

**A Study for
Community Woodland Association**

**Evaluation of Partnerships between
Community Groups and Forestry Commission
Scotland**

Final Report

**Prepared by
Lorna Campbell, Campbell Consulting (Highland) Ltd**

with

Amanda Bryan, Aigas Associates

May 2006

Acknowledgement and many thanks to community members and FCS staff who have given time to contribute openly to this evaluation study.

Lorna Campbell, Campbell Consulting (Highland) Ltd
Copperfields, 11 Ardendrain, Kiltarlity IV4 7HS
Tel: 01463 741704 Mobile: 07766 013366
email: campbellconsulting@tiscali.co.uk

Amanda Bryan, Aigas Associates
North View, Crask of Aigas, Beaully IV4 7AD
Tel: 01463 782597
email: aigasassociates@aol.com

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Executive Summary

Background

The Community Woodland Association in partnership with Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise commissioned this study. It examines the overview of experience of FCS-community partnership working over the last 10 years and how it is perceived by both communities and FCS District staff.

Methodology

The study incorporates four methods of information collection: desk research; a questionnaire survey; telephone interviews and two focus discussion groups.

The study sample was drawn from the FCS partnership list of a total 84 partnerships. The majority of these are associated with small rural communities (less than 3,000 population). The partnerships vary in style of agreement across 4 broad categories, from informal partnerships with no written agreement, to more formal arrangements including those with joint management structures. A cross-section of the following variables was included in the study sample:-

- Type of partnership agreement
- Stage of maturity of the partnership/ length of operation (start date ranges from 1994 – 2005)
- Origins of the partnership
- Geographical location across 14 Forest Districts
- Forest size and type (ranges from 0.5ha to 14,768ha, with 51 partnerships working with less than 400ha)
- Key interest and focus of the specific partnership e.g. access, economic regeneration, conservation etc.

Key Findings

Overall the consultation responses from FCS staff and community representatives show consistency and a high degree of correlation, with the exception of a few project specific issues. Feedback on the whole has been very positive regarding the value and operation of partnerships. It clearly indicates that both community representatives and FCS staff feel that the partnership approach has offered added-value compared with trying to work alone. The commonest perceptions of "THE MOST important benefit" in the questionnaire survey were:-

- Community Empowerment: introducing a sense of influence over destiny of local environment, and
- Access to recreational amenities

Origin and Development of Partnerships

There is wide diversity in partnership formats and the nature of the communities with which FCS has developed a relationship. Formal agreements are not seen by FCS staff or community respondents as a pre-requisite for all types of community involvement.

Constructing partnership agreements was one of the few areas of conflict reported. In particular, the time taken to establish agreements needs to be addressed. There is a strong staff voice to retain flexibility in the format of agreements, allowing due consideration of the future commitments they specify for both FCS and the community. Given the organic nature of partnership development and ongoing dynamics in the community, long term implications need to be considered.

Partnership Operation

The study confirms that there is in general very good communication in both directions, with communities reporting FCS District staff as very accessible. In some areas (e.g. budget planning and resource availability, operational policies and rules) clearer and more accessible information provided by FCS could help prevent misunderstandings or resentments from developing.

Information and guidance on insurance requirements, and which elements are covered under FCS provision, have been raised as an area of lack of clarity and mixed messages. There is a clear request from both staff and communities for FCS to offer the flexibility to tailor insurance requirements to circumstance and the degree of risk, and to acknowledge that "one solution is not appropriate for all".

Community involvement in partnerships is characterised by small numbers of dedicated volunteers (commonly 6-15 people). Limitations and frustrations were reported by both community representatives and FCS staff to arise from:-

- Reliance on a core number of people with difficulty in identifying successors
- Lack of interest/time by the majority of forest users to volunteer in partnership activities
- A sometimes very limited focus and interest of community group members.

The people resource available for partnership work is stretched. FCS staff remits often cover large geographical areas, a range of responsibilities, and face increasing demands in community engagement. On the community side, the resource is often fragile and unstable - although enthusiastic - with succession problems, reliance on a few individuals and volunteer fatigue being commonly reported.

The growing demands for FCS community involvement will put pressure on a fixed resource, and both staff and community respondents were keen to resolve how to service both the existing strong rural interest and the developing agenda to reach more populous areas.

Partnership Funding

Partnerships gave wide-ranging estimates of expenditure, from no cash input to a few investments of over £1 million. Partnership work has in many cases brought funds to a project that FCS alone could not have provided. However, partnership spend is not easy to define due to the different routes through which funds are channelled (in-kind, FCS direct spend, charitable funds through community groups), making cost-benefit analysis very difficult to undertake.

It is clear that some benefits are not related to levels of expenditure; all the partnerships recording zero expenditure reported perceived benefits through better communication and resultant actions.

The majority of partnerships have no income, aside from small funds generated through membership subscriptions, and are dependent on grant funding and ongoing FCS support. Given that access has been a key activity to date and features strongly in future plans, infrastructure maintenance costs are going to become an increasing overhead in the future. Whilst communities are able to contribute to maintenance through volunteer work parties, they reported difficulty in identifying any funding sources willing to support ongoing maintenance costs.

Specific actions raised in the study to address some sustainability issues were:-

- Increased promotion of volunteering opportunities in upkeep of the woodland and project activities, in parallel with promoting use of the facility
- Development of a clear strategy to meet long term maintenance costs of partnership-led infrastructure projects
- Wider sharing of information and experience on local revenue generation, including research and development work on local added-value products.

Partnership Activities and Achievements

To date community engagement has centred most strongly and successfully around recreation and access, with a mix of beneficiaries between local residents and visitors. Activities have commonly broadened out from a single-focus starting point. Benefits include increased exercise leading to improved physical health, increased social interaction opportunities addressing isolation issues, education and learning, and engaging young people.

Economic development objectives, including the creation of local work opportunities, have been more complex and challenging to deliver. Consequently, progress has been slower on this front.

The difficulty of quantifying partnership benefits was raised by a number of respondents. The intangible benefits are intrinsically difficult to measure – attitudinal changes, increased understanding and awareness and social capital. FCS has initiated some research in these areas. As resources are already stretched, it is important that monitoring be built into existing community and FCS records and reporting systems where possible rather than creating additional work.

Future Development of FCS-community Partnerships

The consultation raised questions about the future level of FCS priority and resources assigned to specific activities and benefits, for both existing and new partnerships. Whilst the "Working in Partnership" publication identifies FCS partnership commitments in broad terms, the areas of focus were seen to be changing, aligning with Scottish Executive priorities. It was felt that a step change is taking place in the focus of the impact of partnership benefits. This was perceived as including increased delivery in areas of more concentrated population, especially of social inclusion and health benefits. This has raised a concern as to potential resource implications for the current predominantly rural-based partnerships.

Networking has been cited during the study as positive and productive, with some reference to development work being undertaken by the Community Woodland Association. The use and value of networking could be increased to good advantage, both locally between community partnerships within one Forest District, and more widely throughout Scotland. More structured networking could promote and enable a

greater degree of self-help between partnerships, potentially easing some of the demand on staff resources.

