



RAINCLIFFE WOOD COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE

AGM

17th May 2016

Chairman's Report

Raincliffe Wood Community Enterprise (RWCE) was established in April 2015 with a mandate from Scarborough Borough Council (the owners of the Woodland) to take over the management of this important landscape feature overlooking Scarborough which includes Forge Valley, Raincliffe and Row Brow Woods, all of which is either a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or a Protected Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS) or both, and is situated within the North York Moors National Park. Its special qualities are therefore well protected. The woodland extends to 222 hectares (548.50 acres).

RWCE's vision remains as outlined in the Business Plan

RWCE's Vision

To build a strong community enterprise that secures a safe and sustainable future for the woods while enhancing wildlife and community benefits

Ownership and Governance

RWCE is a Not-for-Profit Company owned by its Members (stakeholders) and managed by a Board of Directors. Six of the Directors (comprising of a Board of up to 14 Members) are elected "Interested Members". Membership is open to anyone in the local communities who support the objectives of RWCE, as set out in the Business Plan (2015-2020). RWCE is a Membership (ie. Community) owned Company with a Board comprising of at least six elected Members.

The Rules and Regulations, through which the RWCE operates are explained in the Articles of Association and other supporting Appendices.

Scarborough Borough Council chose RWCE to undertake the management of the woods, initially under a licence to manage the woodland and to organise events, and subsequently to be responsible for virtually the entire management by way of a 25 year lease.

The Board of RWCE have undertaken a significant task in managing a unique and precious part of our natural and cultural heritage. It is a privilege to care for an important landscape, but this brings with it great responsibilities, and to that end RWCE decided to partner the woodland management with the Woodland Trust, the pre-eminent woodland charity. The Woodland Trust are providing advice and management, which they have agreed to provide free of charge for an initial three years.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RWCE AND THE WOODLAND TRUST

RWCE lease and manage the woodland; the Woodland Trust provide consultancy and management services; RWCE makes the final management decisions, and are the accountable body

Financials

RWCE commenced operations with virtually no financial resources. In the first instance a £9,500 Grant was awarded to assist in establishing the Company and to cover the initial start-up costs, the company producing a small loss of £50 in its first year of trading (to 31 October 2015).

Since then RWCE has generated £10,205 of income from trading operations (mainly woodland management), secured a WREN grant through the Woodland Trust of £100,000 to fund the unproductive woodland management (mainly restorative management) and also grants of £38,966 to support the establishment of a community involvement project, Wild about the Woods, which includes the employment of a part-time activity coordinator, and £5,000 from North York Moors National Park for the resurfacing of the former Sawmill track.

Bids for funding have also been submitted to NYCC Stronger Communities and UnLtd. RWCE has also been selected as one of the first 10 pilot projects in the country to receive support from the Making Local Woods Work programme from the Plunkett Foundation.

The financial position of RWCE is one of viability, but its future will depend on income from trading operations as well as Grants.

Woodland Management

1. The Woodland Management Plan

The first process in embarking on the management of such a special woodland site is to prepare a Ten Year Woodland Management Plan with the

Forestry Commission. Without this Plan it would be impossible (and illegal) to conduct management of the woodland.

Preparation of a Management Plan of a diverse 548 acre Ancient Woodland site is a complicated and lengthy process. Not only is important to recognise that woodland management is over a very long term cycle (over 60 years), but landscape, the environment, diversity of species, disease and pests are all factors which are taken into account in developing the Plan.

The process also involves consultation with numerous bodies, organisations and individuals. Public meetings and walks were also held and by far the biggest response was positive.

2. The Business Plan

The woodland management proposals are outlined in the five year Business Plan, and in summary the Plan envisaged (my paraphrasing).

BUSINESS PLAN

The careful restoration of the woodland to enhance its value for wildlife and timber. RWCE will embark on large scale forestry operations, the initial work being spread over 10 years. This work is vital for restoration of the woodland and some of this work will provide an income.

RWCE propose to manage around 50% of the woods as continuous cover (avoiding clear fells), where the canopy of the trees is maintained through careful selection. This process avoids any large scale impact on the landscape such as clear felling large areas.

The areas proposed for timber extraction have been selected based on their suitability for this purpose and for ecological and landscape value.

The Business Plan was adopted by Members and the Board at the first AGM held in April 2015. The Plan will be kept under review as the understanding of the woodland environment improves.

3. Woodland Management

i. Introduction

A large part (100 hectares / 247 acres) of Raincliffe, Row Brow and part of Forge Valley woods was planted with non-native species. Much of this area was clear felled between 1920 and 1950 and replanted with non-native conifers. The presence of these species will lead to the gradual degradation (loss of a diverse “woodland floor”, wildlife, landscape) of the woodland over time.

