

BIRSE COMMUNITY TRUST

**STRATEGIC PLAN
2016 - 2020**

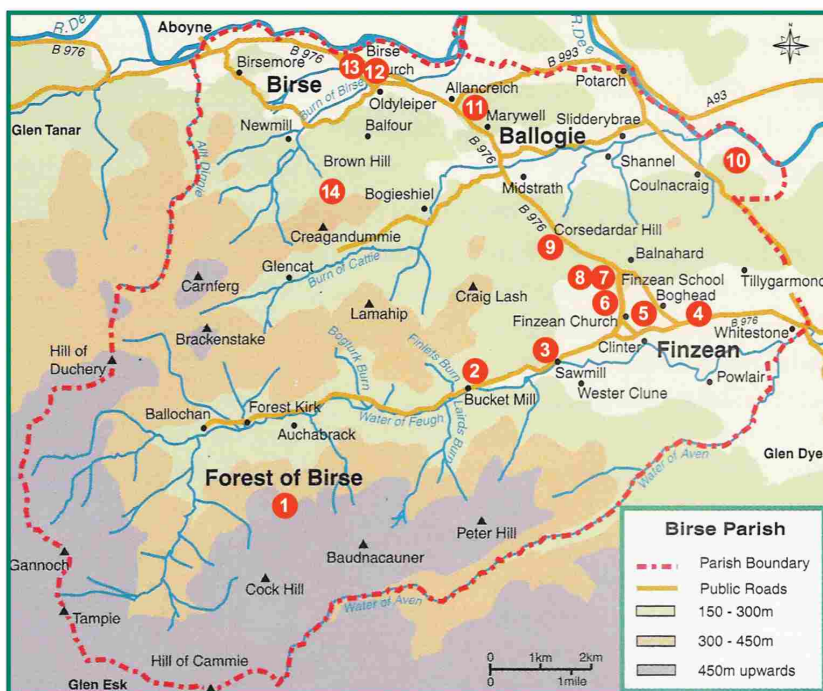
CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

BIRSE COMMUNITY TRUST

The Old School, Finzean, Banchory AB31 6NY

Scottish Company Number SC188799 : Scottish Charity Number SC028220

BIRSE PARISH



Birse Parish covers over 125 sq.kms. (50 sq.mls.) of Mid Deeside. The four main parts of the parish are the three local communities of Finzean, Ballogie and Birse and the largely uninhabited Forest of Birse. There are more than 600 voters on the Electoral Register covering the parish, which has a total population of over 800 living in around 300 households. Half of the parish's population and households are in Finzean.

BCT is directly involved in managing fourteen sites in Birse parish on behalf of the community. The sites are marked on the map and the legal basis of BCT's involvement in each is listed below.

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| 1. Forest of Birse Commonly <i>ancient rights (>3,750 ha.)</i> | 8. Birse Parish Archive <i>ownership (<1 ha.)</i> |
| 2. The Bucket Mill <i>ownership (c.1 ha.)</i> | 9. Corsedardar <i>long term lease (<1 ha.)</i> |
| 3. Finzean Sawmill <i>ownership (c.1 ha.)</i> | 10. Slewdrum Forest <i>ownership (168 ha.)</i> |
| 4. Finzean Community Woods <i>long term leases (17 ha.)</i> | 11. Ballogie Soutar's Shop <i>ownership (building only)</i> |
| 5. Finzean Community Path <i>long term lease (<1 ha.)</i> | 12. Birse Kirk <i>ownership (<1 ha.)</i> |
| 6. Finzean School Wood <i>long term lease (<1 ha.)</i> | 13. Birse Community Hall <i>ownership (<1 ha.)</i> |
| 7. Finzean Old School <i>ownership (<1 ha.)</i> | 14. Balfour Forest <i>ownership (241 ha.)</i> |

Consultation Document

INTRODUCTION

Birse Community Trust (BCT) is a limited company and registered charity that exists to promote the common good of the inhabitants of Birse parish to deliver wider public benefits.

BCT is currently consulting on its draft Strategic Plan for the management of BCT over the five years, 1st January 2016 to 31st December 2020.