Recommendations

A number of specific actions are recommended based on the study findings which can be summarised as follows:-

	Summary of Recommendation	Action to be taken by:-
1	Partnership Format and Agreements: Clearer guidelines should be provided by FCS on the full range of partnership format, clarifying for each option:- timeframe and procedure for establishment; levels and frequency of expected FCS support and community contribution; degree of flexibility to change the agreement in the future.	FCS in collaboration with community partners, CWA, HIE Community Land Unit
2	Insurance Cover: Clear and consistent guidelines need to be available on the insurance requirements for community groups to undertake different activities on FCS land, and which elements are covered by FCS provision.	FCS
3	Partnership Induction: An induction course and/or users' guide on national FCS policy and practice pertinent to partnerships should be developed to introduce new community groups and office bearers to FCS partnership work. Community partners should also provide a proper induction for their new Board or committee members at the local level.	FCS, CWA, community partners
4	Financial Sustainability: There is a role for awareness raising among partnerships of the free advisory support available in Scotland on financial sustainability issues.	FCS, CWA, social economy support organisations e.g. HISEZ (Highlands & Islands Social Enterprise Zone), Social Enterprise Academy, Sencot, Community Energy Company, DTAS.
5	Measuring Change and Benefits: There is scope to explore joint working with other agencies or research bodies to establish a shared measurement framework for partnership activities.	FCS, individual partnerships, Community Planning agencies
6	Future Focus of FCS-Community Partnership Work: FCS needs to clearly communicate to community partnerships its specific future priorities and resources for activities and benefits as the new Scottish Forestry Strategy evolves, in particular, the balance of rural and urban focus.	FCS
7	Learning and Support: A proactive, strategic approach to networking between partnerships to share experience and expertise should continue and be further developed.	FCS, CWA, community partners

1. Background

Over the past 10 years both the concept and practice of Community Partnership in Forestry Commission woodlands have evolved considerably, with about 50 active groups UK-wide in 2000 (most of which were in Scotland), rising to the present list of over 90 partnerships in Scotland.

The Community Woodland Association in partnership with Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise have commissioned this study to examine in detail the operation of these partnerships and to provide a sound baseline on which each organisation can continue to support both the existing partnerships and the development of new partnerships.

More specifically the purpose and scope of the study is:

- To evaluate whether the current partnerships represent the best working arrangements for both the community groups and FCS, and best meet their objectives. In effect, to assess the extent to which these partnerships have been a mechanism for successfully delivering sustainable development in rural communities.
- To understand how well FCS and community groups work together.
- To identify best practice; benefits and value of the partnerships; problems and aspirations; and opportunities for improvement.

2. Context

It is helpful to start by considering some of the broader contextual issues in Scotland against which FCS partnership work has been developing over the last 10 years.

Firstly, land reform legislation has opened up opportunities for community control of land resources promoting an awareness and appetite to become involved. Secondly, an increasing emphasis has been placed on community engagement by the public sector, along with the requirement to develop community planning. In addition, we have been seeing a phasing in of changing support mechanisms for land management, including reductions in subsidies. There is a move towards land management contracts and a more integrated approach to land management support in Scotland.

The current climate of efficient government savings and best value practice mean there is pressure on agencies to scrutinise all resource use - both hard cash expenditure and in kind support provided.

Against this background of change, Scottish Forestry has also undergone transformation, especially since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and devolution of forestry. Work on community involvement was initiated in the mid 1990s by the Forestry and People in Rural Areas initiative (FAPIRA) which published a visionary report. This led to the launch of a Forestry Commission public commitment in 1999 "Working with Communities in Scotland".

The Scottish Forestry Strategy was launched in 2000 and reflected an increased emphasis on social and community matters and the important role that forestry can play in delivering a diverse range of public benefits. This resulted in the Forestry for People Advisory Panel being convened by the Forestry Commission in October 2000,

to provide advice and encourage best practice on the involvement of people in forestry. The Panel worked for a 5-year term producing a final report in September 2005, having provided substantial input to the community involvement agenda.

During 2005, FCS renewed its commitment to communities, and to wider partnership work, with the launch of "Working in Partnership: Our Commitment", which lays out FCS partnership objectives to be:-

- To encourage a high level of involvement of community and forest user groups
- To be inclusive of all sectors of the local community
- To promote active citizenship
- To provide current information and good communication
- To advertise and recruit work opportunities locally
- To be a good neighbour and responsible land manager
- To expand the range of benefits from woodlands
- To take advice on the Scottish Forestry Strategy
- To make a difference through partnership work.

FCS is now in the final stages of drafting a new strategy (2006 – 2025) which is currently undergoing public consultation. The proposed three key principles of the strategy - sustainability, social inclusion, and forestry for and with people - are all pertinent to the partnership work being examined in this study. Community partnerships will contribute to some degree to the outcomes below, which are expected to follow from the strategy, the first being of particular relevance:-

- Improved health and well-being of people and their communities
- Competitive and innovative business contributing to the growth of the Scottish economy
- High-quality robust and adaptable environment

Other relevant FCS developments during 2005 include:

- Launch of the National Forest Land Scheme, opening up potential for new and existing partnerships, but also exploration of potential work with housing associations to develop affordable housing, and the creation of woodland crofts in rural areas
- Launch of the FCS education strategy
- Creation of the FCS health programme plan.

Collectively, all of these changes and developments have wide ranging implications for the future direction and resourcing of FCS partnership work.

3. Methodology

The study examines the overview of experience of partnership working over the last 10 years and how it is perceived by both community and FCS District staff. It does not set out to document detailed case studies for individual partnerships. The study sample uses as its basis a partnership list provided by FCS. A copy of the sample structure is available from the Community Woodland Association or FCS.

Partnership work is a people-centred process, therefore, much of the study is based around important qualitative or "softer" issues (perceptions, attitudes, quality etc), as opposed to the more traditional hard, factual, quantitative measures.

The study involved four key elements of information collection as follows:

3.1 Desk Research

- Examination of existing FCS partnership information.
- Review the existing evidence base such as case study material including:-
 - 10 FCS case studies "Community Partnerships on the National Forest Estate" (2005)
 - Social Land Ownership Case Studies 2000/2001
 - 8 case studies on FCS holdings produced by Donald McPhillimy with community input (1999)

3.2 Questionnaire Survey

- Postal questionnaires were issued to 56 community organisations and 38 FCS site managers. A copy of the questionnaire is available from the Community Woodland Association or FCS.
- Collection of factual information on partnership operation and benefits from both FCS staff and communities.
- Collection of views and opinion from both FCS staff and communities.

3.3 Telephone Interviews

- Telephone interviews were undertaken with both community group representatives and FCS staff for a sample of 25 partnerships selected from across the partnership types and other variables (as described in 3.5), using the initial questionnaire responses for guidance.
- Telephone interviews used the written questionnaire content as a prompt to explore in more depth key issues arising from the desk research and questionnaire survey.
- Exploration in particular of qualitative aspects, views and opinions.
- Analysis of above to inform and focus group work.

3.4 Focus Group Discussions

Facilitation of 2 focussed discussions (1 involving community groups, 1 involving FCS staff) on selected specific issues to provide a crosscheck and validation of findings from the earlier phases. The two groups respectively involved representatives from 5 community groups and 9 FCS Forest Districts. The discussions with community representatives and FCS staff were conducted separately under Chatham House rules in order to facilitate frank discussion on any contentious issues.

3.5 Selection of Partnership Sample for Different Elements of Study

Once finalised, the list of partnerships provided by FCS stood at 84 cases. The majority of these are associated with small rural communities (less than 3,000 population), and many have significantly less than 500 residents, reflecting the rural nature of FCS's woodland resource.

The partnerships vary in style of agreement across 4 broad categories, from informal partnerships with no written agreement, to more formal arrangements including those with joint management structures. Therefore, a number of variables needed to be considered during the course of the evaluation and in selection of study samples.

