

Proposed response to Walker Hines Woodland Proposal

Dear Andy,

Here is Symington Community Council's response your Burnbrae Farm Woodland Creation Proposals (and associated material), which you presented at our 17 September public meeting.

Other than at the 17 September meeting, the Community Council has not sought the views of the community about your proposal. Whilst a number of questions were asked, Community Council members do not recall, and the minutes of the meeting do not record, any particular public views; positive or negative.

In order to obtain some sense of the public's views, would you be willing to share with the Community Council an overview of the feedback you received from your questionnaire?

Notwithstanding that, the Symington Community Council sees the potential for the proposals to enhance the current natural habitat and provide a much needed off-road walking route out of the village. For these reasons, the Community Council is supportive of your proposed woodland creation if you are willing to consider suggestions for further biodiversity enhancements and thoughts about how the village might engage with the woodland and make it an asset for the community.

In recent years, the Community Council has supported a community project called 'Pollinator Friendly Symington', which, with the support of the Scottish Wildlife Trust and South Ayrshire Rangers, has developed a wildflower verge, is encouraging gardeners to garden with pollinators in mind and has planted trees in the village. We are currently collaborating with Prestwick Community Council about the potential for introducing riparian woodland along stretches of the Pow Burn (we had previously considered the Rumbling Burn). So, although we fully recognise the proposal for woodland at Burnbrae is a commercial venture, with the associated and inherent compromises, you can perhaps see why it has sparked our interest.

Before getting onto our request for biodiversity enhancements, we have a few comments on and questions about the Ecological Survey:

- How does the latest Draft Planting Design respond to the survey's mandatory requirements and recommendations?
- It should be noted that Himalayan balsam is prevalent at the edge of the Catcraig plantation (i.e. just across the road).
- On page 9 there is a recommendation to not plant right up to boundaries in order to minimise pollution during the woodland's creation. The plan shows space between the boundaries and woodland, except at a few locations: the south side of the Rumbling Burn to the east of The Old Byre and the woodland to the south of Townend House. Will the recommendation also be applied in these locations?
- On page 25, the recommendations for 'Flora and invertebrates' recommend to "*use only native species of local provenance*". How do Sitka and Norway spruce respect this recommendation?

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- We support the “*Installation of bat and bird boxes within the landscaping of the Site would increase their suitability for these species*” referred on page 35, whether or not potential roosting or nesting is lost during planting.
- We support the suggestion on page 32, to retain some of the semi-improved grassland, the benefits of having a defined scrub layer on page 34 and selective cutting regimes also on page 34. See below for further comment.

Habitat and Biodiversity enhancements

- Connecting, in so far as is reasonable, the Catcraig plantation, Broadhirst woods and Slough Burn (for which there are records of rich wildlife), Dankeith woods and Townend woods, would greatly enhance the ability of wildlife to travel, creating nature networks (fundamental to the Scottish Government’s Biodiversity Strategy and South Ayrshire Council’s Local Biodiversity Action Plan) that enable viable habitats. In this respect, matching tree species where the new woodland meets existing would certainly help such connectivity and we recognise the latest plan goes *some* way to supporting this principle.
- Regarding South Ayrshire Council’s priority habitats, we could we help improve the hedgerows by laying them (we have laid the hedge behind our wildflower verge), which would provide a richer habitat for nature.
This could help meet the recommendations for UKBAP / SBL Priority Habitats referred on page 29 of the Ecological Survey (ES).
- From both a habitat/biodiversity and aesthetic point of view, we would like to see stands of mixed tree types of various ages, which, at the woodlands edges, recede in height to scrub layers (ES p34) then native/wildflower meadows (ES p32) and retained field margins (ES p32).

To support this principle, would you be willing to consider continuous cover forestry (i.e. not clear felling)? Under CCF management, stand improvement is concentrated on the development of preferred individuals rather than the creation of a block of stems with uniform spacing and average stem characteristics. This would allow the development of a continuous canopy, which, in conjunction with mixed silviculture (for example by intimately mixing fast growing broadleaves such as Aspen and Birch through the conifers), could provide higher amenity value than clear felling as the forest is progressively thinned and, potentially, increase species diversity and connectivity.

“Under CCF management, stand improvement is concentrated on the development of preferred individuals rather than the creation of a block of stems with uniform spacing and average stem characteristics.” <https://www.ccfg.org.uk/about/ccfg-principles/>

Perhaps this could also increase the percentage of broadleaved/native trees?

Scottish Wildlife Trust (and Pollinator Friendly Symington) is willing to support habitat enhancement; for example with the creation of wildflower meadows because it would add to the network of pollinator friendly habitats they (and PFS) are currently developing in the area.

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- Whilst the trees proposed along the Rumbling Burn are mostly broadleaved or native woodland, in order to create a cohesive riparian habitat and limit the potential negative impacts of Sitka and Norway Spruce on the watercourse, we would like to see strips of broadleaved/native trees in all of the sections of the Western woodland that sits adjacent to the Burn.
In the future we may be considering additional riparian woodland further downstream.
- We would like the footpaths through the woodlands to be accessed from the village *without* having to walk along Townend Road (i.e. the road past Burnbrae).
The footpaths through the proposed woodland to the South West of Townend Road could be accessed via the track that runs beyond Townend Brae, assuming a small bridge is built across the dyke and a break in the fence.
The footpaths through the proposed woodland to the North East of Townend Road would need to be accessed via the path route, shown on the Draft Planting Design, which runs adjacent to the thin stand of Scots Pine on the South East side of the Rumbling Burn. This would require a bridge across the Burn.

We would also like to discuss the potential for community benefits, depending on local interests; for example, an area allocated for an orchard or coppice for craft materials or community wood fuel, etc..

In this respect, we have been made aware of 'GSA Biosphere & Ayrshire Tree Planting Programme', a project funded by South Ayrshire Council, Scottish Forestry, the Woodland Trust and Land Energy, which "*is providing grants for small groups (less than 0.25ha or 0.6 acre) of native trees which add landscape and biodiversity value to the South & East Ayrshire countryside for the benefit of people, communities and wildlife*".

If the land owner is amenable, perhaps we could use this grant to help create such community benefits in or adjacent to the woodland you are proposing?

We appreciate there is quite a lot here for consideration and would welcome the opportunity to discuss how we might find common ground that meets your aims and ours.

Regards,

David Houfe on behalf of Symington Community Council
Symington Community Council Vice-chair and Secretary