The Strategic Plan has three main sections covering the three core components of the management and operation of BCT:-

Governance - how BCT will be managed on behalf of the community during the Plan

Activities - the projects and other activities that BCT plans to carry out during the Plan

Resources - how BCT plans to have the resources to implement the Plan

The Plan sets out BCT's strategic objectives for these core components and describes how BCT plans to implement them, with the main policies that BCT intends to follow underlined in the text.

These objectives and policies provide a framework to guide BCT's management over the next five years. The Plan is, like BCT's previous Strategic Plans, about direction rather than detail.

BCT's draft Plan is relatively long and this consultation document provides a shortened version, in which the Plan is summarised except for the Activities and Forward View sections.

The full version of BCT's Strategic Plan 2016-20 can be viewed on BCT's website:

www.birsecommunitytrust.org.uk.

BCT STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-20

Consultation Document

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1. BACKGROUND SUMMARY

- 1 Birse Community Trust (BCT) is a limited company and registered charity, which was set up in 1998 by the local community in the civil parish of Birse to improve the community's capacity to tackle community issues and develop local opportunities.
- 2 BCT is controlled by the local community, with everyone on the Electoral Register covering Birse parish eligible to be a voting member of BCT and responsible for electing the local Trustees that manage BCT for the community.
- 3 BCT's overall purpose is to develop and implement projects that help *'to promote the common good of the inhabitants of Birse parish and deliver wider benefits'*.
- 4 In carrying out this role, BCT works in partnership with the parish's three Community Associations (Finzean, Birse, Ballogie) and two Community Councils (Finzean, Birse & Ballogie) through the Birse Parish Liaison Group involving all six community bodies.
- 5 BCT has now been operating for 18 years and during that time, BCT has carried out a wide range of activities on behalf of the community.
- 6 BCT's main activity since it started has been the management of lands and buildings. BCT now manages fourteen sites spread across the parish because of the contribution that each site makes to the local community's identity and well being. The sites includes historic buildings, community facilities, amenity areas and BCT's three forests: the Community Pinewoods, Balfour and Slewdrum Forests. The forests reflect the traditional local pattern of three common good forests, with one in each community.
- 8 BCT also carries out a wide range of projects to conserve and promote the natural and cultural heritage of Birse parish, as well as a variety of other initiatives to contribute to the common good of the local community. BCT's heritage work includes the management of BCT's Birse Parish Archive and its collection of old documents, records and artefacts related to the history of the parish.
- 9 BCT has always avoided raising funds locally for its projects, so that it does not compete with other groups in the community for local donations. This means that nearly all BCT's income of £1.88 million over its first 17 years came from sources outside the parish. Nearly £0.5 million or 30% of the income was capital funding to enable BCT to buy properties.
- 10 BCT's income during the 17 years excluding the capital funding, consisted of grants (55%), donations (24%) and sales (21%). A key development in BCT's income was when it managed to buy Slewdrum Forest (2006) and Balfour Forest (2010). These are managed by BCT's subsidiary the Birse Trading Company (BTCO), which donates surplus income from timber sales to BCT to help BCT meet its core operating costs and the costs of other project work for which there are no grants.
- 11 BCT's average annual expenditure over its first 17 years was around £80K, excluding the capital expenditure. During that time, 50% or more of BCT's expenditure each year was spent in the parish on local contractors and suppliers, and 75% or more in the parish and the rest of the Mid Deeside area.
- 12 BCT ended 2015 in a relatively sound position and a key task for BCT's Trustees is to maintain and improve on that position over the period of its Strategic Plan for 2016-20.