These included:-

- The type of partnership agreement
- The stage of maturity of the partnership/ length of operation (start date ranges from 1994 – 2005)
- Origins of the partnership
- Geographical location across 14 Forest Districts
- Forest size and type (ranges from 0.5ha to 14,768ha, with 51 partnerships working with less than 400ha)
- Key interest and focus of the specific partnership e.g. access, economic regeneration, conservation etc.

The 25 partnerships which participated in the telephone interviews were selected in order to achieve a good cross-section of each of the variables listed above. Those partnerships which had recently been the subject of other detailed case study work were excluded in order not to unduly burden the community groups involved. Two partnerships also had to be substituted for those initially selected due to a lack of telephone contact details.

Postal questionnaires were sent to a total of 56 community groups, this comprising the remainder of the partnerships for which postal contact details were provided. A smaller number of postal questionnaires (38 sites) were issued to FCS staff; a maximum of 5 questionnaires per Forest District were distributed bearing in mind that in many cases it would be the same staff member completing all returns. Selection of cases was made in proportion to the total number of partnership sites in any one District, and again including a cross-section of the above variables.

3.6 Report Format

The findings are reported by each of the four study elements. Results from the written questionnaire and the telephone interviews are presented separately due to the difference in consultation method and nature of the returns; the questionnaire used largely tick-box responses while the telephone interviews were interactive, allowing two way dialogue and follow up questions on the reasons behind respondents' views. Section 4.2 below analyses the written returns, dealing more with quantitative results; while section 4.3 reports on the telephone interviews and the more qualitative findings.

The key issues arising from all elements of the study are summarised in section 5, together with recommendations for action.

4. Findings

4.1 Desk Research

The table below summarises which FCS community woodlands were included in case study work commissioned by FCS and HIE Community Land Unit since the late 1990s. Five partnerships featured twice in the three sets of studies undertaken.

The 1999 set of 20 case studies was produced by Donald McPhillimy, in partnership with local community groups, for the Rural Development Forestry Toolkit. Only 8 (as listed below) of the 20 cases involved activity on FCS-owned land.

The Social Land Ownership case studies were undertaken by the Not-for-Profit Landowners Project Group and focus on community land ownership and management, and do not provide in-depth coverage of specific community woodland aspects.

The 2005 series of studies was produced by John Fowler and Roland Stiven for FCS.

FCS-community partnership site featured in the case studies	1999 case studies Rural Development Forestry Toolkit: 8 cases	2005 case studies FCS Community Partnerships on the national forest estate: 10 cases	Social Land Ownership case studies (2001 & 2002): 5 cases
Cairnhead			
Cree Valley			
Glen Urquhart			
Blairadam Forest, Kelty			
Minard			
South Strome			Fernaig Community Trust
Sunart			
Tyndrum			
Rosehall			
Strathglass			
Strathmashie, Laggan			
Cow Hill			
Balfour Wood, Birse			
Ladybank			
Glenkinnon Burn			Borders Forest Trust
Bellsbank			
Dalbeattie			
Creag Nay			Abriachan Forest Trust

Community representatives from the 1999 case studies collectively highlighted the following "Lessons for Others" in their conclusions:-

Planning Together

- Balance emerging viewpoints with existing community structures
- Democracy
- Different people have different visions which need to be blended together – keep the group vision broad enough to allow this
- Decisions – decide and agree what you are trying to achieve as a community

Values and Attitude

- Trust and confidence are the key ingredients
- Open meetings and transparent decision making
- Be prepared to compromise
- Determination – provides motivation to overcome obstacles
- Don't give up and be prepared for a long haul and to invest a lot of time
- Dedication – you've got to have a passion for it

Ownership

- Work with as many interested parties as possible and give them all a sense of ownership of the project
- It is vital that the project must be embedded in the local community

Project Management

- The group has to accept all the responsibilities that go with the project
- There must be cover for the key people developing the project
- Delegation enables work to be carried forward on a broad front and not rely upon one or two individuals
- Ensure that the financial package is secure and in place
- Demonstration – you need to be seen to be getting somewhere

Communication

- There is big value in networking and seeking advice from other initiatives
- Clear dialogue between potential partners and the wider community is important
- The value of a positive attitude to working together by all groups involved, using wide consultation and discussion to allow as many people as possible to get involved and realise the benefit to the whole community

The set of 2005 studies makes the following concluding observations:-

- Partnerships by their nature break down barriers, encouraging communication between FCS and local people.
- Community groups raise funds from sources other than FCS and increase the level of investment in woodland projects.
- Community groups are by definition inclusive and projects initially fairly open-ended; it takes time for ideas to be shared and clear objectives and goals settled.
- Community forest projects can be empowering, providing a sense of achievement and encouraging other community activities.
- Groups tend to rely heavily on the voluntary input of a few people, and many have difficulty filling the committee roles.
- The abundance of agencies and funding sources results in community groups being frustrated, bewildered and reporting to many interested parties.
- Woodland management is a long-term activity that outlasts current partnership teams – maintaining commitment and activity can be more difficult than starting up.

The above pointers from both sets of case studies were integrated into the questionnaire, telephone interviews and focus group work to explore whether these continue to be key issues.

The 8 cases that participated in the 1999 studies have stood the test of time, are all still in operation, and participated in this study (with the exception of South Strome).

4.2 Questionnaire Survey

Partnerships which were not selected for the telephone interview sample were invited to participate in a written questionnaire survey. A total of 27 returns were received from community representatives and 28 returns from FCS staff. Note that the two sets of returns do not all correlate to the same sites but are a random return; only 11 of both sets of returns relate to the same partnership, meaning that returns (community and FCS staff collectively) were received for 44 partnership sites in total which is 52% of the total partnership list.

The collective responses are summarised below. More qualitative feedback is provided in section 4.3 Telephone Interviews.

4.2.1 Origin and Development of Partnerships

Partnerships took a number of forms with many working on a more than one aspect, for example having a written agreement for a specific area or tasks but also contributing to wider forest design and management planning.

The initial partnership objectives were most often multiple. A majority of respondents viewed "community engagement" and "allowing the community to have a say in the forest" as a key initial objective (52% community responses & 39% FCS responses). Access, habitat management and education were all flagged up as key objectives. Forest design & management was raised as an objective in the FCS staff responses, but not by any of the community respondents. Four respondents identified job creation and local economic development as a specific objective.

The spark that triggered the partnership idea and need was again often multi-faceted, with a need for access, community engagement and habitat management being the key motivators, as summarised in the table below.

What was the origin of the partnership idea?	% of community responses	% of FCS responses
Community desire for improved recreational access	63%	50%
FE desire for community engagement	59%	54%
Community concerns about habitat management	48%	14%
Other e.g. Historic site protection, community concern over increased public access, flooding and management practices, Millennium events held in forest	15%	39%
Community desire for access to forest products	22%	18%
Threat of sale to private ownership	4%	7%
Community desires for access to land for affordable housing	4%	4%

NOTE: 4% = 1 response

The balance of driving forces that led to the establishment of the partnership was viewed similarly by both community and FCS respondents, as indicated in the following table. In many cases there was more than one party involved.

