



# West Stormont Woodland Group

## Appendix P1: Background to the WSWG Proposal 2022

*“Did you know the woods are for sale?”*

*“Which woods?”*

*“Those woods!”*

*“What???”*

That was the moment in late June 2018 which started the WSWG journey, in which we are hopefully coming to the final stages of the beginning! It is the next bit we are really excited about.

West Stormont Woodland Group (WSWG) was established in July 2018 as a response to the opportunity offered by Forestry and Land Scotland (formerly the Forestry Commission Scotland) to make available two woodlands about six miles north of Perth within the Strathtay ward available for potential community ownership via its Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS). This scheme falls within Scottish Government obligations contained within the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 Part 5, that has introduced the right for community organisations and groups to request ownership, lease or use of public sector assets through acquiring them at a discount upon market values on the basis of investing in community benefits.

A group of interested local residents produced a Scoping Paper for acquiring Taymount Wood and Five Mile Wood as community-owned assets. This formed the basis of an Expression of Interest signed by 184 local people which was submitted to and officially registered by Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) in July 2018. Once this process had commenced, FLS were able to enter into a formal agreement with WSWG in providing a preferential structured timetable to proceed through the process of submitting proposals for a woodland Community Asset Transfer.

The Steering Group then established WSWG as a constituted community association which, through meaningful engagement and involvement of the local community, would take the lead in developing proposals for how the woods would be managed, the range of benefits they would bring to the local community and the community needs they would serve through being in community ownership.

With funding support in 2019 from the Scottish Land Fund (SLF) Stage 1 Development Funding and Perth and Kinross Council's (PKC) Community Investment Fund, one of the first tasks of WSWG was to embark upon gaining knowledge and expertise and mapping out the preparation of a feasibility study designed to explore what potential could exist for the community to manage the woodlands in an environmentally friendly way and provide a broad range of benefits to local people.

The first question to answer was “Who will these woods belong to?”. Sitting a mile apart, the woods are immediately encircled by Kinclaven to the east, Stanley to the south, Bankfoot to the west and Murthly to the north. Would that suitably define the boundary we were required to put on paper? From the signatories to the Expression of Interest, it was already clear that an outer circle of nearby settlements felt directly connected to the woods and to the prospect

of community ownership: Luncarty, Redgorton, Pitcairngreen, Logiealmond, Dunkeld and Birnam, Caputh and Spittalfield to name a few.

Through the local West Stormont Historical Society, we learnt that West Stormont was the name used in medieval times to cover the parishes of Auchtergaven, Kinclaven, Logiealmond, Moneydie, Redgorton (Stanley) and the Murthly portion of Little Dunkeld. Being such a close match, this helped determine our boundary and explains why West Stormont has been chosen as the most suitably inclusive title for the many communities connected to Taymount and Five Mile Woods today.

WSWG embarked on a programme of community outreach and engagement, spreading the word and growing support for the project throughout the WSWG area and beyond. From the outset, WSWG networked widely with community organisations including the various community councils, Stanley Development Trust, Spittalfield and District Active Recreation Hub, Bankfoot Gala, Murthly Gala and more. We also liaised with relevant departments in PKC, including Community Education, the Health and Social Care Partnership and the Strathtay Action Partnership, through which WSWG is now cited as a working partner in the Strathtay Local Action Plan. In September 2018, Stanley Community Council requested a WSWG update at its monthly meetings, which instigated the "Community Monthly Update" which has been published widely in email and poster form since then, including routine display on homemade noticeboards at the four main entrances to the woods. A membership scheme was set up which at December 2022 has 351 Members within the WSWG area and 154 Associates from further afield. Around 100 children were added through family sign-up cards pre covid, but are under 16's are not eligible for the on-line joining process which has operated since then. In future, WSWG will develop membership arrangements which will be able to include children. Additional Supporters (individuals and organisations) bring our contacts list to nearly 700.

Our events programme started with guided walks in 2018, and in 2019, with funding from the PKC Community Investment Fund, we hosted a programme of events for all ages and abilities entitled "Feeling Good in the Woods" which attracted more than twice the overall target numbers of people joining in. This is when we also first engaged with the seven primary schools in the WSWG area for the "Woodland in a Backpack" sessions delivered by the amazing Biscuit of Wee Adventures. These events were complemented with pop-up stalls at Active Kids, The Picnic on the Pitch at Spittalfield Primary School and Aviva HQ, amongst other venues. WSWG also met with many if not quite all neighbouring landowners and householders to seek their early views on the prospect of community ownership of the woods. In addition, WSWG conducted gateway surveys to help understand who and how many people used the woods, in what ways, what they like about the woods and how they travelled there. Whilst our in-person community engagement was obviously impacted by the covid pandemic, we maintained communications with everyone throughout and devised covid-compliant ways in which people could connect with the woods as lockdown regulations eased. Usage of both woods increased significantly during the pandemic, we would estimate by a factor of perhaps 3 or 4, with greater use still maintained as we get back to more normal ways of living.