2. GOVERNANCE SUMMARY

- 1 BCT's first strategic objective is *"to fulfil all relevant statutory, legal and other regulatory requirements in all BCT's activities, and operate in ways that also meet high standards of good governance"*.
- 2 BCT is a company limited by guarantee, with its objects, powers and duties set out in its Memorandum and Articles of Association. The four objectives in the Memorandum and Articles are BCT's charitable objectives as a registered charity. All BCT's activities and expenditure need to further these objectives.
- 3 BCT is controlled by its members, with everyone on the Electoral Register in the area covered by Birse parish eligible to be a voting member. The membership elects up to 7 members as the Board of Trustees that manages BCT on behalf of the community. BCT aims to have a full complement of elected Trustees and to co-opt up to two other Trustees, when appropriate. BCT also aims to increase the average length of term served by Trustees, to increase the level of experience on the Board.
- 4 The Trustees will hold 8 or more Board Meetings each year and have an annual site visit to each property managed by BCT. It is important that BCT is organised so that it provides appropriate support to Trustees in carrying out their role. This also helps ensure that the role is one that can be taken on by a wide cross section of local community members.
- 5 Until BCT's 2015 AGM everyone on the Electoral Register for the parish was automatically a member of BCT. Now they need to sign a BCT membership form to become a member. BCT considers it is vital as a matter of principle that BCT should remain as accountable as possible to the community, and therefore aims to encourage as many people as possible to become members. BCT aims to achieve a membership of 70-75% of those on the Electoral register for the parish by the end of 2017, and to maintain its membership at that level.
- 6 BCT aims to maintain consistently high standards of transparency and accountability in all its operations. Aspects of this include BCT's AGMs, Board Meetings, Patron's role and communication with its membership. BCT's AGM is its main formal meeting each year and BCT aims to make them interesting and positive events, and to achieve a target of 50 or more BCT members at each AGM.
- 7 BCT's Board Minutes are written in a style that is informative to those not present and put on BCT's website. Any member of BCT can arrange to attend a Board Meeting, and to be able to examine any of BCT's files and papers, except any explicitly marked as 'confidential'. BCT also appoints a Patron on a three year renewable term as part of its accountability arrangements. The Patron should be a well respected member of the local community to whom a BCT member or other person can go if, for example, BCT's Board was considered not to be responding appropriately on an issue.
- 8 BCT sends an Annual Report to all members with Notice of its AGM and will continue to provide an illustrated account for members of BCT's operations and activities each year, whether this is part of the Annual Report or not. BCT will also develop and improve its website, while aiming to improve its communication with its membership more generally.
- 9 BCT's core local partnership is with the parish's three Community Associations and two Community Councils. BCT will continue to work closely with these community bodies and to provide the secretariat for the Birse Parish Liaison Group involving these bodies and BCT.

3. ACTIVITIES

Strategic Objective - to conserve and develop the lands, buildings and other property rights and interests managed by BCT, and undertake other projects and initiatives to benefit the local community and wider public.

3.1 Charitable Purposes

- 1 BCT is a company constituted through its Memorandum and Articles of Association. In BCT's Memorandum, paragraph 3 states that BCT was *'formed to benefit the community within the Parish of Birse'* through the four objectives that are set out in the paragraph.
- 2 These objectives are also BCT's charitable purposes as a registered Scottish charity, and all BCT's activities and expenditure need to further one or more of these four charitable purposes.
- 3 Two of these purposes are the traditional charitable purposes 'to relieve poverty' and 'to advance education'. BCT's other two charitable purposes were based on the main planned activities for BCT once it was set up and involve environmental conservation and community well being.
- 4 BCT's environment purpose is to conserve, restore and promote native woodlands, their flora and fauna and the natural environment in Birse parish generally for local and wider public benefit. This objective was based on the significance of the existing native woodlands in Birse parish and the wider importance of native woodlands and forests to the identity and cultural heritage of the parish.
- 5 BCT's local community purpose is to promote the social welfare of the inhabitants of Birse parish by providing facilities and undertaking activities to improve the conditions of life for the inhabitants of the parish for local and wider benefit. This objective was based on the importance of local community facilities and the parish's cultural heritage to local community well being and development in the parish.
- 6 There is a high level of synergy between BCT's environmental, social and educational charitable purposes, with many of BCT's activities each year contributing to more than one of these three purposes. BCT has had no little involvement to date with the relief of poverty, given the relatively limited levels of multiple social deprivation in Birse parish and the other support services available.
- 7 During the period of this Plan, BCT will continue to summarise the overall purpose of BCT's charitable objectives and all its activities as being to promote the common good of the inhabitants of Birse parish and deliver wider public benefits.
- 8 BCT's plans to implement its strategic objective for its activities over the next five years, are described below under BCT's three main types of activities. These are, firstly, managing the lands and buildings for which BCT is responsible, secondly, carrying out natural and cultural projects related to the parish and thirdly, undertaking a range of other local projects and initiatives

