

# **BIRSE COMMUNITY TRUST**

## **STRATEGIC PLAN 2016 - 2020**

### **SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS**

**BIRSE COMMUNITY TRUST**

**The Old School, Finzean, Banchory AB31 6NY**

**Scottish Company Number SC188799 : Scottish Charity Number SC028220**

## BCT STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-20

### **Summary of Key Points**

#### **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.

This document is a summary of the key points from the Strategic Plan that BCT has adopted for the management of BCT over the next five years, 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020.

The Strategic Plan has an initial Background section and then 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.

This Summary of Key Points from the Strategic Plan starts with a shortened Background section and then lists BCT's strategic objectives and the policies intended to implement each.

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

[www.birsecommunitytrust.org.uk](http://www.birsecommunitytrust.org.uk).

BCT STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-20

**Summary of Key Points**

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## 1. BACKGROUND

- 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 Commony 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. Around £05 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**

***Strategic Objective** - 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.*

### **2.1 Constitution**

During this Plan, the Trustees will propose amendments to BCT's Memorandum and Articles if the need arises

### **2.2 Trustees**

During this Plan, the Trustees will:-

- ⌚ achieve and maintain a full complement of elected Trustees
- ⌚ consider using the power to co-opt in the following three circumstances:
  - ⌚ if there are less than 7 elected Trustees
  - ⌚ to have a reasonable gender balance amongst Trustees
  - ⌚ to have Trustees from each of the parish's three communities and a reasonable balance between them.
- ⌚ ensure that the role of a Trustee continues to be one that can be taken on by a wide cross section of local community members.
- ⌚ ensure appropriate support to Trustees in carrying out their role.
  - ⌚ appropriate legal and accountancy firms
  - ⌚ maintain and improve the current level of induction provided for new Trustees and other training opportunities for Trustees
  - ⌚ maintain and continue to improve the current level of management and administrative support available to the Board.
- ⌚ increase the total number of years experience as a Trustee of the Trustees on the Board
- ⌚ hold 8 or more Board Meetings each year and have an annual Trustees' site visit to each property managed by BCT
- ⌚ annually review and amend if appropriate, BCT's Trustees Code of Code, General Code of Conduct, Equal Opportunities Policy and Health and Safety Policy
- ⌚ manage BCT in ways that maintain and develop BCT's capacity

### **2.3 Membership**

During this Plan, the Trustees will:-

- ⌚ encourage as many people as possible on the Electoral Register for the parish area to become BCT members
- ⌚ achieve a membership of 70-75% or more of those on the Electoral Register for the parish, with one or more members in 80-85% or more of local households
- ⌚ develop a systematic approach to maintaining BCT's membership at its target level
- ⌚ maintain consistently high standards of transparency and accountability in all BCT operations
- ⌚ make BCT's AGMs interesting and positive events to attend as part of achieving a good turn out
- ⌚ achieve a target of 50 or more BCT members at each AGM
- ⌚ maintain BCT's records of attendees at AGMs
- ⌚ maintain the current openness of Board Meetings
- ⌚ continue to appoint a Patron
- ⌚ provide an illustrated account for members of BCT's operations and activities each year
- ⌚ maintain and improve the information about BCT's operations and activities on its website
- ⌚ consider replacing BCT's current website with an improved design
- ⌚ develop an improved and more systematic approach to communicating with BCT's membership

## **2.4 Community Representatives**

During this Plan, the Trustees will:-

- ⌚ continue to work closely with the parish's Community Associations and Community Councils and be guided in its work by their concerns and interests
- ⌚ continue to provide the secretariat for the BPLG and encourage its further development
- ⌚ maintain and develop the extent to which BCT is consulting through the BPLG on its operations and plans

### **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**

- ⌚ During this Plan, BCT will continue to promote the common good of the inhabitants of Birse parish and deliver wider public benefits

#### **3.2 Land and Building Management**

During this Plan, BCT will:-

- ⌚ maintain and improve the management of each of the sites for which BCT is responsible, to high standards
- ⌚ remain prepared to become involved with other sites in the parish
- ⌚ organise a minimum of two guided visits for members to a BCT site each year
- ⌚ encourage the sense of involvement of local members in sites managed by BCT

##### Historic Sites

- ⌚ maintain Corsedardar to high amenity standards
- ⌚ organise the annual Remembrance Sunday Event at the War Memorial
- ⌚ hold a community event at the Millennium Stone on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020
- ⌚ replace the interpretation panel at Corsedardar
- ⌚ meet ETBK annually to liaise over the lease and conservation of Birse Kirk
- ⌚ maintain the Soutar's Shop building and conserve the Shop's contents
- ⌚ organise visits for local members to the Soutar's and accommodate other educational group visits
- ⌚ repair the 2016 New Year flood damage at each of the Mill, including repairs to the Sawmill weir
- ⌚ carry out an annual programme of maintenance, repairs and renewals at the Mills
- ⌚ ensure the wheel and main drives at each mill are operated on a regular basis as part of conserving the Mills
- ⌚ ensure a high level of knowledge transfer from the current millers to successors
- ⌚ secure ownership of remaining parts of the historic Sawmill site
- ⌚ complete a Conservation Plan for the Mills in discussion with Historic Environment Scotland and others

- ⌚ organise visits to the Mills for local members and other groups with a particular interest in the Mills