Once plans were well advanced, we conducted a community consultation on a Draft Proposal in February and March 2021 through an on-line survey because of covid restrictions. Having used those results and the vast number of comments provided to inform changes and adding financial, governance and operational plans to produce this revised Proposal, WSWG is ready for the concluding stages of the CATS process.


Nearing as we are to our goal of submitting the WSWG CATS Application to FLS in November 2022, our final task is to secure clear support from the local community, all ages and demographics, members and non-members alike, for both the principle of community ownership and the final Proposal itself which the CATS process requires. We therefore hope our local community likes our plans and ethos for being the best stewards of Taymount Wood and Five Mile Wood we can possibly be.

In this respect WSWG is holding “Community Consultation 2” from 17 to 31 October 2022 that seeks to demonstrate the level of local support which exists for the WSWG Project Proposal. The outcome of this community consultation will form a key foundation in supporting our case to Forestry and Land Scotland.

The timeline for achieving the woodland transfer goal of WSWG is dependent on a number of factors. We anticipate the evaluation process commencing at the CATS Panel in early 2023 and with the final decision being made by FLS within the following six months. We will also have to raise the funds to purchase Taymount and Five Mile Woods, which had a market valuation of £2.4 million in 2020/21 on which we would hope to secure a discount of perhaps some 5-20% in recognition of the delivery of community benefit through the WSWG Project. The purchase price is a large sum of money, but not an unattainable one and one which with support from the right donors will ensure Taymount and Five Mile Woods are retained in perpetuity by the community and not be sold off as private or commercial forest woodlands bringing little benefit to the community. Whilst we have begun the process of fundraising through a nominal figure prospectively attainable from the Scottish Land Fund and a further application to the Investing in Communities Fund Round 2 for a substantial funding package towards operations in Years 1 and 2, we will address the total fundraising process once we have established clearly stated community support for the Proposal we intend to submit.

## 2. Taymount and Five Mile Woods - “One Wood with a Gap in the Middle”

Taymount Wood and Five Mile Wood lie within a definable ecological unit in lowland Perthshire between the A9 and a large loop in the River Tay. Taymount Wood lies immediately east of the main Perth to Inverness railway line and is associated with a fairly well-wooded landscape in the northern part of the area, all of which bar Taymount and Five Mile Wood are in private ownership. Five Mile Wood to the south-west of Taymount Wood is an isolated woodland in an intensively managed, very open, arable landscape. The two woods being a mile apart in this long and still ecologically declining landscape highlights both the need and wonderful opportunity we have to protect the habitats and species which still cling on in the woods and to enable the woods to naturalise further, but also the urgent need for ecological regeneration through habitat enhancement and connectivity at landscape scale.

<p><b>Taymount Wood</b></p> <p>Located between Stanley, Kinclaven and Murthly, within a large eastward loop in the River Tay, 1 mile from Five Mile Wood.</p> <p>155 hectares</p>	
<p><b>Five Mile Wood</b></p> <p>Between Stanley and Bankfoot, just east of the A9, 6 miles from Perth.</p> <p>134 hectares</p>	

The same connectivity principle applies to the need for improved public access in the area. The woods should be more accessible from all surrounding settlements by active travel and public transport as well as by car. WSWG

therefore wishes to help improve the access network within and between the two woods and links with those beyond, such as Kinclaven Bluebell Woods.