Who was driving force behind the partnership establishment?	% of community responses	% of FCS responses
Several individuals working informally	41%	43%
A strong, established community group	48%	32%
The FCS team	30%	39%
One individual within the community	19%	14%
Other e.g. local authority, river owners' group, regional forest trust, national park	11%	11%
An FCS employee	7%	11%

All cases responding had some level of communication with the wider community at the outset of the partnership. The most common form of community engagement was initially through a public community meeting (in about 80% of cases), with over half also undertaking a full or selective community consultation or opinion survey. Other channels for community engagement included a newsletter, household leaflet and the local paper. No cases reported little or no engagement with the wider community.

The partnerships responding were equally split between those who work with a pre-existing community group and those which had to form a new community group especially for the forest partnership.

Over half the partnerships indicated that they are working in small rural communities (less than 500 residents) and quite a few pointed out that their communities are considerably smaller than this, between 3 – 60 residents. A sizeable number of partnerships are also in or near small towns (500 - 3,000 residents), but few are working directly in communities larger than 3,000 residents.

4.2.2 Partnership Operation – How well do they work?

Communication was rated as very good overall in both directions, as reflected in the table below.

How do you rate the level and type of communication between FCS & the community?	Community (% of total responses)	FCS (% of total responses)
Excellent	59%	39%
Good	0%	4%
Adequate	30%	54%
Poor	7%	4%
No response	4%	0%

The majority of partnerships meet on a monthly or quarterly basis about practical, operational matters, and quarterly on planning and strategic matters.

Over 70% of respondents (both community and FCS staff) felt that there was mutual understanding of objectives and work programme between the community and FCS, with most of the remainder indicating that there was partial agreement and understanding.

FCS staff recalled a higher incidence (43% of responses) than community representatives (19% of responses) of a “significant disagreement” having taken place between the partners – note that the two sets of responses do not relate to exactly the same partnerships. This feedback also reflects, in part, a difference in interpretation of “significant”. Further discussion is given in the telephone survey results (section 4.3.2).

The reasons behind disagreements were given as follows:-

Community Perceived Areas of Disagreement (5 responses)	FCS staff Perceived Areas of Disagreement (12 responses)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delay in getting management agreement signed off (up to 5 years) although written• Felling operations and aftermath• The nature of agreement /lease• Condition of site when community management assumed• Trying to get funding without a management agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The wish by the community for a formal lease rather than a standard permission on an annual basis• Harvesting operations• Sub-groups and user groups with different ideas & needs (2 responses)• Conservation vs. recreation and access promotion• Installation/design of motor bike barrier restricting legitimate user access• Deer & land management & land proposals• Design plan changes requested by community after planned operations had began• MTB facility - safety issues, level of usage and impact on other users• Objectives of woodland management & species balance, including retention of trees• Conduct of office bearers• Ownership

In exploring the relative roles of the two sides in the partnership, both community representatives and FCS respondents attached some importance to input from the other party in the form of:- administration; funding; delivery of practical projects; problem solving and useful contacts; and technical support.

However, the balance of input from each party and its relative importance seemed to vary greatly between the partnership types and be dependent on the nature and scale of their activities.

Overall, community responses seemed to **attach most importance to an FCS input in:-**

1. Delivery of practical projects (including in-kind contributions of materials, expertise and contractors)
2. Funding
3. Technical support.

In contrast, FCS staff viewed the **communities’ core contribution to the partnership as:-**

1. Problem solving and useful contacts
2. Delivery of practical projects (volunteer input)
3. Funding.

4.2.3 Partnership Funding

Overall there was only 1 case among the questionnaire returns that had invested over £1 million in the life of the partnership, and 4 cases which estimated expenditure between £250k and £1 million.

Total direct funding (from all sources) invested over life of the Partnership – estimated range	Community estimate (% of responses)	FCS staff estimate (% of responses)
No funding	22%	29%
Up to £50k	37%	29%
Between £50k - £250k	11%	25%
Between £250k - £1 million	7%	7%
Over £1million	4%	4%

The majority of partnerships had no independent direct cash income to supplement grant or agency support. Income sources were indicated by only 8 respondents, generating between £500 and £1,000 each. This was generated by donations, charges at events, sale of firewood and charcoal (although half the income was taken by insurance costs), sale of willow and of locally made goods (cheese boards, candle holders). Larger income in the region of £10-20,000 was generated in the case of a larger well known charity involved in the partnership and by a specialist heritage attraction that received donations and purchase of goods by enthusiasts. One partnership was bequeathed £80,000 from a local person.

4.2.4 Partnership Activities and Achievements

4.2.4.1 Activities

Multiple activities were undertaken by nearly all partnerships, although a small number did not undertake any practical activities at all due to the liaison and nature of the partnership. The table below illustrates the most common partnership activities.

Activities delivered by the partnership	Community (% of total responses)	FCS (% of total responses)
Recreation facilities e.g. footpaths/car parks	78%	86%
Habitat enhancement	70%	64%
Education e.g. workshops, events, guided walks	67%	75%
Tourism promotion e.g. interpretation & information	59%	61%
Forest planning	41%	68%
All-abilities access	41%	18%
Timber harvesting	26%	32%
Job creation	19%	18%
Other e.g. agroforestry, art work, culture & heritage	19%	11%
Added-value timber processing	7%	18%

The majority of partnerships started with and retained a recreation and access activity base. Over the life of partnerships, the areas that have most commonly grown and developed are:- tourism development; education and events; habitat enhancement.

Activity areas which seem to have remained static or decreased marginally across the life of partnerships include: added-value timber processing; and job creation from forest management operations.

4.2.4.2 Achievements

A high proportion of respondents viewed partnership achievements to be in line with expectations, with many indicating that there is a lot more to be achieved.

Respondents were asked to identify what they feel is THE ONE most important benefit from the partnership (although many did not respond as perhaps they felt unable to single this out) and also to list ALL the major benefits they see. Feedback is summarised in the table below showing that both community and FCS staff rated "community empowerment" as the top benefit. Following closely, strong importance was attached by community representatives to "access to recreational amenities"; and by FCS staff to "improved relationship between community and FCS".

Type of community benefit arising from the partnership	The MOST important benefit		A Major Benefit	
	Community (% of total responses)	FCS - % of total response	Community (% of total responses)	FCS - % of total response
Community Empowerment – influence over events and destiny of local environment	33%	43%	41%	32%
Access to recreational amenities	30%	14%	37%	68%
Improved relationship & understanding between community and FCS	4%	21%	41%	64%
Improved biodiversity & wildlife habitat	11%	4%	48%	43%
Protection of heritage	7%	4%	48%	46%
Education for all (events, guided walks etc)	4%	4%	41%	39%
Fundraising bringing investment into the area	4%	4%	19%	29%
Landscaping and environmental improvements	7%	0%	33%	54%
Benefits to non-residents (locals and tourists)	4%	0%	52%	36%
Employment opportunities & job creation	0%	4%	19%	11%
Skills/capacity building of individuals & groups	0%	4%	30%	14%
Strengthening social networks & relationships within the community or new groups formed	0	0	15%	43%
Participation of whole community in project	0	0	15%	32%
Sharing best practice with neighbouring or other Scottish community forestry projects	0	0	19%	18%
Inclusion of hard to reach groups e.g. elderly, single parent families, disabled, low income	0	0	15%	11%

Responses show a common pattern of active community participation in delivering the project objectives, this is that small numbers from the community (less than 20% of the community in all cases, except where the community was only 3 people) volunteer both on a regular basis to undertake planning and committee duties and also to work on more occasional practical work days. In a number of cases, where the partnership is centred around liaison, it does not entail physical site work.

