



**BIRSE COMMUNITY TRUST**

**STRATEGIC PLAN  
2008 - 2009 - 2010**

**BIRSE COMMUNITY TRUST**

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

**Scottish Company Number SC188799 Scottish Charity Number SC28220**

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Plan is to help guide the management of Birse Community Trust (BCT) during the three years from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010.

BCT is a company with charitable status that exists “*to promote the common good of the inhabitants of Birse parish and deliver wider public benefits*”.

The company is owned and controlled by the local community in Birse with everyone on the Electoral Registers for the parish responsible for electing five local residents as Trustees to run BCT on behalf of the community.

BCT’s Trustees have produced this Plan to provide a framework for the operation and development of BCT over the next three years.

This is the fourth Strategic Plan that BCT has produced since it was first incorporated as a company in 1998. While this is the first Plan based on BCT’s financial years (1<sup>st</sup> Jan.-31<sup>st</sup> Dec.) rather than fiscal years (1<sup>st</sup> April – 31<sup>st</sup> March), this Plan is like the earlier Plans in being about direction rather than detail.

The Plan has seven sections. The first provides background information about BCT, the second sets out BCT’s five Strategic Objectives for the period of the Plan and the remaining sections cover each of those objectives in turn.

1. Background
2. Strategic Objectives
3. Governance
4. Property Management
5. Other Activities
6. Administration
7. Finance

## 1. BACKGROUND

1. BCT is a company limited by guarantee (*Scottish Company Number SC188799*) and a registered charity (*Scottish Charity Number SC28220*), with its objects, powers and duties set out in its Memorandum and Articles of Association.
2. The company is owned and controlled by the residents of Birse parish, with everyone on the Electoral Registers for the parish responsible for electing the five local residents as the 'Trustees' who run BCT on behalf of the community.
3. BCT currently has c.620 voting members living in c.290 households within Birse parish. The parish covers 125 square kilometres and has four main parts with the three scattered rural communities of Finzean, Birse and Ballogie and the largely uninhabited Forest of Birse.
4. BCT was set up by the community in 1998 to increase its ability to tackle local community issues and develop local opportunities. BCT's overall purpose is:  
*"to promote the common good of the inhabitants of Birse parish  
and deliver wider public benefits"*
5. BCT was formally incorporated as a company in August 1998 and has therefore been operating as a local community business for nearly ten years. During that time, BCT has carried out a wide range of activities on behalf of the community.
6. BCT's main involvement since it started has been the management of land and buildings. BCT is directly involved in the management of twelve sites in the parish because of the contribution that each makes to the local community's identity, well-being or future development.
7. BCT also undertakes projects to promote the parish's heritage and encourage local community development. BCT's third main type of activity is providing local goods and services.
8. BCT's Trustees are unpaid volunteers and they use contractors to carry out the work required for BCT's many different activities. In each of the nine years that BCT has completed so far, over 75% of its total expenditure (excluding property purchases) has been spent in the parish or immediate Mid Deeside area.
9. In its nine financial years to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2007, BCT's average annual turn-over (excluding property purchases) has been over £85,000 with its turn-over falling between £70K - £90K in most years.
10. BCT has spent a total of £1.1 million on carrying out its work on behalf of the community during its first nine years. 30% of this income was capital grants towards the costs of land and buildings that BCT has purchased, 50% of the income was other project grants and 20% income from other sources.

## 2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

1. BCT's overall aim is *to promote the common good of the inhabitants of Birse parish and deliver wider public benefits.*
2. BCT has five main strategic objectives to fulfil that overall aim during the period of this Plan. These objectives are:-
  - (i) Governance  
*to fulfil all relevant statutory, legal and other regulatory requirements and standards in all of its operations and activities.*
  - (ii) Property Management  
*to safeguard, conserve and develop the lands, buildings and other property rights and interests that it manages on behalf of the local community.*
  - (iii) Other Activities  
*to undertake or be involved with a range of other activities and initiatives that deliver local social, environment and economic benefits.*
  - (iv) Administration  
*to operate in ways that are efficient and effective and also meet high standards of openness and accountability to its local membership.*
  - (v) Finance  
*to secure sufficient resources each year to meet its expenditure commitments and maintain adequate reserves for its continued operation.*
2. The ways in which BCT will implement each of these five objectives are described in the following sections of this Plan.
3. Much of the implementation will involve the continued operation and development of BCT's well established pattern of activities. In addition, BCT has four particular aims that Trustees hope to have achieved by the end of the Plan in 2010 as part of BCT's overall development. These aims are that:-
  - (a) BCT will have bought Balfour Wood, resolved the long standing local issues over the current management of the Wood and be managing the existing timber so that it contributes to the longer term financial sustainability of BCT.
  - (b) BCT will have held a special AGM and other associated events in 2009 to mark the completion of BCT's first ten years of operation and involving a wide cross section of members of the local community.
  - (c) BCT will have established greater local awareness that the properties managed by BCT are a single integrated estate of land, buildings and other property interests owned and managed by the community on its own behalf.
  - (d) BCT will have in place the management structures and financial plans necessary to provide a secure basis for BCT's next three year plan.