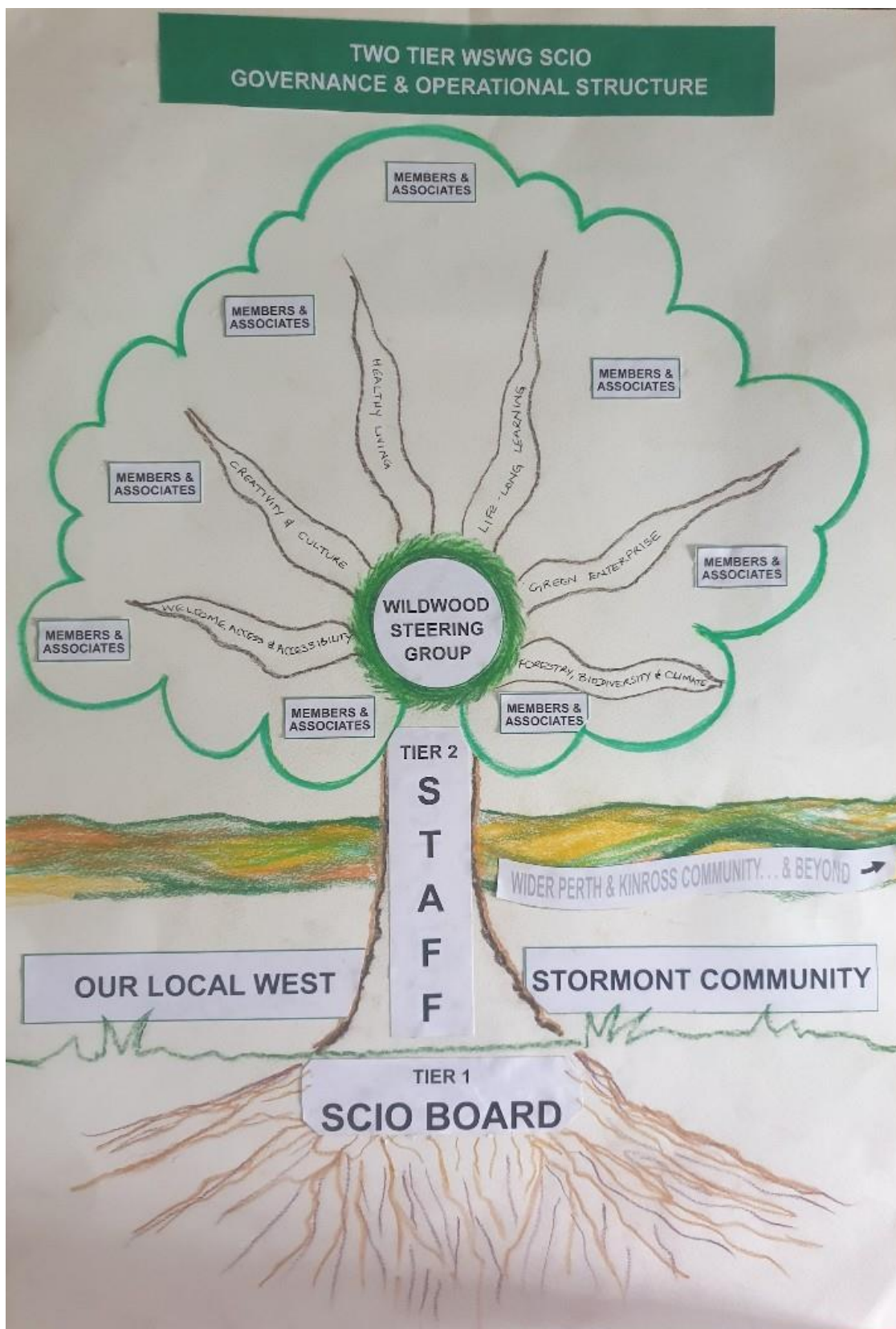
### 3. A Community Owned Woodland

In seeking to bring Taymount and Five Mile Woods into community ownership, both hold their unique and individual characteristics relating to their history and management in more recent decades by Forestry Commission Scotland. Both woods have significant histories, having been forest plantations in one form or another for centuries in the hands of estate owners before they were acquired by Forestry Commission Scotland. However, in terms of community ownership and future development, the woods will be maintained in Trust by charity ownership for the benefit of the community.

On 5 April 2022, WSWG was registered as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) which will be responsible for holding the woodlands in perpetuity as a legacy benefit for the community. It held its first General Meeting (GM) on 20 June 2022 at the Tayside Hotel in Stanley, at which the Interim Board was replaced by an elected Board of Trustees.

WSWG has chosen to become a "2- tier SCIO", which means that its members are encouraged to participate in the running of the organisation and its activities. WSWG has put considerable thought into the kind of structure which would support diverse and meaningful involvement of members in a staffed organisation. The two key components

being proposed are the Wildwood Steering Group and “Window on the Woods” themed Community Working Groups. Read more on proposed WSWG governance and operations in Sections 1.2 and 1.3 of the WSWG Proposal.