Training opportunities have only been taken up or developed by a small number of partnerships. Only 11% of cases stated they had offered training to certificate level to partnership members – this was commonly for chainsaw use or other small mechanical equipment. However, in one or two cases where chainsaw certification had been achieved it was seen as central to the partnership aims in job creation through forest management. Ten partnerships indicated access to informal training in areas such as community development, partnership work and fund raising.

4.2.4.3 Employment

Local jobs created as a result of the partnership activities is a difficult indicator to measure. Jobs directly delivering partnership outputs have usually been short-term contracts or fixed term project posts. Their temporary nature and the frequency at which they occur mean have offered limited value to the local economy. Most of the project officer posts referred to in the study have lasted for up to 2-3 years, after which the partnership has usually reconciled to operate with volunteers.

New jobs were also reported as indirect spin-offs generated from partnership activities, such as increased levels of activity for local visitor service providers. However, it is hard to demonstrate definitively that the jobs result solely due to partnership impact.

The table below shows the collective estimates of job creation provided through the questionnaire – but needs to be interpreted with care for the above reasons.

Creation of new jobs by Partnership within the community	Community estimated no. jobs created	FCS estimated no. jobs created
No. Full time posts		
'Direct' jobs created and employed by the partnership itself	5	9
'Indirect' jobs created in the community as a spin off from partnership activities	18	38
No. Part time posts		
'Direct' jobs created and employed by the partnership itself	5	4
'Indirect' jobs created in the community as a spin off from partnership activities	3	24

Explanation of some of the above figures:

- **Full-time direct jobs:** largely project manager posts
- **Full-time indirect jobs:** a large number are attributable to a Training for Work Programme in a single partnership (community estimate 15 posts; FCS estimate 26 posts) where path building trainees have gained employment in the wider area. A further 9 posts (FCS estimate) also relate to tourism benefits from a single partnership.
- **Part-time direct jobs:** mainly as project staff and short term field contracts
- **Part-time indirect jobs:** 18 posts (FCS estimate) are related to a single partnership tourism spin-off, largely through mountain biking visitors.

4.2.4.4 Benefits of Partnerships

The majority of respondents felt that the partnership had enabled their organisation to achieve things that would not have been possible alone (community response 70%; FCS staff response 82%). Only 3 FCS staff responses indicated that similar outputs would have been possible without the community input, but would have lacked the community liaison aspect.

Respondents envisaged that, in the absence of the partnership, the outputs would have been affected as indicated in the following table:-

In the absence of the partnership, delivery of outputs would have:-	Community (% of total responses)	FCS (% of total responses)
Taken longer	30%	39%
Been smaller Scale	30%	36%
Been poorer Quality	19%	39%
Nothing at all would have happened	37%	21%
If "Other", please specify	11%	18%

Respondents assessed the value of the FCS input in different ways dependent on the partnership type and activities. Not surprisingly, access to land was seen as critical in the majority of cases, although for some partnerships of a planning and liaison nature this was not relevant. Advisory input was also highly rated in a majority of cases. Interestingly, funding was not seen as important or of any benefit in a number of cases.

4.2.5 Future of Partnerships

Almost 60% of both sets of responses indicated that the partnership objectives and role had remained the same since starting. Where partnerships indicated that there has been a change, this was usually through a combination of increased understanding of forest management, development of ideas and sometimes completion of initial goals leading on to new activities.

The majority of responses indicated an intention to continue with the existing partnership structure. However, the table below shows that a number of cases are considering moving to a new, preferred structure including potential lease or land purchase.

Does your organisation aspire to change the partnership structure to enable delivery to work better?	Community (% of total responses)	FCS (% of total responses)
Continue with partnership as presently constituted	67%	71%
Continue with partnership with different structure	11%	18%
Community purchase or lease under the National Forest Land Scheme	22%	11%
Dissolve partnership	4%	4%
Other	0%	4%

Future plans and key issues to address over the next 3 years were indicated in the following order of priority:-

Community Responses	FCS Staff Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop more access including cycling, recreation infrastructure, interpretation & signage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Further recreational infrastructure development, including WIAT work & maintenance of facilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Habitat, biodiversity & native woodland development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tourism development & visitor management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase local employment & economic activities, including land purchase or long term lease and business development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promotion of facilities and widening the local support base; sustaining community input and enthusiasm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fund raising efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fund raising
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase education activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Habitat enhancement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase youth involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educational development

The three greatest perceived barriers to future progress were reported by both community and FCS staff as:-

- Funding
- Volunteer fatigue/community capacity/level of participation
- Time available, by both FCS staff and community volunteers.

Communities felt the next biggest barrier is FCS bureaucracy and the time taken by FCS to respond to needs; while FCS staff felt future barriers will continue to be varying agendas and objectives, local rivalry and dominant individuals within communities.

4.3 Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews were carried out in relation to 25 sites. Representatives from 25 different community groups were interviewed, these being the key contact names supplied by FCS Districts, usually the Chair or Secretary of the group. FCS staff were interviewed with regard to 23 of the sites, the interview being held with the staff member in most frequent contact with the group, which varied from ranger to District Manager. The discrepancy in number is due to one site being dealt with solely by FCS estates staff, as the agreement was a straightforward lease, and another site having received no FCS input since a change of staff 3 years previously although this was about to be resolved.

Community groups were very quick to comment on how supportive FCS have been in engaging with the community and they all recognise that the organisation has come a long way in a very short period of time. They also noted that in comparison to other government agencies FCS has been much more progressive.

Overall there was a high degree of correlation between the community and FCS staff responses for these 25 paired interviews. In addition the responses also mirror those analysed through the questionnaire survey.

4.3.1 Origin and Development of Partnerships

Of the partnerships questioned in the telephone interviews just over half have some form of written agreement with FCS, or are in the process of finalising one. This can take a number of forms from a 'permission', to a concordat, to a management agreement. In a small number of instances a more formal lease has been agreed but these tend to focus on pieces of land or buildings that are not core to FCS's main business e.g. buildings used for outdoor education groups or specific heritage projects.

Many of these agreements were still being negotiated and community groups commented about how long this process takes. It is clear that delays had been due in part to the groups themselves taking some time to decide exactly what they wanted and sometimes changing their plans. However, there was a frustration that, even when the details had been agreed locally, groups were being advised by FCS staff that it would take up to a year to finalise the written, legal agreement. In 2 cases, written agreements have been in development for 5 years.

More informal liaison and consultation tends to apply to projects where FCS has been proactive in initiating the partnership, generally to meet their own objectives and a desire to ensure that their work on a particular site meets the communities' needs.

The initial objectives of partnerships vary considerably, with many having multiple objectives. The majority relate in some way to improving access and upgrading recreational facilities whether this be paths for general access, mountain bike trails, providing children's play areas or educational and nature based activities. A smaller number of groups are driven by a desire to see improved natural habitats, both in terms of the structure of the woodland and more general biodiversity, including birds, bats, watercourses and ground flora. The smallest grouping would be those who have a very specific interest in a particular topic such as railway heritage or archaeology. In a small number of instances the initial intention of the community

was to purchase the site but this had been pulled back from as the relationship developed.

The main trigger for the development of the partnership was one of:-

- community desire for improved recreational access
- community concerns about habitat management
- a desire from FE for community engagement
- the site being put on the disposals list and a concern that the land would be sold to a private owner.

A range of other triggers were also mentioned including bad local PR about the condition of the woodland, concern about unsafe trees, and the desire to stop aspects of local heritage deteriorating.