### 3. GOVERNANCE

1. BCT's first strategic objective is *to fulfil all relevant statutory, legal and other regulatory requirements and standards in all of its operations and activities.*
2. BCT has particular legal responsibilities as a company and a charity, as an owner and manager of land and buildings and more generally in its operations as a business.
3. BCT's Board of Trustees will ensure that BCT complies with all these requirements and as part of that, will continue to retain appropriate legal and accountancy firms to act as BCT's advisers on these and other matters.
4. Trustees will ensure that each new Trustee is given appropriate induction training and that the management support available to Trustees enables the role of Trustee to be taken on by a wide cross section of local members.
5. Trustees will consider using their power to co-opt up to two Trustees if necessary to ensure that the Board has a reasonable balance of geographic and gender representation.
6. Trustees will, at the first meeting of the new Board after BCT's AGM each year, ensure that BCT's Register of Interests is fully up to date and will review, amend if necessary and agree BCT's:-
  - Code of Conduct
  - Equal Opportunities Policy
  - Health and Safety Policy
  - Insurance Policy.
7. Trustees will hold eight or more Board Meetings each year as part of managing BCT to deliver this Plan's five strategic objectives.
8. Trustees will ensure that BCT's governance and operations maintain high standards of openness, accountability and involvement with the local community in Birse parish as BCT's membership.
9. Trustees will also maintain BCT's core local partnership with the parish's two Community Councils and three Community Associations, which represent the interests of different geographic sectors of BCT's membership in their respective areas and roles.
10. Trustees will aim to convene at least an annual meeting of the Birse Parish Liaison Group, as made up of representatives of BCT, Finzean Community Council, Birse & Ballogie Community Council, Finzean Community Association, Birse Area Community Association and Ballogie Community Association.

## 4. PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

1. BCT's second strategic objective is *to safeguard, conserve and develop the lands, buildings and other property rights and interests that it manages on behalf of the local community.*
2. BCT is directly involved at present in the management of twelve sites through a variety of legal arrangements (*see attached map*). BCT:-
  - (a) holds ancient rights over the Forest of Birse Community;
  - (b) owns seven properties: Birse Kirk, Birse Community Hall, Finzean Old School, Finzean Sawmill, the Bucket Mill, the Ballogie Soutar's Shop (building only) and Slewdrum Forest;
  - (c) tenants three properties on long leases: Corsedardar, Finzean School Wood and Finzean Community Woodlands;
  - (d) has a Management Agreement over Balfour Wood with Scottish Ministers.
3. BCT became involved with each site because of community concern over its future. Nearly all were already issues before BCT was set up. BCT was involved with the management of nine sites by the end of its first year and the other three sites within two years.
4. There are still community issues over the management and future of Balfour Wood and during the period of the Plan, BCT will endeavour to buy the Wood from the Scottish Government to manage it for greater local community benefits.
5. The purchase of Balfour Wood would complete a pattern where BCT is managing a community forest in each of the parish's three communities and where timber income from these three forests makes a significant financial contribution to the less economically viable sites that BCT manages.
6. BCT will continue to ensure that each site that it owns or manages is maintained and improved to high standards. BCT's current Schedule of Lands and Buildings indicates the main management aims for each site during the period of this Plan.
7. BCT will also undertake activities to promote greater local awareness that the properties managed by BCT are a single integrated estate of land, buildings and other property interests owned and managed by the community on its own behalf
8. BCT will remain prepared to become involved with other sites in the parish where this addresses a community issue or promotes a local opportunity, and if the Trustees judge it practical and prudent for BCT to become involved.
9. BCT's most important property other than land and buildings are, firstly, BCT's parish archive collections at Finzean Old School and in BCT's other historic properties and secondly, BCT's wholly own subsidiary company the Birse Trading Company. These are covered in sections 5 and 7 respectively.

## 5. OTHER ACTIVITIES

1. BCT's third strategic objective is *to undertake or be involved with a range of other activities and initiatives that deliver local social, environment and economic benefits.*
2. BCT has two main activities other than managing land and buildings. These activities are, firstly, projects to promote the parish's heritage and local community development and, secondly, supplying local goods and services.
3. In years 2008-10, BCT anticipates broadly maintaining the proportion of its work that is spent on these other activities. During BCT's first nine year, the share of expenditure was 60% on land and buildings and 40% on other activities. In other activities, the split was projects 65% and other goods & services 35%.
4. With heritage projects in the next three years, BCT will build on the significant amount of work that it has already done on the parish's cultural heritage. In particular, BCT will try and put in place a major project to develop BCT's parish archive, including investigating local history topics and further work on the archive collections and their use and enjoyment by local members and others.
5. During the period of this Plan, BCT will also continue an active involvement to promote the parish's natural heritage. BCT has recently completed its second three year natural heritage work programme and BCT will look for opportunities to carry out projects on key local natural heritage topics. BCT will also continue to cooperate with local land owners and other interests in parish wide initiatives on key species including capercaillie, raptors, deer, squirrels and mink.
6. The respective shares of BCT's expenditure over the last nine years on heritage and community development projects has been in the ratio 60%:40%. BCT will look for more opportunities for community development related projects and will work particularly closely with the parish's Community Councils and Associations in developing these types of projects.
7. BCT's 'Other Goods and Services' heading covers a wide range of relatively small scale activities including servicing BCT's subscription paying associate membership, producing and selling publications and selling timber goods from the Finzean Mills and charging for some types of group visits to BCT.
8. BCT plans to invest more resources to improve and develop these types of activities in the next three years, including the publication of a book in 2009 about Birse and the places BCT manages to commemorate the completion of BCT's first ten years of operation at the end of 2008.
9. BCT's other goods and services also include project work which BCT undertakes where BCT invoices for the work rather than claiming a grant. BCT prefers this approach to delivering projects and will seek more opportunities of this type.