The objective is therefore to restore the woods back to a predominantly broadleaf woodland, rich in native species and biodiversity. To do this the woodland operations need to be economically viable and sustainable over a long period of time (over 50 years). The key drivers, however, are biodiversity, habitat conservation and managed visitor access and involvement.

ii. Woodland Restoration (2015)

Harvesting by way of thinning or selective felling took place over 19 hectares (47 acres), with timber extraction from 9 hectares (22 acres). The objectives were in line with the Business Plan and the ideals of RWCE and included:

- Reducing the level of shading to the ground and thus encourage the re-establishment of ground flora.
- Reducing the number of non-native trees and give opportunities for the native trees to develop by opening up the canopy and introducing more light to the under-story.
- Creating standing and fallen deadwood – a valuable woodland wildlife habitat, very typical of former ancient woodland.
- Producing a financial return.

The income is to be used to help fund the development of RWCE, volunteering, infrastructure (paths, bridges, etc) and woodland management.

The first phase achieved all the objectives with approximately 650 tonnes of timber being sold and generating an income of £10,205. Locally based employment was also created equivalent to 3 men for 3 months.

Part of the WREN grant paid for the un-economical restorative work, which took place on the steeper slopes of Forge Valley and Row Brow Woods.

4. Communication

The consultee bodies such as the National Park, Natural England, etc. were consulted before commencement of the work. Public meetings and walks were also held, and at that time the response was very positive. During the work the feedback from Members and the public became increasingly negative and there were failures in maintaining public awareness as the 2015 woodland programme took place. RWCE attempted to respond with the help of the Woodland Trust with the production of 8 information boards and responding by letter or email.

The contractors started the work later than had been anticipated and this factor combined with an abnormally wet summer result in greater track rutting and wind blow than had been anticipated (the latter being one of the consequences of an under thinned wood).

The Board of RWCE recognises that it needs to improve its communication. Critics of RWCE's woodland operations, however, also need to recognise that

the work is following an already well publicised and approved plan, and it is important to listen to the explanation from the experts - to do nothing is not an option!

As part of the process of improving communication Facebook is now the main publicity mechanism for RWCE

(<https://www.facebook.com/raincliffewoodcommunityenterprise/>). The page currently has 297 likes and is constantly growing. Regular two-way discussion and feedback takes place as well as promotion of RWCE activities.

5. Woodland Restoration (2016)

The proposals which are currently being put in-hand include.

- **Infrastructure Improvements**

A grant has been offered for the resurfacing of the access road to the old sawmill site. The improvement to this track will enable RWCE to use the existing sawmill site for stacking and loading of timber and reduce the need to use car parks.

- **Harvesting Operations**

The restoration thinning where timber is left for deadwood will continue along Row Brow Wood covering an area of approximately 10 hectares (25 acres). This will complete the work required in Row Brow. The main harvesting (thinning) operation involving timber extraction is proposed within areas of larch, pine and beech. The timber will be led to the sawmill site for collection. Approximately 900 tonnes is proposed to be removed.

- **Track Work**

Further work on the tracks and car parks will be undertaken once drier weather arrives and site conditions improve.

- **Replanting**

Replanting with new native trees and shrubs will be undertaken within the wind-blown areas. This process, called enrichment planting, is a good example of how the structure and age diversity of the woodland will be improved through the introduction of native species planted in small irregular groups.

The harvesting work will start in August when the ground conditions will be much drier. The track and path repair work will take place as the harvesting progresses, and the old sawmill site will be used for storage and loading thereby reducing the disturbance to the car parks.

6. Volunteering / Public Involvement

There were over 25 visits, tours or volunteering opportunities in the first year.

It is intended to increase the involvement of the public both in terms of holding walks to demonstrate the woodland operations which took place last year and also the proposals for this year. It is also hoped that there will be an opportunity to visit a Woodland Trust wood (Robson's Spring Wood) near Helmsley which is a smaller but similar Ancient Woodland site where restoration work started 7 years ago.

Volunteer days started in February 2016 and offer the opportunity once a week for local people to come and help manage and improve the woods. Initial work has focussed on path improvements and dramatic benefits have been seen and positive feedback received from volunteers, and woodland users. Future volunteer days will expand to include habitat management, wildlife recording, heritage research, and environmental education.

The Wild about the Woods (WATW) project which has a two year life, is aimed at introducing the local community to lifestyle benefits of volunteering within and enjoying a woodland environment. This community involvement programme is directed primarily to the Barrowcliff and Northstead communities because of the grant funding requirements, but others can join in once a walk or visit has been put in place.

It is anticipated that there will be a Public Open meeting later in the year.

7. Summary

RWCE, a community owned project, has achieved an immense amount in its first year of operation.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- A Board with proper Governance principles.
- Regular volunteer days to manage and improve the woodland.
- Funding to support the Wild about the Woods project to include a one day per week project co-ordinator for two years.
- Walks and visits to provide managed and safe access and to explain the management process.
- Funding to support the woodland restorative programme.
- Completion of the first year woodland management programme aligned to the Business Plan.
- An income generated from harvesting and grants.

RAH SWORD
Chair
May 2016

