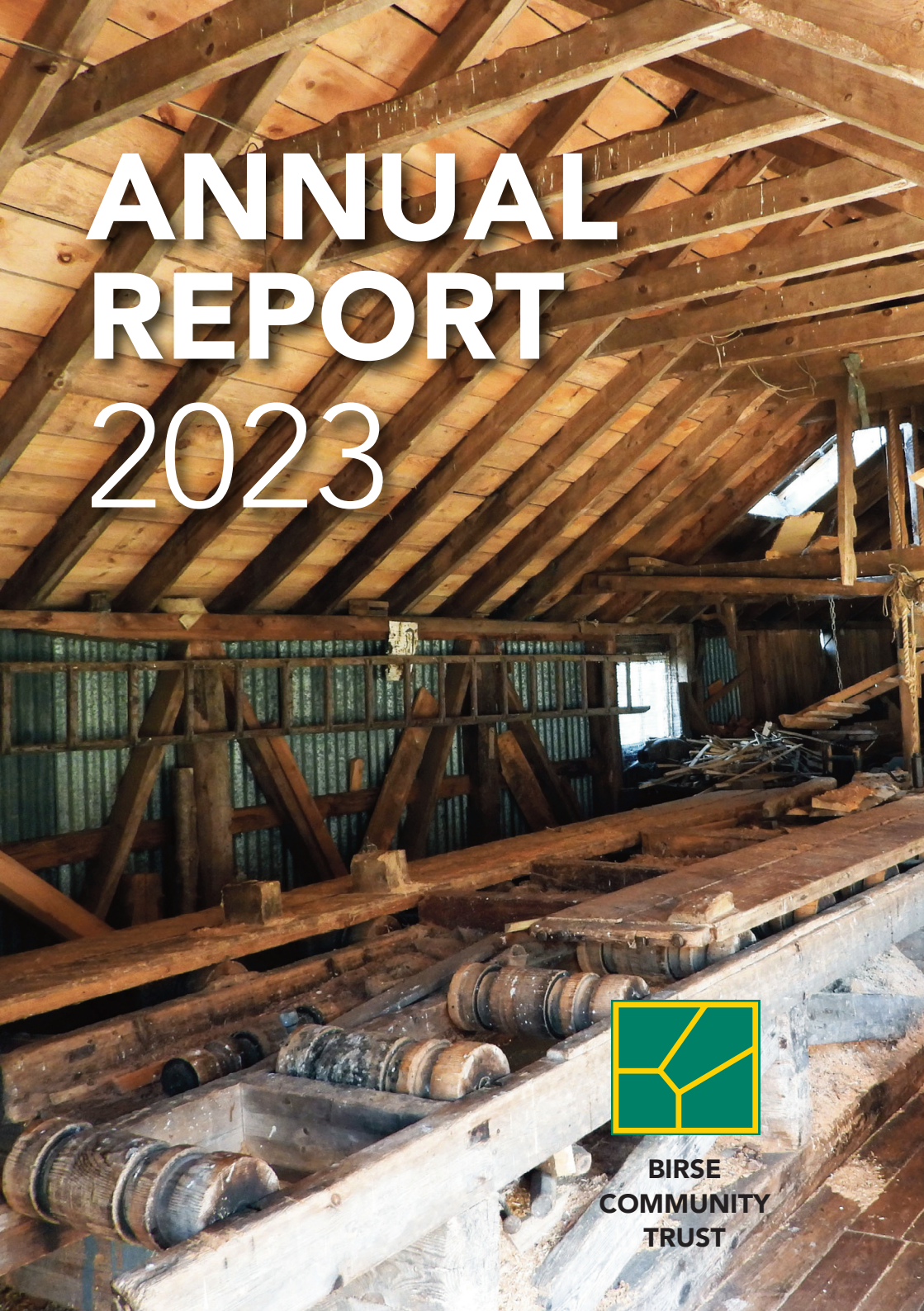


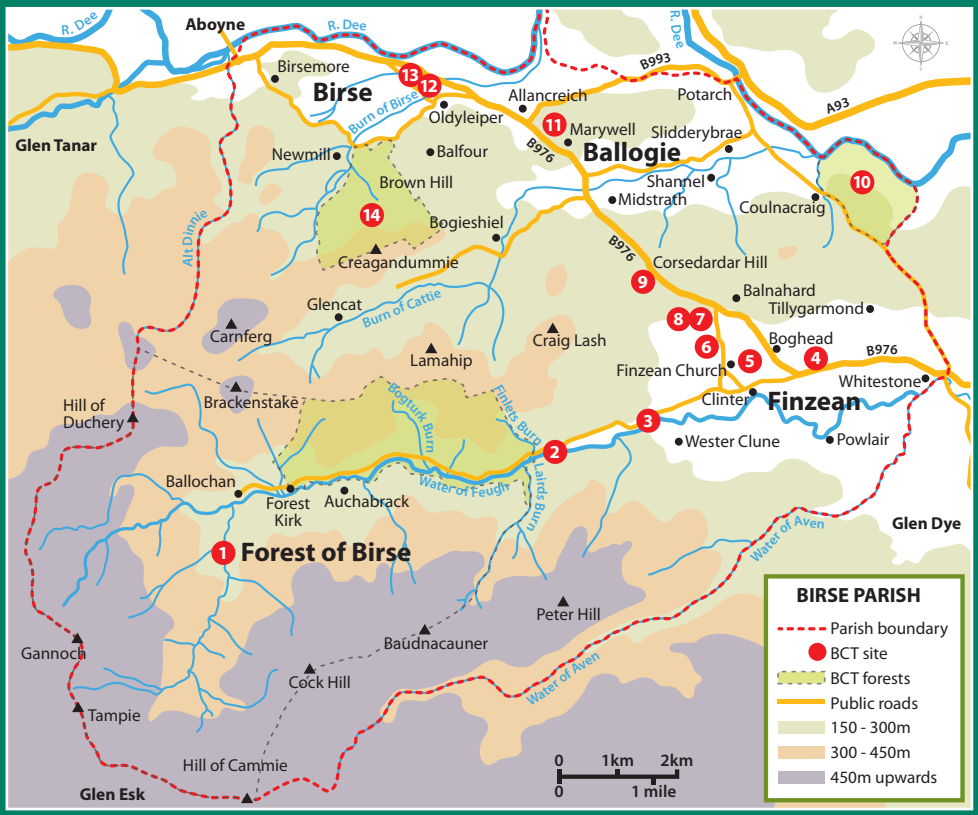
ANNUAL REPORT 2023

BIRSE COMMUNITY TRUST

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 Ballogie, Birse and Finzean 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.

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.



1. **Forest of Birse Commonty.** Ancient rights (>3,750 ha.)
2. **The Bucket Mill.** Ownership (c.1 ha.)
3. **Finzean Sawmill.** Ownership (c.1 ha.)
4. **Finzean Community Woods.** Long term leases (17 ha.)
5. **Finzean Community Path.** Long term lease (<1 ha.)
6. **Finzean School Wood.** Long term lease (<1 ha.)
7. **Finzean Old School.** Ownership (<1 ha.)
8. **Birse Parish Archive.** Ownership (<1 ha.)
9. **Corsedardar.** Long term lease (<1 ha.)
10. **Slewdrum Forest.** Ownership (173 ha.)
11. **Ballogie Soutar's Shop.** Ownership (building only)
12. **Birse Kirk.** Ownership (<1 ha.)
13. **Birse Community Hall.** Ownership (<1 ha.)
14. **Balfour Forest.** Ownership (241 ha.)

Letter from the chair

2023 saw the significant milestone of BCT's 25th Anniversary. The trust took the time to look back at what had been achieved over the years and seeing the regenerating Commonty Pine Woods and the significant listed buildings we are responsible for; the trust can be proud of what it has done for the Parish.

These achievements have taken a considerable amount of work by the various trustees and chairs as well as members of the community. This is all voluntary work, and on behalf of the current trustees, I want to thank everyone who has contributed to achieving this milestone.