## 6. ADMINISTRATION

1. BCT's fourth strategic objective is *to operate in ways that are efficient and effective and also meet high standards of openness and accountability to its local membership*
2. BCT has been operating for over nine years and has an established pattern of administration based in BCT's offices at Finzean Old School. BCT plans to improve the working environment at the Old School by installing a woodchip heating system in 2009.
3. While BCT is grateful for voluntary help that it receives, BCT aims to pay for the work it requires to minimise competition for volunteers with other local groups. BCT will continue its approach of contracting out work to a range of local self-employed individuals and businesses and will look for further opportunities to increase the part time local employment.
4. BCT will also aim to maintain its existing track record for completing its property management and other projects on schedule to high standards and on budget.
5. To fulfil BCT's many responsibilities and deliver its diverse activities, Trustees will strengthen BCT's central management roles during this Plan and aim to further improve BCT's management by putting in place a development project to start by the end of this Plan.
6. BCT will continue to work closely with the partners that it has at many of the sites which it manages, including the Birse Trading Company, Birse Area Community Association, Ecumenical Trust for Birse Kirk, the wood mill operators or millers, local estates, Finzean School and others. BCT will also maintain and develop its core local partnership with the parish's Community Councils and Associations.
7. BCT will lease Slewdrum, Balfour and the woodchip heating system to BTCo and look for further opportunities for BTCo to manage other BCT activities.
8. BCT will also aim to maintain and increase the ways in which involves members of the community in its work including, through mailings, meetings, events, consultations, site visits, part time employment or volunteer activities. After the publication of BCT Update 20 in spring 2009, Trustees will consider having one Update during the year in the autumn and replacing the spring Update with an improved Annual Report.
9. As part of BCT's openness and accountability, BCT's members will also be able to arrange to attend Trustees meetings and to examine any of BCT's files and papers except any explicitly marked as confidential.
10. In 2009, to mark BCT's first ten years of operation and promote community involvement, BCT will hold a special AGM and organise a programme of guided visits for local members to each of the sites which BCT manages.



## 7. FINANCE

1. BCT's fifth strategic objective is *to secure sufficient resources each year to meet its expenditure commitments and maintain adequate reserves for its continued operation.*
2. BCT does not charge its local members a subscription so that BCT is an inclusive community body. While BCT is always very grateful for donations it receives from members, BCT aims to enhance the capacity of the community by raising its income outwith the parish and avoiding competition with other groups in the community for local funds.
3. BCT's main source of income over its first nine years has been grants committed to specific projects. The challenge for BCT has always been to have enough uncommitted income from other sources to pay for BCT's core operations costs, including development work, administration and overheads.
4. Over BCT's first nine years, its income and expenditure levels have been very close with BCT operating on very narrow margins with little financial flexibility and no scope to have a level of reserves appropriate to its responsibilities.
5. The first year of this Plan will see a long awaited improvement in BCT's finances when BCT's subsidiary BCo gift aids to BCT the first funds to come from timber harvesting in Slewdrum Forest. BCT first tried to buy Slewdrum in its second year of operation and will at last receive the first income from the forest in its tenth year.
6. If BCT buys Balfour Wood in 2009 as planned, this will enable BCT to have a sustainable level of annual income from timber. Some income will also come from the sale of heat to Finzean Primary School if BCT's planned woodchip heating scheme at Finzean Old School goes ahead.
7. The start of this improved income in 2008 will enable BCT to operate on a more realistic annual margin. While some of the income will be used to strengthen BCT's part time management roles, BCT's core operating costs are both relatively consistent year to year and independent of turn-over. This will enable the improved income to support the development of further projects and of the goods and services that BCT supplies.
8. BCT's anticipated pattern of annual income and expenditure in each year of this Plan is set out in its Business Plan for 2008 – 10. The main division in income is between grants and other sources and in expenditure between lands & buildings, heritage & community projects, other goods & services and administration.
9. During the period of this plan, BCT does not expect to achieve an adequate level of reserves funds. However, ownership of the timber resources in Slewdrum and Balfour would mean that BCT has a 'bank' which could be used in an emergency