3.2 Land and Building Management

Dispersed Estate

- 1 BCT's main activity since it started has been managing a dispersed estate of buildings and land spread across the parish. Each of the fourteen sites involved is described in BCT's annually updated Schedule of Lands and Buildings. The descriptions each include a summary of the local concerns that gave rise to BCT's involvement in the site, the legal basis of BCT's involvement in it, the history of BCT's management to date and BCT's current plans for the site.
- 2 The fourteen sites managed by BCT contribute to the identity and well being of the communities in Birse parish. The sites can be seen as consisting of three types:
Historic Sites (5) - the Birse Parish War Memorial site at Corsedardar, Birse Kirk, the Ballogie Soutar's Shop, Finzean Sawmill and the Bucket Mill.
Community Facilities (6) - Birse Community Hall, Finzean Old School, the Birse Parish Archive Building, Finzean Community Woods and School Wood, and the Finzean Community Path.
Forests (3) - the Commonly Pinewoods and wider Forest of Birse Commonly, Slewdrum Forest and Balfour Forest.
- 3 BCT's plans for each site over the next five years are considered below, with the sites grouped under the above three headings. The management of these sites is a major on-going commitment for BCT on behalf of the community. During this Plan, BCT will maintain and improve the management of each of the sites for which BCT is responsible, to high standards.
- 4 BCT has become involved with each of these sites because of their value to the local communities in Birse parish. During this Plan, BCT will remain prepared to become involved with other sites in the parish where this addresses a community issue or promotes local opportunities, and if the Trustees at the time judge it practical and prudent for BCT to become involved.
- 5 BCT will aim to organise a minimum of two guided visits for members to a BCT site each year during this Plan, while also looking for other ways and opportunities to encourage the sense of involvement of local members in sites managed by BCT.

Historic Sites

- 6 The land that BCT manages at *Corsedardar* is a prominent community site with the Birse Parish War Memorial and Birse Parish Millennium Stone, as well as the ancient Dardanus Standing Stone. During this Plan, BCT will continue to maintain Corsedardar to high amenity standards. BCT will also continue to organise the annual Remembrance Sunday Event at the War Memorial and will plan to hold a community event at the Millennium Stone on 1st January 2020, following the events in 2000 and 2010. BCT will also replace the interpretation panel at Corsedardar during this Plan, as the original one is no longer readable.
- 7 BCT has leased the *Birse Kirk* to the Ecumenical Trust for Birse Kirk (ETBK) since 2003. Under the 25 year lease, ETBK is responsible for the management, maintenance and repair of the historic building. During this Plan, BCT will continue to meet ETBK annually to liaise over the lease and conservation of Birse Kirk.

- 8 The *Ballogie Soutar's Shop* is considered with its contents to be the only *in situ* traditional rural shoemaker's premises still surviving in the UK. BCT has catalogued the contents of the Shop as part of its Parish Archive collection. During this Plan, BCT will continue to maintain the Soutar's Shop building and conserve the Shop's contents. BCT will also continue to organise visits for local members to the Soutar's and accommodate other education group visits.
- 9 The *Bucket Mill and Finzean Sawmill*, with the Duncan's Turning Mill on BCT's land at the Sawmill, are important parts of the parish's surviving forest heritage and there are no equivalent surviving mills elsewhere in the UK. The restoration, conservation and continued operation of the Mills has been a major ongoing involvement for BCT since it started. This will continue to be the case during this Plan. The next five years will be an important period in the conservation of the Mills due to several factors. These include the end of sawing at the Sawmill due to Health & Safety, the loss of the Sawmill weir in the 2016 New Year floods and the possible retirement of the millers, David Duncan and Stan Moyes, who have each operated the Mills since long before BCT started.
- 10 During this Plan, BCT will repair the 2016 New Year flood damage at each of the Mills, including repairs to the Sawmill weir. BCT will also continue to carry out an annual programme of maintenance, repairs and renewals at the Mills. As part of this, BCT will ensure the wheel and main drives at each mill are run on a regular basis as part of conserving the Mills. A priority will be to ensure a high level of knowledge transfer from the current millers to successors who will become responsible for working the Mills.
- 11 BCT will also aim during the next five years to secure ownership of remaining parts of the historic Sawmill site, and to complete a Conservation Plan for the Mills in discussion with Historic Environment Scotland and others, as part of securing the longer term future of the Mills. BCT will continue during this Plan to organise visits to the Mills for local members and other groups with a particular interest in the Mills.

