners make land available, assuming that additional funds can be obtained. The WT is interested in further acquisition in partnership with CCA and other bodies such as the wildlife trust. This will link the core areas to the wider agricultural landscape and up onto the mountain, developing a habitat network and opportunities for walking routes. There are other funding opportunities including strong Ulster/ American links, possibly via the www.

How quickly the project grows depends both on the funding situation and the project officer/ management team. Awareness of the project will spread beyond Carntogher and involvement, by schools, groups and individuals, could broaden out to the whole of mid Ulster. Success breeds success and business opportunities could develop from the project. Once people's livelihoods depend to some extent upon the project, its sustainability in the longer term is almost guaranteed.

### **Lessons for others ?**

- Talk to everybody you can
- Decide what you want to do
- Temper that with what can be done

The original intention was to implement the complete project themselves, then they realised that the WT is set up to buy and manage woodland and it made sense to use its skill, knowledge and credibility. So there are other lessons :-

- Share out areas of the project where you can, you lose some of the ownership and control but you also lose some of the workload and liabilities
- Joint ownership equals joint liabilities (everybody needs to sleep well at night)

### **Contacts**

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