The majority of partnerships were started by an approach to FCS from the community whether from a particular individual, several individuals working informally or a strong established group. In almost half the cases there was a pre-existing group that was able to take on the lead role, with the other half developing a new group over time, although in some instances a more informal grouping is still in place. In one case, the resident community is so small that there is no group as such but all individuals are invited to attend partnership meetings.

The level of community engagement and the nature of the groups varied considerably. Some could be classified as more widely representative of the community, others are largely made up of individuals who have a specific interest in the woodland, either their own gardens form a boundary with the woodland or they like to carry out practical conservation work. Some groups could be classed as special interest groups who only have an interest in a particular topic such as mountain biking or heritage and the woodland itself is incidental to their aims and it just so happens that what they want to do will happen on land managed by FCS. Partnerships also exist with groups such as Forest Trusts, whose staff then facilitate grass roots community involvement. What is clear is that one size does not fit all and that each of the relationships have developed to meet local circumstances.

4.3.2 Partnership Operation – How well do they work?

On the whole the feedback received about partnership operation was very positive both from FCS and from community groups. The sense is that very successful working relationships, with a good dialogue at local level, have been achieved throughout all Forest Districts. This doesn't mean that there have been no problems, although in the majority of cases these have been resolved and are seen as water under the bridge with only a few outstanding or recurring issues.

At a local level there is a high level of communication between community groups and staff, with most communicating on a monthly basis and many on a weekly if not daily basis as and when required. The level of communication understandably varies depending on the nature of current activity being undertaken by each group. In cases where joint site meetings and FCS attendance at community meetings happens less often, the majority of communication is through regular telephone and email contact.

Communication tends to focus on practical operational matters with occasional input into longer term planning or strategic issues. There were a small handful of cases where communication was either non-existent or much less frequent. This could be attributed either to changes in staff or a decision to take a more reactive stance by the local Forest District. Neither party seemed to be concerned by this approach but it was unclear on what basis these decisions had been taken.

The only negative comment that was made about communications was about the reliance on verbal communication, which in some cases wasn't followed up by written confirmation of agreed actions by either party. This had led to a lack of clarity in some situations about what had actually been agreed and who was going to do what and by when.

The level and type of communication is generally felt to be good or excellent, although in some cases this was qualified as referring to local communications with the District. In only one instance did any respondent indicate that they felt it was poor and this reflected a frustration with FCS at a more central, strategic level. On the whole few barriers to communication were reported; where they were, most comments related to delays or mixed messages perceived to be caused by FCS central bureaucracy, or to communications with forest operations staff.

In only one case was a lack of mutual understanding of objectives and work programmes articulated (by the community). In a significant number of cases it was indicated by both sides (7 community responses & 8 FCS responses) that there was only a partial understanding and it was noted that this was part of the reason that a written agreement of some form was in development. This also included cases where FCS access objectives were not fully shared by the community due to conservation interests.

When asked whether any significant disagreements had taken place the majority felt not (community 17; FCS 19). Slightly more community groups (8) indicated that there had been a significant disagreement compared to 4 FCS staff responses, however when this was explored further both parties expanded on the same issues which had caused problems. The community groups appeared to perceive these as being more significant than FCS staff do. However, even when respondents said there had been no significant disagreements there was generally quite a bit of discussion about 'minor' disagreements that had been resolved.

The reasons for disagreement can be categorised into 4 main issues:

1. From a community perspective while relations with local staff, in particular the main points of contact, are very good, issues with other parts of the FCS organisation were identified as follows. Problems had arisen in a few instances with lack of communication with forest operations staff, doing thinning or clear felling work with no warning to the community – sometimes this had resulted in loss of amenity or damage to work carried out by the community; additional burdens had in one or two cases been placed on groups through the written agreements from FCS Estates staff; and a small number felt changes in strategic priorities or national schemes (e.g. Woods Works, mountain bike developments) taken by FCS centrally were impacting on local developments, setting joint work back.

2. From a community perspective there is a sense of frustration of having to deal with a "large bureaucratic organisation" that could provide clearer, more accessible information in some aspects of its operations. The main issues are the amount of time it takes for FCS to respond and the need for a lot of paperwork and consultation. This is viewed as being unresponsive from the communities' perspective. Correspondingly there is some concern from FCS staff that community groups go ahead and do work without informing FCS staff, which could have implications for Health and Safety and technical/engineering standards or quality.
3. Both community and FCS respondents commented that in some cases which are not within FCS's perceived main remit of forest management and recreation, there is a tendency to be less responsive. Examples given were heritage projects, archaeology and specific types of conservation management. There is a sense of frustration that these initiatives are not looked on more positively as they could open up and provide core facilities e.g. car parking, toilets etc. to enable easier development of other access and recreation facilities within the adjacent woodland in the longer term. However, there is also positive experience on this front, for example at Daingain, where a local expert is leading on archaeology, and at Cairnhead where the partnership has teamed up with Dumfries and Galloway Arts Association to manage the Andy Goldsworthy Striding Arches project on its behalf.
4. Insurance and maintenance responsibility and costs are areas of concern both from a community and an FCS perspective. Part of the reason these have become such significant issues is that they have not been dealt with clearly at the outset of the partnership activities, and when raised have often caused confusion due to lack of clarity, leading to conflict and delay. The apparent lack of FCS consistency on requirements from community groups, and when FCS might take responsibility for these aspects, has been raised as a concern.

4.3.3 Partnership Funding

Most of the 25 partnerships interviewed had dealt with relatively low cost activities, some spending only a few hundred pounds in total and quite a few less than £5,000. The range of investment level in project work is summarised in the following table. Discrepancies between community and FCS responses can be explained by varying interpretation of "Partnership Funding", including the following factors:

- FCS (and other agency) contributions are not always interpreted by the community as partnership spend, but as FCS core spend.
- Although the input of FCS in-kind contribution (materials, contractors, professional advisers' time) is often recognised and fully appreciated by the community, the value of this is often not known.
- Some projects accessed considerable funding in liaison with partner bodies which received and managed the funds on the partnership behalf; a couple of these are included below.
- Two of the cases with 'No Spend' are based on liaison and joint management planning and have no project activities.

Estimated total direct funding (from all sources) invested over life of the Partnership	Community (% of total responses)	FCS staff (% of total responses)
None	16%	9%
Up to £50k	44%	57%
Between £50k - £250k	28%	22%
Between £250k - £1 million	8%	9%
Over £1million	4%	4%

The role of partnerships in leveraging additional funds which FCS is unable to access alone was acknowledged and accepted by both parties as a benefit of joint working. Only in one case was dissatisfaction expressed by community interests that they are feeling marginalised at present after community involvement being used as a linchpin to source substantial funding.

Many cases cited examples of FCS responding positively and relatively quickly with the offer of materials to undertake community projects. This included fencing materials, hard core for paths, contractors to undertake thinning or site excavation.

The majority of cases have no direct cash income to the partnership aside from grant awards. Only 6 indicated they did have income, but this was restricted to small amounts from membership fees and donations. Some flagged up FCS car park takings, although these are an FCS income rather than partnership income. In a small number of cases it was also noted that while there was no direct funding for the partnership FCS had agreed to ring-fence any income from timber sales within the woodland to be reinvested back into it rather than being put into a central pot for redistribution. The 5 communities that flagged up economic objectives for their partnership are still working to achieve direct income generation.