As well as volunteer time, maintenance of buildings and development of community assets costs money. BCT has always sought support from grant funding, and although this can help to cover the capital outlay required, the routine operating costs for the day-to-day maintenance comes from the trust.

To date, much of the trust's funding has come from the two commercial forests, but the forecast income from these will no longer generate the required revenue to meet the maintenance of BCT's assets. The last 10 years saw significant felling operations in both forests, and now there is a lull in activity whilst the replanted trees grow and mature. One area of clear fell is planned for late 2024/early 2025 but most of this income will be required to manage the forests in this quiet period.

BCT now needs to find other ways to generate income to ensure we meet our mandate to protect the rural and built assets we manage. This will take time and a lot of effort, and we will need

to be careful where funds are allocated in the meantime. We need the community to offer their time and resources to help the trust. Jobs such as clearing vegetation from paths and cutting grass are all activities that cost money but could be done by members of the community. If you are able to offer some time, please get in touch with the BCT Manager.

Amongst all this, we must recognise the significant positive activity carried out by the trust in 2023. The Old School has hosted activities for the community which we have managed to secure funding to support. These include, sign writing, leather working, stained glass working, lime mortar work and a jewellery workshop. These have been well supported and we intend to continue where there is interest.

We have also started a project to protect the Souter's Shop in Ballogie which is at danger from its degrading structure. The project has been able to secure funding and so is currently cost neutral, allowing conservation of this important historical record.

We have been lucky to have support from other outside organisations and 2023 saw a team from Total Energies carry out volunteer maintenance on the community paths. Thank you for the support!

The BCT team continues to work hard on your behalf to manage the diverse assets in its care. I reiterate our need for your support and encourage anyone who wants to help to get in touch.

Toby Rider
July 2024

Ceremonial Tree Planting and Time Capsule

To mark BCT's first 25 years we invited the original tree planters who planted School Wood, together with Finzean Primary School staff and pupils to join us and on a very wet day planted a commemorative apple tree, donated by the Rider family. We then buried a time capsule, which the children had been compiling in class to be opened in another 25 years time. Our thanks to Vivien Moorhouse for joining us with the whole of Finzean Primary School, to Donald Farquharson for giving a short address before the planting and to the 23 members of the local community who came out braving the wet weather.



SPAB Work Week

We were delighted to welcome volunteers and specialist contractors from the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) Scotland back to the Finzean water powered mills for a second year.



After last year, our first with SPAB, the volunteers along with traditional wood working specialists were ready to tackle essential repairs to the wooden platform beside the Sawmill. The structure supporting the platform was rotting and moving away from the Sawmill, so it was an ideal opportunity to learn traditional joinery skills, replacing the rotten sections. Separate teams also learned traditional wood working skills to repair the pulley on the back of the Sawmill and replace rotten bridges, adding handrails to make it safer for walkers.



It was a great few days, learning joinery skills from traditional woodworkers, meeting new people, working in the beautiful setting of the mills and all helping to protect and care for these important buildings, part of the special heritage in Birse. We held an open morning on the last working day and we would like to thank everyone who came along to support us and visit the volunteers.

BCT would also like to thank the Duncan family especially miller Davie Duncan, for meeting with the volunteers, Bucket miller Stan Moyes, Davie Hector for organizing and planning the work, Finzean Estate who offered a field for the volunteers to camp in and to Finzean Community Association for hire of the hall. The Trust is also grateful to everyone in the community who helped with baking, logistics and who came along to the ceilidh.

Commonty Pinewoods

One of the primary objectives of the BCT is to protect the community's ancient, shared land use rights over the whole Forest of Birse Commonty. These rights were vested in BCT in 1998, and as part of BCT carrying out its responsibility, there has been an agreement with Birse and Ballogie Estates for BCT to manage the North Hill. During 2023 there have been ongoing negotiations to extend this agreement, it is hoped these will conclude in 2024.

Since 1999 nearly 50,000 seedlings have been planted over an area of nearly 30 hectares with great success. The area of pine woodland has increased by 41% to 331 hectares in 23 years and provides a special environment for a range of native fauna and flora.