Community Facilities

- 12 The *Birse Community Hall* has been managed by the Birse Area Community Association (BACA) as their community hall since 2003 under a 25 year Management Agreement with BCT. Under the Agreement, BACA carries out maintenance and minor repairs, while BCT can become involved for more major repairs. During this Plan, BCT will continue to meet BACA annually about the maintenance of the Birse Community Hall and continue to support BACA's management and use of the Hall.
- 13 The main building at *Finzean Old School* provides BCT with an essential office building for office work, meeting space and storing BCT records and other items. During the last 10 years, BCT has invested in two major projects involving the future of the building, both of which have come to nothing. As the use of the building is limited by the difficulties and high expense of heating it, BCT developed a project during 2008-10 to supply wood chip heating to it, BCT's Archive Building, the Primary School and School House. However, one of the project's grant applications was unsuccessful at the final stage. BCT was then involved during 2011-13 with others in the development of the Old Schools Proposal, which would have involved BCT's offices moving to the Ballogie Old School and the Council's Nursery moving from there into Finzean Old School, so it shared the same school campus with the Primary School. However, while the proposals was strongly supported locally, nothing came of this due to Council funding constraints at the time.
- 14 BCT will continue to maintain and repair the Old School building as BCT's offices. BCT will also continue to consider options for greater use of the Old School building during this Plan,

while ensuring BCT still has adequate office space. As part of that, BCT recognises that the community in Ballogie now no longer supports the Old Schools Proposal, because of the current contribution of the Nursery to community life in Ballogie. Finzean Primary School is important to the local community and, during this Plan, BCT will maintain a presumption against options for the Old School that would prevent the building being available for use by the School, if it could contribute to the continued operation of the School at some stage.

- 15 The *Birse Parish Archive Building* on the Finzean Old School site is in better condition than the main building, because of the extensive work done to it by BCT to make it suitable for housing the items in BCT's Parish Archive collection. During this Plan, BCT will continue to maintain and repair the Archive building.
- 16 During this Plan, BCT will continue to manage and maintain the *Finzean Community Woods*, *Finzean School Wood* and *the Finzean Community Path* to high standards of amenity. This will include continuing to encourage and support use of the School Wood by Finzean Primary pupils and to liaise closely with Finzean Community Association over the management of the sites. Most of the car park for Finzean Hall is on land leased by BCT and BCT is keen to support more of Finzean Hall car park being tarred during this Plan, if funds are available.

Forests

- 17 The *Forest of Birse Commonty* has a very unusual legal constitution, with one party owning the solum of the ground (Birse Estate), two parties sharing the shooting rights (Birse and Ballogie Estates) and a third party holding the other land use rights (BCT). The management of the Commonty depends on cooperation and agreement between the parties for their interests. During this Plan, BCT will continue to work closely with Birse and Ballogie Estates over the management of the Forest of Birse Commonty.
- 18 The cooperation between the parties includes an annual meeting each spring to discuss the management of the Commonty, with BCT providing the secretariat for the meetings. The North Hill Management Agreement is an agreement between BCT and the two Estates, to provide BCT with sufficient clarity to be able to claim forestry grants over the Commonty Pinewoods area. This Agreement, which has been extended previously, currently runs to 2021. During the period of this Plan, BCT aims to develop and agree with the other parties a clearer operating framework for communication and cooperation over different land uses in the wider Commonty.
- 19 BCT is currently implementing its FC Scotland approved Forest Plan 2011-30 for the Commonty Pinewoods, which cover 525 ha of the nearly 4,000 ha Commonty. The Plan mainly involves encouraging the natural regeneration of the pinewoods, planting some native pine seedlings in the 2003 wildfire site, establishing the individual protected planted native broadleaves, maintaining the network of tracks in the pinewoods area and ensuring adequate deer control. During the next five years, BCT will continue to implement BCT's Forest Plan 2011-30 for the Commonty Pinewoods.
- 20 BCT aims to extend its native broadleaved planting in the wider Commonty, particularly in areas beside the Feugh and its tributaries to restore and link up areas of riparian woodland. During this Plan, BCT will develop and start to implement a new programme of native broadleaved planting in the Commonty beyond the Commonty Pinewoods area. Another main aim in the Commonty during the next five years, is to resolve the issues over the route of the Fungle in the Balloch area. During this Plan, BCT aims to develop and implement a project to re-route the Fungle to the east of Birse Castle by restoring part of the original historic route.