4.3.4 Partnership Activities and Achievements

The range of activities and outputs is broad. Key elements flagged up as successes include the physical projects achieved on the ground from paths and trails, interpretation projects and supporting infrastructure such as car parks and toilets to habitat enhancements ranging from clearing of non natives to tree planting and the installation of bat/bird boxes. The provision of activities such as guided walks, educational activities, Green Gym, open days and woodland festivals were also seen as being a success. From an FCS viewpoint, the greater involvement of the community and the development of good relationships is viewed as a significant outcome.

The actual development of active groups and the fostering of new social networks was also seen as an aspect of the partnership that had gone well. In a couple of cases there had been an increase in the interest and involvement of young people. The building of relationships not just between FCS and the community but also with other organisations including Local Authorities and SNH were noted by a number of partnerships.

In terms of achievements, a number of respondents cited the limited degree of engagement with and support from the wider community as something which had

not gone so well. From an FCS perspective, the issue of quality and lack of warning in advance of the community undertaking an activity was raised as an issue.

Do Partnership achievements to date meet your organisation's expectations?	Community (% of total responses)	FCS staff (% of total responses)
Yes- completely	40%	26%
No - not at all	4%	0%
Not yet	0%	17%
So far but more to do	48%	48%
No response/ Not Applicable	8%	9%

Most respondents felt that the partnership achievements to date have met their organisation's expectations so far but that there is more to do. A similar number of community respondents felt that their expectations had been fully met, with a discrepancy on the FCS staff view. This is explained in some cases due to a slight mis-match in core objectives, for example where FCS may have a predominantly access agenda compared to a community conservation focus where increased use may be seen as detrimental. Only one community respondent felt that at the present time community expectations are not being met at all, in relation to the more challenging economic and job creation objectives.

Community and FCS respondents agreed in 10 cases that the partnership work had enabled their organisations to achieve outputs that would not have been possible alone. In 3 cases, FCS staff felt that they could have achieved the same physical outputs alone, but this would not have achieved the "community goodwill" aspect. In one case the community respondent felt they could have achieved similar results alone.

It was felt that in about half the cases none of the current activities would have happened in the absence of the partnership. Scenarios offered were: the forest may have been sold; FCS would have designated the forest for commercial operations with no recreational programme; the archaeological site may have simply been listed to prevent replanting. In the remainder of cases it was felt that some activity would have taken place but of smaller scale, poorer quality or it would have taken much longer.

Creation of new jobs through the partnerships has been very low, although it is difficult to measure through this type of consultation. In most cases this was not a specific objective. In the 2 cases where this is a key objective, progress has been very slow and hard work. Working with FCS on accessing contracts in forest management and harvesting has been difficult, although efforts are still being made to make this work. The community perception is that barriers (e.g. insurance and qualification requirements) are used as reasons not to progress, rather than trying to find a solution.

The track record on direct employment by partnerships has largely been of fixed term funding for project officer posts. This has lead many partnerships to reconcile to operating on a voluntary basis with occasional contracted input.

About half of the respondents cited tourism income as a wider financial benefit to the community although they were unable to quantify this. Only two had undertaken

studies to provide detailed information on the benefits (Sunart, Mull Eagle Viewing). Clearly there are a number of cases where the partnership is contributing significantly towards provision for visitors and adding value to the local economy and this is an area that is identified as of potential future activity.

In the cases that did not indicate potential economic spin-offs, the point was made that their objectives were socially oriented and about improving quality of life and opportunities for local residents. A significant number of spin off activities were mentioned here, including the development of school tree nurseries and ambitious arts, heritage and archaeological projects. The woodlands themselves have also provided a base for new groups varying from sports clubs to those working with behaviourally challenged young people. In addition, in a couple of cases groups that had started off as community woodland groups had branched out into wider community development activities and in one instance a group has purchased a community shop (Minard).

4.3.5 Future of Partnerships

The current role and objectives of community partnerships has generally remained the same, albeit with minor changes of emphasis, although the perception of the two sets of respondents differs slightly (19 community responses; 13 FCS responses). Where there have been significant changes (6 community responses; 10 FCS responses) this has been either due to a change in circumstances or external influences, such as lack of financial support to enable a community purchase, or a change in outlook and attitude as the partnership has become more informed and experienced in woodland management. A small number of groups have become more ambitious fed in part by their current success in achieving work on the ground.

The majority of groups do have some active plans for on the ground development that will to a certain extent be dependent on accessing external funding. In most cases this is not envisaged to be a problem. Of greater concern are revenue funding issues surrounding insurance and maintenance, and the perception of FCS's lack of consistency between partnerships on this. Another significant barrier relates to the heavy dependence on volunteer effort and the challenges that face community groups in getting the wider community to engage. In one or two cases there are real concerns about succession and leadership within the community groups. This has an impact in that there doesn't seem to be enough time to deliver the partnerships' aspirations, almost every group commented that they would appreciate a more dedicated resource. FCS staff also indicated that they are unable to provide more time to support groups although they would like to and that this also means they are restricted in taking on more community partnerships.

When asked about potential changes to the partnership structure, most respondents indicated that they were happy to continue in the present form for the immediate future. In some cases written agreements of one type or another are still being finalised, and in 3 cases different structures are evolving. Four community respondents indicated interest in purchase at some point in the future but this is likely to be some way off, except for in one instance where a group is actively pursuing this option.

A frequent comment made by community groups was that they had received the message from FCS staff that community ownership was not encouraged, and that it was easier all round if some other form of arrangement was made. This was echoed

by FCS staff responses which indicated that they felt that it was much less onerous for the community if FCS retained ownership and responsibility for the management; the community could then influence the forest management activities and play a more proactive role in areas that they were interested in, such as access or practical conservation activities.

4.4 Focus Group Discussions

Two focus group discussions were held in early April 2006. The objective of the discussions was to explore in more depth some of the issues identified during the questionnaire and interview processes and also to identify any further issues that had not been raised to date. The first meeting, held in Inverness, involved representatives of 5 community groups from the 3 Forest Districts surrounding Inverness. The second meeting was held in Perth and involved 10 FCS staff, mainly Forest District Managers, representing 9 Forest Districts from throughout Scotland.

A summary of the collective key discussion points raised during the two focus groups is given below. Some of these issues were raised by only one of the groups and others were discussed by both groups.

4.4.1 Clarification of Issues Already Identified

The following points were made regarding issues that had been identified as significant in the earlier part of the evaluation:

Strategic Planning: While there are strategic objectives for FCS to engage broadly with community partnerships there is no framework that sets out how this should be achieved. Districts have largely been reactive in developing opportunities either when approached by community groups or where they have seen the potential for benefits in particular forests through engaging the wider community. This has led to a flexibility in approach, acknowledging that one size does not fit all. There is however now a resourcing issue in that the demand for community engagement and partnerships has expanded, and there is not always the staff or financial resources available to meet the demands of this area of work.

FCS Staff Support: Previously little support was given to staff with a community liaison role but this has changed in recent years. However there is a recognised need for team planning workshops to discuss how the Forest District team works as a whole and how it can work better to serve community interests. In addition, it was felt that training could usefully be offered to staff dealing with community conflict and division and how to broaden out community engagement where perhaps only a small community of self or limited interest is currently involved.

Written Agreements: It was confirmed that written agreements sometimes work well and other times are less useful. In many instances day to day management aspects of partnership work can work very well on an informal basis. However written agreements are essential for enabling joint working on more strategic issues, in order to clarify roles if the community is doing physical work or for funding purposes. The key message is that any agreement should be fit for purpose and not overly burdensome on either partner. There is however a concern that over the last 10 years there has been a cultural shift within FCS with a move towards greater caution over health and safety and risk management, which can work against a creative and open approach to community activities.

