



Raincliffe Wood Community Enterprise

AGM

30th April 2019 – Reconvened 28 May 2019

Chairman's Report

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

As RWCE enters its fifth year the vision remains entirely relevant, and is evidenced by:

- In increase in Members (the Stakeholders) to over 200.
- Conversion from a Not-for-Profit Company to a Community Interest (Not-for-Profit) Company.
- A Stronger Board.
- Increasing volunteer involvement.
- Enhanced and less intensive woodland management.
- Continuing school and group visits.
- A Major initiative to replace the Board Walk in Forge Valley.

Governance and Assets

With support of Mark Walton of Shared Assets, the Board decided to convert RWCE into a Community Interest Company, which is not a charity, but is regulated.

The structure allows the company, which remains as a Not-for-Profit Company to trade, which is not possible for a charity. There are other advantages to include an "asset lock" which protects the Members in the event the Directors decided to sell the assets of the Company. They cannot do so!

The Board is also completing a 25 year lease, which will give RWCE the independence to make its own decisions within a distinct framework.

Discussions are taking place with Natural England (NE) over a new agreement between RWCE and NE for the "National Nature Reserve" status of Forge Valley, which is also a SSSI.

Woodland Management

The Woodland Trust are no longer contracted to manage the woodland, but provide advice as and when required. As a result a "Focus Group" comprising three Directors has been formed to oversee the management of the woodland as well as to develop other services for volunteers and schools.

The "Focus Group" have developed a strong emphasis for a "local" input. This was felt to be a key desire of Members and as a result the most recent thinning of mainly larch has been felled by a local contractor and converted to firewood by Flixton Sawmills. This has also cut out the "middle man" which has produced much improved financial margins. The "Focus Group", on an entirely voluntary basis have overseen the felling programme with the assistance of Mark Feather (Woodland Trust) to mark the trees.

Much of the tidying up has been carried out by a team of volunteers.

The Directors have also experimented with felling and extracting a small amount of timber on the steeper slopes by horse. The result has been much more tidy and less brash, but unfortunately at a considerable net cost.

It is expected the introduction of more sunlight to the woodland floor will enhance the biodiversity of the vegetation, insects, amphibians and birds.

There remains the commitment to the long term plan – "a healthy, diverse and sustainable ancient woodland".

Access

Discussions have taken place with various bodies to improve the access along Lady Edith's Drive to Throxenby Mere. It is hoped that Section 106 money from a proposed housing development will support the costs of improving the footpaths and cycle access.

Another project, supported by volunteers is to improve a cycle route between the Dog Park Bend car park and the Middle Road track. The objective is to provide a safer route for walkers, wheelchair users and also cyclists.

Probably the most significant project is to replace the Forge Valley Board Walk with the assistance of funding from the Lottery. This is a major project which RWCE has agreed to take over and organise with the support of the North York Moors National Park and Scarborough Borough Council. The Scheme is to replace the existing timber with a recycled plastic Board Walk which will last for longer and provide improved access for wheelchair users. The Scheme also involves a foot bridge at the West Ayton end of Forge Valley.

Volunteering

Several volunteer days have been organised, mostly to remove brash after felling, filling in the worst of the wheel ruts after the forestry machinery and improving drainage around the public footpaths. A programme of "works" is being developed to enable local volunteers to actively take part in woodland management.

The "Wild about the Woods" and "Stronger Communities" initiatives are coming to an end. Both have been very successful and introduced school children and members of the public to bush craft sessions, archaeology walks, toad patrols, dawn chorus walks and many others. It is to be hoped that a replacement programme can be developed as well as introducing the woodland to primary and secondary schools as part of a Forest School Programme.

Row Brow Archery

A newly formed club of field archery has been formed and granted a Licence (subject to Scarborough Council consent) of a small area accessed from Stepney Hill Farm of Row Brow Wood. The area is on steep ground and will not conflict with public access, and the activities of the club are carried out with the full implementation of risk assessments and compliance with Health and Safety.

Finance

The thinning programme has produced a welcome boost to the finances of RWCE with sales in excess of £60,000 (approximately 1145 tonnes) and expenditure in the region of £43,500 resulting in a surplus in excess of £17,500.

The accounts (Year Ending 31st October 2018) will have been presented at the AGM.

Summary

It has been a busy and successful year with an emphasis on local input, and the Board and Members should be extremely proud of the newly acquired skills of the “Focus Group” who have made a very significant difference to their experience and output of a volunteer managed and sustainable woodland.

RAH SWORD
Chair
April 2019