

Name: The Forest of Falkland and the Centre for Stewardship

Place: Falkland, Fife.

Short headline: A traditional estate (with a long history as a place of power and privilege) offering new opportunities in the use, stewardship and ownership of the land to a much wider community of interest.

Keywords: Community participation, rural skills, local economics.

What is the context? Falkland Estate is a historic rural estate in central Scotland that is carving out a new way forward. The 1500ha estate includes: an in-hand farm; a thousand acres of woodland; let farms; leased cottages; historic landscape; and business premises.

In recent years, Falkland Estate Trust (a private family trust) has been working closely with Falkland Stewardship Trust (a heritage and educational charity), and Falkland Rural Enterprises Ltd (a small organic farming /forestry business) to create and cultivate a Centre for Stewardship. Our shared and evolving purpose is to realise the potential of a place “where land gives life to people and people give life to the land”.

What was the initial aim?

1. Develop a new business model with a focus on innovation, sustainability & resilience;
2. Localise land management – and make it more sustainable and participatory;
3. Host inspiring events, summer schools, ceremonies and occasional festivals in the woods;
4. Increase quality skills training, in partnership with others;
5. Transform underutilised sites on the estate into dynamic, purposeful hubs;
6. Investigate then initiate a new ownership model that will: reflect the stewardship values; widen the circle of contributors and beneficiaries; enable us to sustain the estate’s assets for future generations.

What has actually happened, and what is the evidence for what has been achieved?

The Falkland Estate trustees are mid-way on a journey with a long term aim. The Falkland Stewardship Trust has been successfully set up and is a registered and respected charity with a reputation for skills training, community engagement and running events.

1. **The new business model** with a focus on innovation, sustainability and resilience
 - a. Our business model is still in an early stage of evolution. Best known for environmental & social engagement, Falkland Estate’s increasing focus on commercial enterprise is still being tried and tested. Strong on innovation.
 - b. From late summer 2015, our new WoodWorks initiative has engaged 59 young people in a woodland enterprise programme, and developed an iPhone app that links woodland sites to creative practitioners and products that they are selling. We are now supporting seven people who are developing business ideas, some of which will take place in the Forest of Falkland – with mutual benefit for the estate as land-manager and young people who are developing businesses.
2. **Locally based land management** working towards greater sustainability:
 - a. FET *employ our own management team* (used to be external factors). This has been working well – better fit-for-purpose for an estate that is keen to directly add value to the natural resources and providing more work opportunities.
 - b. Planted a 2 acre *organic apple orchard* in line with our aims in 2012. Still working on

business model to achieve both profit and community benefit.. Our second year of production is going better than the first, since an enthusiastic staff member offered to take it on. Exploring ways of adding value and developing own brand of apple juice etc.

- c. Renting up to 2 hectares of land to three sets of commercial growers under a “*new farmer*” scheme. Again this fits well with our aims but has meant losing grant support – and involves a fair amount of management time.
- d. *Harvesting and Log Conversion* - To improve the sustainable management of our woodlands, the estate has just bought a tractor, small trailer, winch and a mobile sawmill, with some grant support from SRDP, so that we have the capacity to extract, transport and convert trees felled on the estate.
- e. *Building with wood*: We’ve successfully prototyped a small number of huts built with estate timber and aim to begin making and selling huts for local use in 2017.
- f. *Huts and hutting*: A pioneer site for the building and enjoyment of simple structures (usually wooden) for living, working and recreation in the countryside.
- g. *Woodfuel*: Plans are in place to start supplying a small local firewood market. We are also installing a Biomass Plant for Falkland House School and hope to be in a position to supply wood for this within the next 5 years.
- h. *Reviewed our Forest Plan* which now includes: more continuous cover; a site for hutting; and a new site for a sawmill and biomass storage/processing.

3. Host inspiring events – large and small: Falkland is well known for the Big Tent Festival. However, in 2012, the Centre for Stewardship decided not to run this again as it had outgrown the site. Despite its success, the risks of running major outdoor festivals are significant – and we would have had to increase ticket prices if we had continued it.

With some improvements to the Stables and purchase of a marquee and other infrastructure, the Centre is now focusing on smaller events of up to 250 people. From 2017/18, we are planning to host summer schools. Many of the events and activities on the estate are run by (or in partnership with) others - including many NGOs.

4. Quality skills training – The Centre for Stewardship has been most successful in this area:

- a. Leading on the development of a 3 year training project as part of Living Lomonds Landscape Partnership. More than 30 individuals participated in three rural skills academies, gaining valuable skills. Six Modern Apprenticeships in Trees & Timber of which five secured employment and one in further education.
- b. Providing support and admin in the establishment of Fife Rural Skills Partnership;
- c. We have secured 5 years funding from the Big Lottery and Wildlife Trusts to deliver an “Our Bright Futures” programme –
 - i. Enabling young people in Fife to gain new skills to finding jobs, training, volunteer opportunities or starting entrepreneurial projects that contribute to the green economy
 - ii. Achieving a net gain in the built and natural environment across rural and urban settings of Fife. It will help young people (15-24) across Fife into sustainable jobs, businesses and other positive destinations.