The BCT's current policy is to manage the Commonty Pinewoods and forest habitat with a light touch to maintain and conserve it in the most natural way possible.



In 2023 plans were submitted to erect a Telecommunications Mast on the North Hill. Whilst recognising the benefits of improved communications in a remote area that is very popular with residents and visitors, throughout the planning process the BCT highlighted the potential negative impact on this sensitive area.

Planning permission has been granted, subject to appropriate conditions and mitigation and construction will be carried out in strict accordance with the approved Habitat and Protected Species Survey and associated mitigation measures carried out by Highland Ecology. BCT will assist and monitor the development to limit the impact on this sensitive area of natural beauty.

Birse Trading Company (BTCo)

Certification was secured for the forests in 2023 and we are finally ready for felling operations to begin in Slewdrum. The world of forestry is slow moving and we are a small player in a very big pond drawing on the machines and contractors who can carry out the work. Planned felling of the Muckle Ord will take place in late 2024 or early 2025.

As you will have read in the Chair's report, the income from felling is no longer forecast to be at the levels BCT has enjoyed. Managing forests costs money and if we are to secure the best prices for timber, we need to put in place forest certification and closely manage how the forests are used and maintained.

However, the directors continue to make sure only the necessary task are carried out and to use local, good value contractors where we can.

In Balfour we have continued to work with the mountain biking community. Safety of all forest users remains the priority and adjustments to tracks to ensure safe out runs from tracks were implemented.

BTCo is a wholly owned subsidiary of Birse Community Trust. The Trust leases the management of its commercial forests, Balfour and Slewdrum, to BTCo.







Souter's Workshop

The condition of this property continues to deteriorate but work has started on the project to repair the building. Funding was secured to appoint a fundraiser which has been done. Regular monthly checks continue to be undertaken by Trustees. The chimney was capped after stormy weather in the autumn to help keep the building watertight until the restoration work begins.

A Heritage Group was formed out of a group of locals who indicated a strong interest in this building and its restoration project. Training in how to photograph and record the collection as well as basic collection care was undertaken by members of this group. This training was provided by Aberdeenshire Council Museums Service. A visit by some was also made to the Archives Department in Old Aberdeen. It is hope that the work on the collection will start in the Autumn.

Tours of the Souter's building for small groups of local residents have taken place. Donations from these visits have been gratefully received.



Service of Remembrance

Remembrance Day was commemorated at the Corsedardar War Memorial on Sunday November 12 when wreaths were laid for the dead of the first and second World Wars. Deputy Lieutenant of Aberdeenshire, Jean Haslam, was joined by forty people at the memorial above Finzean for a moving ceremony of remembrance, marked by an address from Guy Haslam who this year spoke about John William Gordon of the 1st/7th Battalion Gordon Highlanders. John Gordon was born at Bloomfield Cottage and enlisted in Finzean. He died of his wounds on September 5, 1917, aged 22, and is buried in Mendingham Military Cemetery, Belgium. Prayers were offered by the Rev. Amy Pierce, minister of Birse and Feughside parish church. Councillors Eileen Durno, Anne Ross and Yi Pei Turvey were in attendance. Piper Scott Hector played, following the two minutes silence. The event was followed by a further well-attended act of remembrance at Birse Kirk.

Finzean Community Path

At the start of 2023 we were grateful to receive funding from Paths for All to help resurface the Community Path in Finzean at Boghead. This part of the path was frequently under water for long stretches in the winter. Martin Ferries, a local contractor, did a superb job raising and surfacing the path.



We would also like to highlight how much we have been helped by volunteers in 2023 on our local paths. Volunteers from TotalEnergies worked on Finzean Community Path and the paths in Slewdrum Forest, cutting back vegetation, re-erecting road safety barriers and scraping the edges of the paths back to widen them. We were also very lucky to have local volunteers work on edging the Community Path as part of the coronation weekend. Altogether, working on Finzean and Slewdrum paths we had 40 volunteers throughout the year totalling 133 hours work. Thank you to everyone involved.