- 21 BCT leases *Slewdrum Forest* (173 ha) and *Balfour Forest* (241 ha) to its subsidiary BCo, to implement BCT's approved Forest Plan 2011-30 for each Forest. In the next five years, there will be some further timber harvesting in each Forest, as well as further planting and natural regeneration. BCT hopes that the natural regeneration will have spread to the top of Balfour Forest by 2020 and that there will be further improvements to access routes in the Forest by then. BCT will continue to monitor the implementation by BCo of the Forest Plans for Slewdrum and Balfour Forests.
- 22 Following BCT's purchase of 5 ha of land as an addition to Slewdrum in 2016, BCo is due to erect some new boundary signs and carry out some other improvements on the new land. BCT will monitor the implementation of the work due by BCo to integrate the additional land at Slewdrum into the Forest. During this Plan, BCT will investigate whether social housing might be an option for the Ord site in Slewdrum. BCT will also seek to agree a new Minute of Agreement with the Commonly Fishing owners over the management of the Fishing Track on BCT's land to replace the current, out of date Agreement from the 1950s.

3.3 Heritage Projects

- 1 BCT is committed to conserving and promoting the Birse parish's natural environment and the local community's social well being. BCT carries out natural and cultural heritage projects as part of promoting these objectives. While some of these projects relate to the sites that BCT manages, other projects involve other local sites or all of the parish.

Natural Heritage

- 2 BCT aims to improve the natural heritage interest of the areas of land it manages, and BCT's largest natural heritage project is the restoration of native woodlands in parts of the Forest of Birse Commonly. BCT also cooperates as a land owner over parish wide wildlife management initiatives with the three other largest land owners in the parish, Finzean, Ballogie and Birse Estates. An example is the Birse Parish Deer Management Group. These parish wide initiatives include other topics such as capercaillie and black grouse conservation and raptor monitoring. During this Plan, BCT will continue to cooperate with other local land owners over local wildlife management issues and local land management generally.
- 3 BCT has also carried out an increasing number of habitat and species surveys and studies in the parish over the years, while also encouraging work by outside researchers and compiling existing records about the natural heritage of the parish. BCT holds all its natural heritage reports and records at Finzean Old School, and has produced several publications about the parish's natural heritage. BCT shares its species records with the North East Scotland Biological Recording Centre. During this Plan, BCT will aim to carry out further local habitat and species surveys and continue to compile natural heritage records about the parish.
- 4 BCT encourages and supports Finzean School to carry out natural heritage projects in the School Wood. BCT also recognises that there are members of the local community who are interested in natural heritage topics, who might become involved in appropriate projects. For several years over 10 years ago, when BCT had a funding package from SNH for natural heritage projects, BCT had a Natural Heritage Advisory Group of interested local members involved in helping identify and supervise a range of the projects. During this Plan, BCT will aim to identify and develop natural heritage projects that involve more members of the community.