All members of the “old WSWG” will be invited to transfer their membership to the WSWG SCIO, either as Members (those who live within the WSWG area) or Associates (those who live elsewhere). Members will have voting rights whilst Associates will not. However, community ownership and project activities are for the whole community, whether signed up as members or not. Membership of WSWG is free.

## 4. Sharing Our Vision

### WSWG acting on Climate and Biodiversity

Through community consultation on the Draft WSWG Proposal in February/March 2021, 95% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the woods should be managed for biodiversity and climate. Starting from day one of our community ownership in this alarm-call United Nations Decade on Ecological Restoration, WSWG will therefore look after these woods with action for climate and biodiversity at the heart of its purpose and practice through regenerative management.

Society needs timber for a multitude of uses, but it will not be WSWG's main purpose. We have a whole timber industry with its massive forests and state of the art sawmills, ports and other industry infrastructure to do that. In a sustainable future, we need community woodlands to fulfil a different role for people and planet. Community owned woods are absolutely vital to community benefit and ecological and climate action, but not by trying to compete or keep up with conventional timber production without the economies of scale available to large, commercial forestry concerns. The mission of community-owned woodland is to invent a new space for itself, innovative, versatile, nimble on its feet, niche, special, different, reviving the network of small local sawmills able to address their smaller scale and more diverse needs specifically.

Thanks to community ownership, we will have access to many other sources of income and funding than would be available to a commercial timber extraction business owner, which is the most likely alternative type of owner to WSWG for Taymount and Five Mile Woods. We have the potential therefore to diversify our income streams rather than focus on timber extraction as our main source of money, particularly when that would impede or compromise our other objectives. These include a suite of options under what can be termed "Living Forest" income streams, which with people worldwide working hard to make it happen, are expected to become, much wider and mainstream in future. WSWG will always have our trees to fall back on for conventional timber income if necessary.

By stepping away from limiting the lifespan of the majority of trees in the woodlands to their MMAI (a forestry term representing maximum annual growth), typically around 50 years of age (still very young for a tree), we can help nature massively from day one by leaving as many trees of different species as possible to grow old, becoming more valuable to the ecosystem every year they remain standing, living or dying, and storing carbon longer term. It is often said when contemplating the natural life-time of an oak tree that it grows for 200 years, thrives alive for 200 years more and takes 200 years to die. Each of these phases is vital and increasingly important to the overall ecological value of a woodland. Some oaks grow much older than that if allowed to.

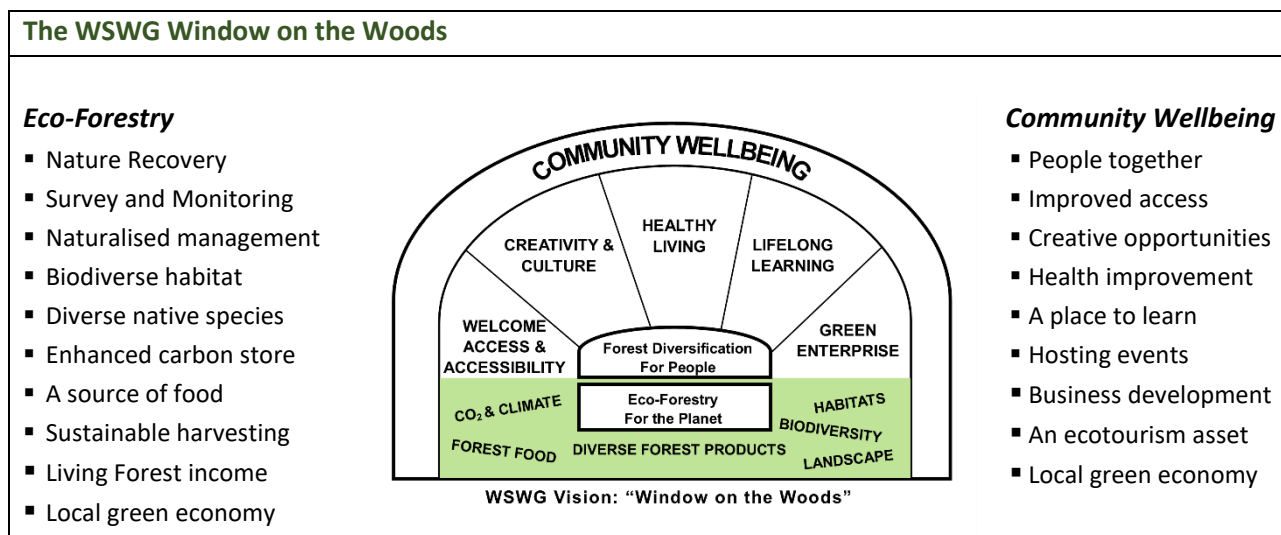
WSWG can, and still will, sell timber but we will first make sure that the woodland soils and ecosystem, which have been starved of natural cycles and diversity for perhaps a century or more, are allowed to regenerate and restore themselves, locking up the levels of carbon they can under a natural system which would never be achieved under extractive 50-year cycles for timber production, whether sustainably managed or otherwise. Removal of felled trees from the forest represents enormous removal of nutrients from the site.