5. Transform underutilised sites into dynamic, purposeful hubs

Falkland Estate is something of an asset-rich, cash-poor estate – so there are many sites that need upgraded and very limited resources to achieve this. However with some help from grants and mostly using our own labour we have in the last two years -

- a. In 2015/2016, transformed parts of the old Stables into a welcome hub focusing on stewardship education about the landscape and themes of food, wood and craft.
- b. In 2016/17, our buildings team are creating a *small Woodland Centre* by upgrading the old estate sawmill building. The new centre will have some workbenches and basic equipment for converting sawn timber. This will be a place for young people to learn simple joinery and building skills – as well as a place for forest skills training.

6. **New ownership model** – Early stages.

This is taking longer than originally envisaged because of its complexity, the relatively limited financial resources and the need to negotiate and collaborate with the community and a range of other organisations and interest groups. We have begun a series of conversations and undertaken some early research with James Hutton Institute and others. Following legal advice and discussions with a range of stakeholders, a new charitable company with a focus on community stewardship of the land is likely to be in place early in 2017/18. However, there is a lot more to be done in preparation for handing over the agricultural land, woodlands and estate properties into the new ownership entity. The mechanism and processes for doing this are complex and involve balancing a number of factors to ensure that the steps taken will ultimately result in the sustainable management of the land and the remaining property. The existing assets still have to be maintained, managed and developed to make them financially sustainable. So the development of a new model that is fit for a new set of purposes is now a high priority.

What were the factors that contributed to those outcomes? The three main factors are:

1. The clearly identified and shared aims, objectives and values of the estate trustees and the Directors of Falkland Stewardship Trust and Falkland Rural Enterprises Ltd;
2. The desire to extend the benefits of the estate and the opportunities for people to contribute to its stewardship.
3. The support and participation of a wide range of public bodies, charities and volunteers who share the intentions of the Centre for Stewardship partnership.

What are the key lessons?

- It is possible to allow woods to be used for a very wide range of activities that foster interest in their stewardship and use by the community.
- It is helpful for an owner to be clear about: what is permitted; what is encouraged; what is directly offered.
- Transferring assets to the community is complex if multiple assets – with a variety of values (historic, commercial, tangible/intangible) are to be sustained.
- Working with communities of interest, place and practice takes time and requires a two-way commitment - a continuous process of “give and take”.
- It is easy to offer increased benefits – such as walking, running, cycling - but without an increase in caretakers of a woodland, it will not continue to thrive.

How replicable is this experience; what is its potential as an element of a better approach to forestry? This case study is both about a specific forestry situation and about woods that form a key part of a wider sharing and transfer of assets to the community. The number and size of the assets involved at Falkland and the historic nature of the estate, and the attitude of the Trustees probably makes Falkland estate an unusual, if not unique, case at present. But it is hoped that the pioneering work and openness to sharing the learning will provide learning opportunities for many others. There are also aspects such as the learning, events and training programmes that are replicable and possible to upscale.

What might the indicators / metrics be that help to tell this story at a wider level?

- i. **Business model:** income and expenditure; turnover and profit.
- ii. **Local land management:** no of staff employed; no of local contracts; turnover and impact on local economy.
- iii. **Events in the landscape:** numbers of events, no of attendees; number of people staying locally; events turnover and profitability.
- iv. **Skills training:** no of training events; no of participants; no of apprentices; no of people into positive outcomes; no and range of partners.

- v. **Improvement and increasing use of redundant properties:** capital improvements; increase no. of tenants, participants and visitors using and benefiting from the estate;
- vi. **New ownership model:** leading to an increase in contributions to sustain and improve the landholding and extend its benefits to more people and more diverse wildlife e.g. level of inward financial investment and/or voluntary time and in-kind contributions.

Key messages:

The Forest of Falkland has a long history. The current owners are keen to broaden the opportunities for people to benefit and contribute to its future. This openness has already increased the range of opportunities and vibrancy of the estate through community engagement and partnership work that is cultivating a “centre for stewardship”.

The centre’s shared and evolving vision is of “a place where land gives life to people and people give life to the land”. This will require people who care for the place as much as people who come to exploit opportunities it offers. The Forest of Falkland has great potential if we can create and sustain: a viable and vibrant business model that provides benefit to the community and local economy; inspiring events and quality skills training; continual improvement of the farm, forest and redundant property; and the development of a new ownership vehicle and governance structure, along with thoughtful induction and succession planning to enable people to step up into the commitment(s) required. It’s an exciting place to live, work and play –a place for people who really want to live sustainable, work hard and enjoy continuous learning on the land.