The Old School and Community Classes

As of 2023, plans to redevelop the Old School, Finzean, into a centre for traditional skills and field studies move slowly whilst funding is focused on more critical renovation projects such as the Souter's Shop. The use by groups in 2023 for classes was a useful test of this use case, but at present does not yet present an overwhelming case to proceed. BCT will continue to assess the viability and consult with the community before proceeding.

To find out more, or to make a booking, contact the Trust at:
BCToffice@birsecommunitytrust.org.uk

Current Trustees

Alison Bell, Liz Bracegirdle, Nancy Davidson, Robert Dinnie,
Simon Lindsey, Toby Rider.

Join us

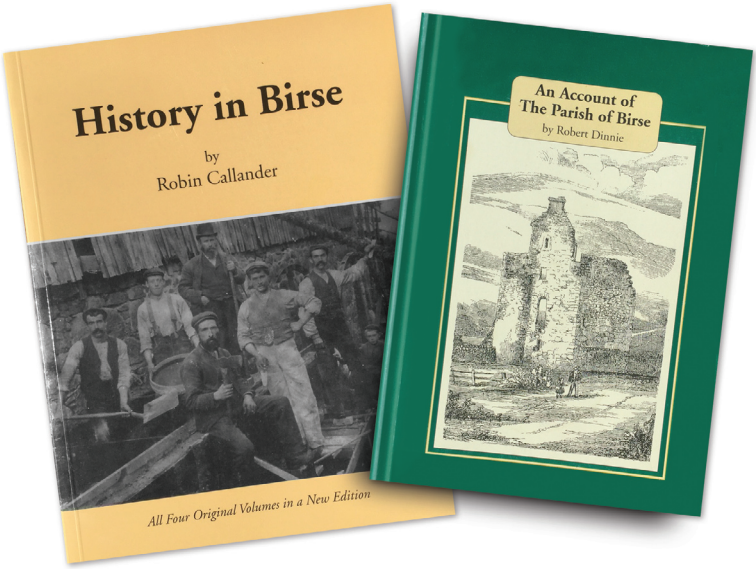
If you live in Ballogie, Birse or Finzean and you'd like to become a trustee, or to offer help with a specific area of interest or expertise, please contact us at: **bctoffice@birsecommunitytrust.org.uk**

BALANCE SHEET AT 31 DECEMBER 2023

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Endowment funds £	2023 Total funds £	2022 Total funds £
FIXED ASSETS					
Tangible assets	79,465	494,980	-	574,445	575,325
Investments	2	-	-	2	2
	79,467	494,980	-	574,447	575,327
CURRENT ASSETS					
Stocks	1,871	-	-	1,871	2,161
Debtors	6,223		-	6,223	8,967
Cash at bank and in hand	24,676	2,102	75,000	101,778	133,485
	32,770	2,102	75,000	109,872	144,613
CREDITORS					
Amounts falling due within one year	(3,083)	-	-	(3,083)	(11,182)
NET CURRENT ASSETS	29,687	2,102	75,000	106,789	133,431
NET ASSETS	109,154	497,082	75,000	681,236	708,758
FUNDS					
Unrestricted funds				109,154	97,046
Restricted funds				497,082	496,712
Endowment funds				75,000	115,00
TOTAL FUNDS				681,236	708,758

BCT 2023 Financial Summary

Income	Area	Amount	Comment
Rent	Balfour & Slewdrum Forests	4,000	Birse Trading Company Ltd
	Slewdrum Forest	5,000	EE telephone mast
Grants and donations	Grants	60,617	AHF, Aberdeenshire Council
	Donations	7,632	Individuals
Other income	Sales and services	883	Book sales, wooden products, room hire etc
	Subscriptions	350	Associate members
	Total income	**78,482**	
Expenditure			
Land and buildings	Commonty Pinewoods	4,037	Deer control & maintenance
	Mills (General)	11,567	Bucket Mill survey, mills maintenance
	Community Woods & Path	4,266	Upkeep of the paths & tree work
	Finzean Old School	55,007	General maintenance
	Soutar's Shop	4,302	Condition survey & maintenance
	Archive	793	Cataloguing
	Total project expenditure	**79,972**	
Administration	Office admin/book keeping	13,527	
	Insurance	7,381	Buildings and Forests
	Accountant fees	1,630	
	Stationery, postage, phone	1,114	Includes mailing Annual Report
	Advertising	351	Website, adverts
	Legal & professional fees	293	
	Electricity	1,736	
	Total administrative costs	**26,032**	
	Total expenditure	**106,004**	
Net total		**-27,522**	