Clear-felling will be limited to small areas required for new community facilities or designated for early replanting as native broadleaf woodland. WSWG's Eco-Forestry plans will seek firstly to promote proforestry (allowing trees to reach their natural maturity) and deadwood (standing or fallen, of which WSWG understands some European countries advocate 30% of the overall forest biomass), followed by use of selectively felled timber on-site for construction needs, habitat, educational, craft and other community benefit. Having satisfied those needs first, timber felled in line with WSWG nature restoration policy can be sold off site for cash.

By putting nature recovery foremost, WSWG can punch above its weight for people and planet by protecting Taymount and Five Mile Woods from reverting to business-as-usual commercial plantations. By focusing even more on rapid naturalisation of the woods, we can use the journey started through a low impact silvicultural system (LISS) 20 years ago by Forestry and Land Scotland to let the woods develop more naturally as a springboard for our best and earliest local action for the climate and ecological crises we are in.

You could say WSWG’s Motto for Climate and Biodiversity is **“Give to Nature First - Keep It in The Ground”**.

On the matter of positive action for climate and biodiversity, this ethos will not be restricted to management of the trees and habitats, it will extend to all WSWG activities and operations relating to community benefit and green enterprise activity as well. In an economic system which too often rewards choices which are detrimental to people and planet, this requires courage and determination, often involving practices which are not the cheapest or evidently most cost effective. In transition to a safer and more just economic framework for humanity, there is unlikely to be gain without pain. However, when you begin to realise that the gain from routinely making good choices for people and planet outweighs any pain, the step change is underway for you. When you view higher costs as greater investment in the right things, being part of the progressive shift to a sustainable future quickly reveals itself as a win-win situation all round.



The mission of West Stormont Woodlands Group is: “To provide Taymount Wood and Five Mile Wood with a long-term sustainable future as a community resource & a vital part of nurturing our local environment”.

WSWG’s 25 Year Goal:

*“To achieve significant progress towards a thriving community living in a sustainable, healthy and enjoyable landscape in eastern Strath Tay centred on the two rapidly naturalising Taymount Wood and Five Mile Wood. Substantially enhanced landscape-scale ecology, improved and integrated access provision and a boosted local green economy.”*

WSWG’s mission for Taymount and Five Mile Woods in community ownership is encompassed within a detailed, costed 10-year Community Benefit Plan with outline Community Enterprise projections to 25 years and a costed 25-year Woodland Management Plan for each wood. This seeks to achieve marked progress towards ensuring that our community attains a sustainable, healthy and enjoyable landscape in Strath Tay that can gain benefits from the naturalising of Taymount Wood and Five Mile Wood, where improved access provision and a positive focus on maintaining a green local economy can be delivered.

WSWG seeks to reflect its aspirations in terms of sharing a commitment towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals and the associated Scottish Government National Outcomes framework covering a range of indicators related to investing in communities, improving health and wellbeing, equality and promoting environmental sustainability.

### ***Sources of Inspirations for WSWG's Mission and Ethos***

With the climate and biodiversity emergencies now hard upon us, not only do we need major transition to a sustainable future, but we need it to happen much faster than normal rates of change in society usually occur. That is behind WSWG's mission for Nature Recovery at the heart of the Woodland Management Plans for Taymount and Five Mile Woods from day 1. We are also conscious of the current and potential role the woods can make in a more connected landscape-scale approach to ecological regeneration. WSWG has found many sources of inspiration, local, regional and global in origin, which have helped it build and stand by its ethos and mission.