### Community Facilities

- ⌚ meet BACA annually about the maintenance of the Birse Community Hall
- ⌚ support BACA's management and use of the Hall
- ⌚ maintain and repair the Old School building
- ⌚ consider options for greater use of the Old School building
- ⌚ maintain a presumption against options for the Old School that would prevent the building being available for use by the School
- ⌚ maintain and repair the Archive building
- ⌚ manage and maintain the Finzean Community Woods, Finzean School Wood and the Finzean Community Path to high standards of amenity
- ⌚ encourage and support use of the School Wood by Finzean Primary pupils
- ⌚ liaise closely with Finzean Community Association and Finzean Estate over the management of these sites
- ⌚ support more of Finzean Hall car park being tarred

### Forests

- ⌚ work closely with Birse and Ballogie Estates over the management of the Forest of Birse Community
- ⌚ develop and agree with the other parties a clearer operating framework for communication and cooperation over different land uses in the wider Community
- ⌚ implement BCT's Forest Plan 2011-30 for the Community Pinewoods
- ⌚ develop and start to implement a new programme of native broadleaved planting in the Community
- ⌚ develop and implement a project to re-route the Fungle to the east of Birse Castle
- ⌚ monitor the implementation by BCTCo of the Forest Plans for Slewdrum and Balfour Forests
- ⌚ monitor the implementation of the work due by BCTCo to integrate the additional land at Slewdrum
- ⌚ investigate whether social housing might be an option for the Ord site
- ⌚ agree a new Minute of Agreement with the Community Fishing owners over the management of the Fishing Track on BCT's land

## **3.3 Heritage Projects**

During this Plan, BCT will:-



- ⌚ continue to cooperate with other local land owners over local wildlife management issues and local land management generally
- ⌚ carry out further local habitat and species surveys and continue to compile natural heritage records about the parish
- ⌚ identify and develop natural heritage projects that involve more members of the community
- ⌚ maintain, conserve and develop the Parish Archive Collection
- ⌚ improve the supervision and management of the Parish Archive
- ⌚ 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
- ⌚ involve more members of the community in developing an increasing number of local cultural heritage projects

### **3.4 Other Projects and Initiatives**

During this Plan, BCT will:-

- ⌚ look for and develop opportunities for BCT to earn income from the sale of local goods and services
- ⌚ review whether or not to develop Associate Membership of BCT more clearly as a form of supporter's subscription

## **4. RESOURCES**

***Strategic Objective** - 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.*

### **4.1 Capacity**

During this Plan, the Trustees will:-

- ⌚ maintain BCT's basic approaches of avoiding local fund raising for its projects and employing as local as possible people to carry out the work required by BCT
- ⌚ maintain and increase BCT's capacity to fulfil its responsibilities and develop further BCT's contribution to the common good of the local community
- ⌚ manage BCT in ways that improve BCT's resilience against adverse changes in circumstances

### **4.2 Management**

During this Plan, the Trustees will:-

- ⌚ monitor the extent of BCT's use of local contractors by analysing the geographic distribution of its expenditure each year
- ⌚ ensure that all those carrying out work for BCT do so to high professional standards and in line with BCT's General Code of Conduct
- ⌚ ensure that BCT's approach to its administration and project management aims to minimise the loss of knowledge and experience when the individuals involved change
- ⌚ maintain and develop BCT's existing administration annual work programme.
- ⌚ strengthen the capacity of BCT's central administration.
- ⌚ ensure each BCT site has a project manager and increase the number of individuals involved with BCT as project managers
- ⌚ increase the number of BCTo Directors to a minimum of four and maintain the link where one BCTo Director is also a BCT Trustee.
- ⌚ maintain the advisory role of BCTo through BCT's Community Advisory Group and continue to work closely with BCTo on a range of topics
- ⌚ maintain and develop BCT's existing cooperation with other local community groups, the main local estates and other local interests
- ⌚ increase the number of activities that BCT organises to encourage community involvement in BCT's projects
- ⌚ maintain and develop BCT's relationships with its main public sector partners

- ⌚ maintain BCT's awareness of and contact with the wider community sector

### **4.3 Finance**

During this Plan, the Trustees will:-

- ⌚ update the data sets in BCT's Financial Tables to 2018
- ⌚ increase the level of BCT's project activity so that BCT's average annual expenditure is £60K or more during the period of this Plan
- ⌚ manage BCT so that 66% or more of its annual expenditure is spent of project activity rather than administration
- ⌚ monitor and carefully manage the level of BCT's administration costs
- ⌚ maintain BCT's existing financial management systems, including its living wage policy
- ⌚ ensure that BCT applies wherever possible for grants to cover the costs of projects and other activities for which grant funding is available
- ⌚ continue to manage BCT's interests in the Forest of Birse Community as an essentially self financing project
- ⌚ aim to have between £30-40K of unrestricted funds at the end of each year
- ⌚ reduce BCT's dependence on income from its forests by developing other sources of unrestricted funds
- ⌚ increase BCT's Endowment Fund to £100K or more, invest the majority of the Fund for a return that judged appropriate and continue to hold part of the Fund as cash
- ⌚ maintain BCT's policy of avoiding local fund raising within the community for its projects and other activities
- ⌚ encourage members of the local community to leave a legacy to BCT
- ⌚ 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 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.
-