

A Small Town with BIG Ambitions

Planning for the future - towards community ownership!

A public meeting hosted by **Callander Community Development Trust** at the Callander Hostel on 29th November attracted around 70 people (including the speakers) from across the Callander community.

The aim was to present factual information about some of the possibilities offered by the Government's current encouragement of local ownership and the development of community assets. Building on this, the repeated message from all the speakers was: *'The opportunities are there. Decide what is best for the various sections of your community. You know it better than any outside organisation. Get involved! And there is support available.'*

Presentations

The evening's theme and aims were set out by **Frank Park, Chair of Callander Community Development Trust**, and expanded by five speakers who gave a range of examples stemming from this policy through short presentations, designed to both inform and to invite comment and involvement.

Linda Gillespie, Community Ownership Support Service (COSS) explained how these community schemes are becoming commonplace in many parts of the country, following the Community Empowerment Act, typically including shop takeover and management, park and play areas, child-care projects ... and a huge variety of other local initiatives. She also outlined the established route through which these asset transfers can take place securely.

Gordon Watson, Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park highlighted various successful community schemes already supported under the National Park Partnership Plan, all involving a similarly wide range of projects.

Drew Leslie, Stirling Council explained how the council supports asset transfer schemes to the local community and presented their new guidelines to help implementation.

Paul Prescott, Callander Landscape Partnership and Director of the Development Trust outlined the range of projects already started by the Landscape Partnership, which is made up of community groups, landowners and government agencies. With the benefit of a substantial grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and other donors, 19 different projects, including archaeological excavations, Gaelic in the landscape, apprenticeships, and restoration of the Victorian Walkway and installation of a bridge at Leny Falls, are planned or already underway.

He then moved on to describe some of the potential asset transfer projects already included in the Community Action Plan 2017-22, including community ownership of the town car parks, public toilets, the Meadows, Camp Place play park, and Coilhallan and Lower Craggs Woods.

Mark Griffiths, Callander Community Woodland Group and Development Trust Director, gave an update on the proposed Coilhallan Wood transfer, emphasising its aim to improve sustainability, encourage native species, develop and maintain paths, and encourage new and ongoing educational projects. The aim is to take into account the interests and concerns of the adjacent residents, as well as to make the wider community and visitors aware of what the area can offer environmentally.

Open discussion - more and ongoing communication

The break provided a valuable opportunity for the informal exchange of reactions and opinions, sustained by food and drinks. After this, there was a lively chaired discussion, where the Chair and the speakers were able to respond to detailed questions and expressions of both dissent and support.

The common thread to all these comments was a plea for greater and ongoing communication and discussion between the various groups as the projects evolve. Different ways of reaching and interacting with the whole community were suggested, involving table displays, BLV articles, the use of the CCDT website (www.callandercdt.org.uk), visits to specific-interest groups, Facebook posts and letter-drops over the next few months. The aim is to open up the discussion, encourage ongoing debate and involvement, and to ensure that the potential to develop Callander's assets is firmly in the hands of its whole community, working together with organisations including the Community Development Trust and Callander Community Council..

Looking ahead. What's next? 31January!

As a first step, the Community Woodland Group will be holding an afternoon and evening drop-in session on 31 January at the Callander Hostel, potentially involving display tables with specific focuses (e.g. wildlife, paths, educational projects), and short presentations and discussion opportunities in the evening. Details to follow!