Cultural Heritage

- 5 BCT has been actively involved in conserving and promoting the parish's cultural heritage since it started, because of the importance of the history of the area and the local community to local identity and community development. All the buildings that BCT owns are significant parts of the parish's cultural heritage. The hub of BCT's cultural heritage projects is the Birse Parish Archive in the building at Finzean Old School which was, in part, the original 18th century school building.
- 6 The Parish Archive is a collection of items of interest related to Birse parish. The collection is all housed in the Archive Building, apart from some of the items in the collection which BCT acquired with the Mills, Soutar's Shop and Birse Kirk and which have been left in situ at those sites. Some larger items are also stored in the Birse Hall steading. BCT started the Archive shortly after it was set up and the Collection includes a diverse range of documents and artefacts that have been donated to BCT, as well as records and reports that have been produced as part of BCT projects. BCT has Acquisition and Disposal Policies to guide what is accepted into the Collection and to define the circumstances in which BCT might remove anything from the Collection. During this Plan, BCT will continue to maintain, conserve and develop the Parish Archive Collection.
- 7 Over recent years, BCT's management of the Archive has been on a care and maintenance basis following a couple of false starts in involving people to project manage the Archive. One result of this is that, while donations are still being made to the Collection, cataloguing and storing items appropriately has fallen behind. During this Plan, BCT will improve the supervision and management of the Parish Archive.
- 8 As part of managing the Archive, BCT has held exhibitions of items from the Collection and produced local history publications to make the Collection more accessible and improve local awareness of the parish's history. However, there has been little activity in recent years and BCT has made limited use of its website to show items in the Collection. During this Plan, BCT will aim to hold at least one Archive exhibition a year and make better use of BCT's website as part of improving access to the Archive Collection.
- 9 BCT has continued to undertake individual projects on aspects of the parish's cultural heritage. In recent years, these have ranged from projects on the archaeology of the Forest of Birse to projects investigating the official census statistics that describe the current community and show how it is changing over the years. BCT recognises that there are many people in the community who are interested in local history and considers that there is significant scope to involve more people in helping with local history projects, with the Archive providing a base for increased project activity. During this Plan, BCT will aim to involve more members of the community in developing an increasing number of local cultural heritage projects.

3.4 Other Projects and Initiatives

- 1 BCT as a company is constituted with wide ranging powers for the types of activities it can carry out, so long as the activities further one or more of BCT's charitable purposes. The nature of BCT's purposes means that BCT's project activities can generally be considered under the three previous headings above. BCT's main 'Other Projects and Initiatives' involve sales by BCT for supplying local goods or services (other than commercially harvested timber from BCT's forests).
- 2 BCT has always sought to earn some income each year from sales, as part of trying to remain viable. Some 'sales' can be simply because a funding body pays its grant for a

project on receipt of an invoice, rather than a grant claim form. However, BCT has always sold wooden items from the mills and BCT publications, as well as occasional other types of items. Local services provided by BCT have included charging for some visits to BCT sites and being paid to organise local consultations in the parish for public bodies. In all cases, the sales complement BCT's charitable purposes (for example, supporting the mills, improving local consultations). During this Plan, BCT will continue to look for and develop opportunities for BCT to earn income from the sale of local goods and services that support BCT's other activities.

- 3 A particular type of sales has been the subscriptions paid by BCT's Associate Members. The scope for BCT to have Associate Members is set out in BCT's Memorandum and Articles. These members pay an annual subscription and are entitled to attend BCT's General Meetings, but have no voting rights. This category of membership was for supporters of BCT living outside the parish and BCT actively recruited Associate Members when it started. While BCT had over 150 Associate Members in its early years, BCT has allowed the numbers to fall over the years to less than 50. This has mainly been because of the limited benefits that it has been offering Associated Members beyond BCT's Annual Reports. During this Plan, BCT will review whether or not to develop Associate Membership of BCT more clearly as a form of supporter's subscription.