AN ACCOUNT OF THE PARISH OF BIRSE

by Robert Dinnie

Published by BCT Paperback, 170 pages; £8.50

BCT's edition of Robert Dinnie's classic 19th century history of Birse Parish. Originally published in 1865, Dinnie's book contains a wealth of information about the parish, including chapters on Birse, Ballogie and Finzean.

HISTORY IN BIRSE

by Robin Callander

Published by BCT Paperback, 180 pages; £9.75

BCT's edition includes all four original volumes of History in Birse published in 1981-85. The book contains over 60 articles on many different aspects of the parish's history, with over 40 old photographs and many other illustrations.

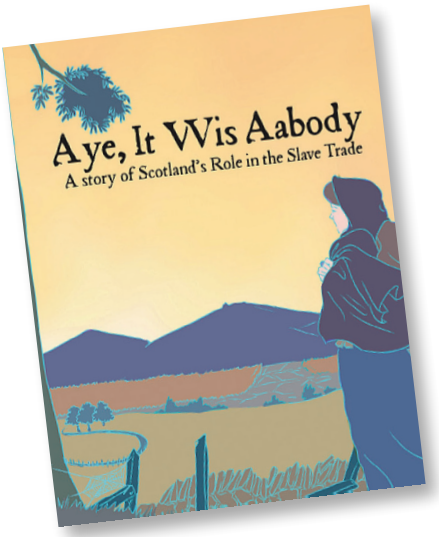
Copies post free in Birse Parish, £2.50 postage elsewhere in UK

BCT, The Old School, Finzean, Banchory AB31 6NY
email: BCToffice@birsecommunitytrust.org.uk

AYE, IT WIS AABODY

A fascinating, age-appropriate graphic novel entitled 'Aye, it wis Aabody' tells the story of Scotland's connection to the slave trade. It was produced by Magic Torch Comics, in collaboration with the children of Finzean Primary, and using research the children themselves worked on.

It is available from BCT for £5 plus p&p. If you would like a copy, please email bctoffice@birsecommunitytrust.org.uk



Donations and Legacies

This Report describes some of the work done by Birse Community Trust (BCT) to conserve historic sites in Birse parish and carry out a wide range of other projects to promote the common good of the local community and deliver wider public benefits.

BCT is a local charity (Scottish Charity Number SC028220) and donations make an essential contribution to helping BCT conserve the heritage of Birse parish and its three communities of Ballogie, Birse and Finzean.

Please help BCT conserve the heritage of Birse Parish by making a donation.

BCT is also very grateful to those who leave a legacy to BCT for the Birse Parish Endowment Fund, which was established by BCT to help provide long term support to maintain the historic sites that BCT looks after on behalf of the local community.

For more information, please contact:-

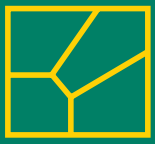
BCT, The Old School, Finzean, Banchory AB31 6NY
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Birse Community Trust exists to promote the common good of the inhabitants of Birse parish and deliver wider public benefits.

Everyone on the Electoral Register covering the parish is eligible to be a member of BCT and responsible for electing up to seven local Trustees who run BCT on behalf of the community.

BCT undertakes a wide range of local projects. BCT's core partners are Birse parish's three Community Associations and two Community Councils.

BCT is a company limited by guarantee (SC188799) and a Scottish charity (SC028220) with its registered office at J&H Mitchell, WS, 51 Atholl Road, Pitlochry PH16 5BU.



Birse Community Trust
BCT

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