

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH



Creating Woodland for Everyone: The University of Edinburgh's Journey in Land Management

In an era where environmental action is imperative, The University of Edinburgh has committed to sequestering unavoidable carbon emissions produced by essential travel (research and students' flights to and from Edinburgh, equating to around 10% of emissions) as part of our ambition to be zero carbon by 2040. In 2021, we embarked on a long-term, multi-million-pound project involving land acquisition, woodland creation, and peatland restoration.

In addition to acquiring 887 hectares of owned land, the University will develop long-term (50 to 100 years) partnerships for woodland creation and peatland restoration. Benefits beyond carbon sequestration include enhancing biodiversity and woodland connectivity, recreational and landscape improvement for local communities, and the preservation and celebration of cultural heritage features.

We are acutely aware of the land ownership context in Scotland and the notion of green lairdship: accelerated land purchases for offsetting schemes that are often associated with greenwashing and lack of consideration for local communities. As such, we are committed to investing in and creating long-term partnerships, and ensuring this work brings about social and environmental capital to the local area. We want to exemplify a responsible approach to woodland creation in Scotland.

Implementation

Covering 431 hectares, our first site in Stirling, Drumbrae will be home to native broadleaved woodlands with a diverse coniferous element,

balancing ecological diversity. 45% of the site will remain unplanted to retain open ground habitats, and areas around archaeological sites will have four times more open ground than the minimum required by the UK Forestry Standard.

Community consultation was really important to us, and the Drumbrae community consultation and engagement was multifaceted. Stakeholders were identified by geographical proximity and the relevance of groups/organisations to the project.

The initial process included an early engagement survey, a formal consultation survey, and an in-person public event. The early engagement survey elucidated existing uses of and relationships to the site. Later, the formal online survey was an opportunity for stakeholders to comment on the woodland design plans. The in-person event drew in over 80 attendees, helping build relationships and offer a deeper understanding of issues important to the local people and community. The event featured an opportunity for stakeholders to provide feedback on the woodland design in paper format and by placing physical notes on enlarged maps.

Stakeholders were also able to learn more about the project directly from the University of Edinburgh staff and the land management, ecology, and archaeology consultants. Feedback was integrated into the project, and we publicly shared [key themes](#) that emerged and how we have responded, showcasing a commitment to community involvement and responsiveness.

Rullion Green Wood is the second site that we own, but we plan to change how we manage it. At the Rullion Green Wood consultation, we built on our experience and created a separate youth survey with a

booklet designed to explain the project to a younger audience. We also incorporated geospatial mapping into public surveys to allow people to comment on precise areas of our woodland designs.

Educational and Recreational Opportunities

Our dedicated Community Ranger is playing a pivotal role in integrating creative methods of engagement. Educational and recreational opportunities are a key element of what we want to deliver at our sites, and we know that our partnerships with local schools, colleges, and community groups are integral to the success of sustainable initiatives.

Throughout the summer there will be several biodiversity projects, aiming to re-establish unique plants that support rare butterfly species.

An academic lead for the programme will be joining us this year so we can capitalise on the opportunities this work will bring for research and experiential learning for our students and researchers.

We are also committed to exploring and showcasing the rich cultural heritage at each of the sites. Our Drumbrae Archaeology Report unearthed several historic environment sites dating from the bronze age to the 20th century. It will be great to work alongside local archaeologists to learn more about these sites, and to preserve and celebrate local history.

To ensure that information is presented in a community-driven manner, we will be hosting a community workshop in the summer to collaboratively shape content for some interpretation panels that will be placed at main entrances and key locations. By involving local communities at each step in the process, we hope to create a sense of shared ownership and pride in the project.

Reflections and Future Direction

The insights gained in the last 18 months have not only shaped our initiatives to date, but also provided a roadmap for future developments and enhancements.

We are exploring avenues for outdoor learning opportunities. This involves working with schools, and staff and students at the University to champion and facilitate experiential learning opportunities.



To embed sustainability into local socio-cultural landscapes, we plan to further lean into the arts by producing videos, conducting interviews, and collaborating with local artists.

Long-term projects hinge on their ability to adapt to circumstances and community needs. Regular evaluations, feedback mechanisms, and ongoing community consultations will be integral to our approach.

By weaving together ecological benefits, community involvement, and cultural appreciation into our projects, we hope to create a blueprint for holistic and impactful woodland creation and peatland restoration in Scotland.

Contact

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