Key amongst these are:

- UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2020-2030
- The Good Ancestor Project - thinking about the impact our actions have on future generations
- Wellbeing Economy Alliance - putting people and planet first so profit does not cost the earth
- Doughnut Economics - 7 Ways to Think Like a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Economist
- Nature Recovery Networks - reversing the fragmentation and deterioration of habitats our actions have wrought on the natural world
- Three Horizons Approach to Planning Change - International Futures Forum modelling for change
- The Scottish Rewilding Alliance
- Perthshire Nature Connections Partnership
- Perth – Most Sustainable Small City in Europe

### ***Consulting with our community***

Consulting with our local community in West Stormont is an exceptionally important component in preparing our proposals for asset transfer submission where we need to incorporate the views of local people, to show that there is clear local support and wide enthusiasm for the project. This was already evidenced by the wide-ranging input from local people to the Steering Group, logo creation, website, posters, brainstorm sessions and other "Imaginarium" activities, access audits, and volunteering at events. With plans for both woods well advanced, we were able to go out to community consultation with a Draft Proposal in February/March 2021. Whilst we had not at that stage completed project costings, the feedback was enormously reassuring. Here is a flavour of the outcome of Community Consultation 1.

- 😊 367 Surveys were completed – representing 769 adults and 131 children
- 😊 More than half of respondents were not members and 100 new members joined WSWG
- 😊 92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with WSWG's Eco-Forestry proposals for the woods
- 😊 95% agreed or strongly agreed that the woods should be managed for climate and biodiversity
- 😊 95% agree or strongly agree with WSWG's proposals for Welcome, Access and Accessibility in the woods
- 😊 Overwhelming support for working with local businesses and creating jobs and community enterprise.
- 😊 Bothy and Hutting in Taymount Wood were more popular than Wigwams in Five Mile Wood.
- 😊 Only 0.83% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with WSWG's Vision for the woods.

Consultation 1 on the Draft Proposal in February and March 2021 provided a valuable opportunity for the then WSWG Steering Group to share our vision and the results and the vast number of comments back from our community enabled us to incorporate many suggestions, ideas and other aspects of the feedback into this revised and final Proposal.



In particular, we took into account a clear wish not to over-develop the wider woodlands, the wish for improved car parking at both woods and the relatively limited support for hutting and wigwam accommodation as income generating enterprises in Taymount and Five Mile Woods respectively. As a result, we have redirected development ideas towards the main entrance areas at each wood and a new range of income generating enterprises to support the project going forward once in community hands which in themselves will deliver community benefit through the provision of community facilities and services for woodland users and others.

In line with the WSWG goal of creating distinctive and complementary woodland character, we are proposing a Flagship Project for each wood: The Taymount Hub in Taymount Wood which will be the main base for the WSWG Project offering community facilities, community enterprises and staff accommodation; and the “Woodland Observatory Project” in Five Mile Wood where the focus will be on education and active recreation. And of course, supporting the recovery of the forests as living ecosystems will be the underpinning policy in WSWG’s Woodland Management Plans.

These intentions for Community Benefit and Nature Recovery are detailed in the revised WSWG Proposal 2022 *Going Forward* along with information on WSWG Governance and Operations and Summary Financial Data for the project which were then the subject of the on-line “Community Consultation 2” from 17-31 October 2022. The purpose of Consultation 2 was not so much to influence the content but to indicate the level of support in the local community for the revised WSWG Proposal going forward as part of the CATS Application in late 2022.

Everyone in our community was encouraged to participate in the survey, members and non-members alike. Look out for member notification by email, posts on Facebook, posters on noticeboards, a notice in the local press, a flyer through the door of all homes in Strathtay ward and please share with family, friends and neighbours to encourage as big a local response rate as we can muster. Thank you.

The key results from Consultation 2 are summarised below, showing overwhelming support for the Proposal from those who took part.

## **Consultation 2**

- 😊 173 responses representing 376 adults and children
  - 71.3% of responses from the WSWG area; 28.7% from outwith the WSWG area
  - 52.3% of responses from members, 47.7% from non-members
- 😊 Support for different elements of the WSWG Proposal – **average score out of 5:**
  - Year-Round Activities Programmes 4.6
  - Access Improvements 4.6
  - Taymount Wood Hub (Flagship Project TW) and Community Enterprises 4.3
  - Woodland Observatory Project (Flagship Project FMW) 4.5
  - Woodland Management Plans 4.7
  - Governance 4.5
  - Operations 4.3
  - Funding 4.2
  - Overall support 4.6

The full financial data behind the summary data in the WSWG Proposal was too unwieldy to form part of Consultation 2 but is presented in the WSWG Business Plan accompanying the WSWG Proposal as part of the CATS Application to demonstrate the long-term viability of what we are proposing. The Business Plan also includes an indication of Social Return on Investment (SROI) as a means of conveying the value of community benefits obtained from the WSWG Project which are not conveyed in standard financial accounting.