4. RESOURCES SUMMARY

- 1 BCT's third strategic objective is *"to manage BCT's operations in ways that are effective, efficient and transparent, and secure sufficient income to cover annual expenditure and develop adequate reserves"*.
- 2 The implementation of this Strategic Plan depends on BCT's Trustees having sufficient human capacity and financial resources each year, to enable BCT to fulfil its existing commitments and the additional improvements and developments set out in the Plan.
- 3 BCT's policy has always been to use as local as possible contractors to carry out BCT's work. During this Plan, BCT will also maintain and develop BCT's existing cooperation with other local community groups, the main local estates and other local interests.
- 4 BCT's average annual expenditure including its subsidiary BCo, has been around £80K since BCT started. The level of BCo's investment in improvements in Balfour and Slewdrum Forests following their purchase is reducing and BCT aims to increase its project activity, so that BCT's average annual expenditure increases to £60K or more during this Plan. BCT's aim is that 66% or more of its annual expenditure is spent on project activities rather than administration. While BCT plans to strengthen its administration during this Plan, Trustees will continue to monitor and carefully manage the level of BCT's administrative costs.
- 5 BCT's three sources of income are grants, donations and sales. BCT aims to apply wherever possible for grants to cover the costs of projects and other activities for which grant funding is available. Grants tend to be 'restricted funds' which can only be used for the purpose for which they are given. BCT also needs up to a significant amount of unrestricted funds each year to cover its annual administration costs and the work on its sites and other projects for which BCT does not have grant funding. BCT's aim is to have between £30-40K of unrestricted funds at the end of each year, to help fund its operations in the next year.

BCT's economic strategy has always been to own Slewdrum and Balfour Forests, so that BCT can generate its own core contribution to its need for unrestricted funds by harvesting timber from the forests on a sustainable basis. Since BCT became owner of the forests, its financial position has been much more stable as a result of income from the forests through rent and donations from BCo. However, during this Plan, BCT will aim to reduce its dependence on income from the forests by developing other sources of unrestricted funds.

BCT has always aspired to build up adequate reserves to improve its resilience against significant falls in income or increases in expenditure. BCT established the BCT Endowment Fund with £75K in 2013, to produce income from interest on the capital invested and provide a fund against which BCT could borrow in the event of difficulties. During this Plan, the Trustees aim to increase the level of the Endowment Fund to £100K or more.

BCT does not raise funds for its projects locally to avoid competing for funds with other groups within the community. However, BCT much appreciates the local donations that it receives. BCT considers that legacies should become an important part of BCT's longer term finances. During this Plan, BCT will produce a legacy leaflet as part of encouraging members of the local community to leave a legacy to BCT.

BCT has managed to improve its financial position over the years. However, BCT's existing liabilities and other factors emphasise the need for the Trustees to continue to take a very cautious and prudent approach to managing BCT and its finances.

5. FORWARD VIEW

- 1 The purpose of this Plan is to provide a framework to guide the management of BCT over the five years 2016-20, as the next stage in BCT's development.
- 2 BCT starts the Plan after 17 years of operation with many on-going commitments, particularly in relation to the lands and buildings that BCT manages on behalf of the community.
- 3 During the Plan, the Trustees overall aims are to manage BCT:
 - to ensure BCT continues to meet its existing responsibilities and commitments;
 - to ensure BCT continues to manage the lands, buildings and other projects for which it is responsible to high standards;
 - to increase BCT's capacity to undertake more activities on behalf of the community;
 - to increase BCT's annual income and the number of projects that BCT carries out;
 - to improve the level of BCT's communication with its membership and the extent of local involvement in BCT's activities;
 - to improve the resilience of BCT's administrative arrangements and its financial position.
- 4 The Plan describes how BCT intends to pursue these aims through its strategic objectives for each of the three main components of the management and operation of BCT - its governance, activities and resources.
- 5 Under each objective, there are a series of underlined statements which represent the policies that BCT will follow to implement the Plan. These statements also provide over 100 benchmarks in the full version of the Plan, against which BCT's performance can be assessed during the Plan.
- 6 These objectives and policies provide the framework that will guide BCT's management during the Plan, As a strategic plan, it is about direction rather than the detail of the activities that BCT will carry out during the Plan.
- 7 The five years of the Plan is a relatively long time in BCT's terms and the particular projects that BCT is taking forward at any stage, will be managed through BCT's Annual Plans and reported in BCT's Annual Reports.
- 8 BCT's Annual Report for 2015 reflected that BCT is starting this Strategic Plan in a more secure financial position than previous Plans, and with its management and administration also both operating reasonably well.
- 9 However, despite all BCT's progress over the years, the core challenges each year remain to try to ensure both that BCT has sufficient funds to meet its commitments and that BCT has adequate capacity in its management team.
- 10 These factors emphasise the need for BCT to have a cautious and prudent approach to its development, as it aims both to do what it already does better and to do more to promote the common good of the inhabitants of Birse parish and deliver wider public benefits.