Insurance Cover for Groups: Insurance cover is possibly the biggest issue facing groups as it is an ongoing revenue cost which public and charitable funders will not support, and premiums having also risen sharply in recent years. There is a lack of clarity about when public liability insurance is required, and why the level of £5million cover appears to have been set by FCS. Different Districts are applying different

ways of working with regard to insurance. There is a feeling that the limits set are not necessarily appropriate given the level of risk, and also that FCS guidelines are difficult for staff to interpret. A comment was made that cover should be based on individual project or group requirements rather than a standard package. There are ways of minimising insurance costs e.g. through using a BTCV scheme, but not all groups are aware of this as an option. Finally the liability of community company directors was raised as an issue that may need further clarification.

FCS Resource and Funding Contributions: Community groups are very appreciative of the support provided by FCS to date such as technical advice, in-kind materials and site contract work and help with cash flow management.

Local flexibility in budget management is generally used to the advantage of community projects, particularly where costs are small. However it is recognised that this isn't a process that is easily understood by community groups, and is sometimes viewed by them with slight suspicion. Accessing significant sums of hard cash funds for community partnerships within FCS can be difficult and staff generally have to be creative – funds may be available for new initiatives or for very successful longer term initiatives.

Communications: The FCS site planning process gives all staff access to operational plans and should ensure that good operational foresters would not destroy anything that was meant to be preserved. In principle, therefore forest operations should not conflict with community projects and needs. This will have to be monitored carefully however as the recent organisational structure changes within FCS have distanced operations from District management and could lead to a weakening in this very local co-ordination.

Differing perceptions of aesthetics can also lead to conflict with the community and it was suggested that operational interpretation be provided or better advance notice of works, using local papers or radio, be utilised more widely as standard practice.

Measuring Success: There is no common marker or system in place by which to measure partnership success, or from whose point of view success should be measured. The FCS internal target for community involvement – “Number of formal community partnership agreements established” – is thought to miss the point. It was also noted that some of the lower key successful examples of community involvement aren't recognised as 'partnerships' as they aren't moving towards any form of written agreement.

4.4.2 Additional Issues Raised

The following points were raised during the focus group discussions as additional issues, not yet identified in the study, that also affect forestry partnerships.

Ongoing Costs: The revenue costs of most community-owned woodlands are almost impossible to meet from timber sales. This is attributed to the fact that, to date, it is the woodlands with the poorest quality timber that are actually affordable from a community purchase perspective.

Limitations of Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme (SFGS): SFGS is not set up in such a way to let communities draw down funds for working on FCS land – this is restricting unless a community undertakes a woodland purchase. Some confusion

also exists about the use of S8 funds under SFGS which may be available for some community activities.

Community Planning: It was felt that there should be better integration of FCS partnership work within Community Planning processes, where currently there is a lack of appreciation of what forestry partnerships have to offer. In addition, there is concern that core Community Planning targets focus on urban populations and don't deliver to rural communities. In many Districts there are few, if any, forests that are located within the WIAT criteria near a centre of population of greater than 3,000 residents.

Funding Approvals: Within FCS there is a current proposal for partnership projects over a certain cost to go to the national management group for approval. There is a concern that this could stifle innovation and experimentation.

4.4.3 Focus Group Recommendations for the Future

The final part of each meeting was spent exploring potential recommendations for future activity to improve partnerships. The points listed below are a brief summary.

- An induction process of some kind should be developed for new directors or lead contacts in community groups dealing with forestry partnerships.
- A simple user guide to FCS covering FCS structure and contacts, grant schemes and funding, FCS budgeting and decision processes, key policies, insurance and maintenance, types of written agreements and FCS can and can't do etc.
- Increased common understanding within partnerships of quality, value for money and sustainability issues, including volunteer recruitment and management and maintenance of physical works.
- Easier access to hard cash for community projects within FCS.
- Continuation of flexibility of approach to community partnerships.
- Increased sharing of experience within FCS, among community groups, and between community groups and FCS.
- Additional people and financial resources within FCS to support community involvement on the ground.
- Clearer strategic guidance within FCS on priority areas within partnership work.

5. Key Findings and Recommendations

Overall the consultation responses from FCS staff and community representatives show consistency and a high degree of correlation, with the exception of a few project specific issues. Feedback on the whole has been very positive regarding the value and the operation of partnerships.

Views expressed clearly indicate that both community representatives and FCS staff feel that the partnership approach has offered added-value compared with trying to work alone. The commonest perceptions of "THE MOST important benefit" in the questionnaire survey were:-

- Community Empowerment: introducing a sense of influence over destiny of local environment, and
- Access to recreational amenities

The study has highlighted a number of areas that offer potential for new development work or that need to be resolved and, where there has been criticism, this has been levelled at overarching FCS policies and mechanisms rather than at the District level.

The FCS objectives, stated in its document "Working in Partnership: Our Commitment" are set out for a broad range of partnership types in which FCS is involved. The study findings confirm that FCS community partnerships are in particular contributing towards the following FCS objectives:-

- To encourage a high level of involvement of community and forest user groups
- To expand the range of benefits from woodlands
- To promote active citizenship
- To be inclusive of all sectors of the local community
- To make a difference through partnership work

The continued active operation of the eight 1999 case studies on FCS sites is testament that this type of partnership work, and its benefits, is valued by both the community and FCS staff – but perhaps also highlights that partnership work takes time and tenacity to make a difference.

5.1 Origin and Development of Partnerships

There is wide diversity in FCS community partnership formats and the nature of the communities with which FCS has developed a relationship. In the study sample these included:-

- FCS directly with a village-based community group
- FCS with a wider area community involving a number of villages/townships e.g. Glen or catchment or island
- FCS with a voluntary organisation representing an area community interest e.g. Mull & Iona Community Trust, Borders Forest Trust
- FCS with a mixed partnership of community-based, agency, user group and private interests
- FCS with a specialist interest or user group e.g. heritage group, school, mountain bike club

There was some confusion among community respondents as to whether they were actually a "partnership" - it was a label with which some of them were not familiar. Sometimes the partnership format is developed around needs and planned activities of the partnership, and sometimes it is based on the historic pattern of partnership agreements within the District.

Formal agreements are not seen by either FCS staff or community respondents as a pre-requisite for productive community involvement. In some cases, the use of a written agreement has been essential in taking forward the involvement agenda e.g.

- where the relationship has started with lack of trust and the agreement helps to define relative responsibilities
- where groups feel more comfortable and secure with clearly agreed guidelines
- where a written agreement is required to access funding from third parties
- where the community organisation wishes to become directly involved in forest management aspects.

Conversely, some cases in the study have worked well to date without formalisation e.g. Glen Doll and Sunart Oakwoods Initiative, although the Sunart partnership is going through this very debate at present.

Constructing partnership agreements was one of the few areas of conflict reported. Issues included difference in opinion in the requirements of an agreement, new requirements being added by estates staff well into the process, and the length of time taken to put in place.

The time taken to establish agreements needs to be addressed, given that lengthy delays have been raised by both community and FCS staff (of up to 5 years in two cases). Now that partnership development is past the initial teething phase, clearer and more coherent guidance should be available on the range of options available, their advantages and disadvantages and how they have been applied to different circumstances.

There is a strong staff voice to retain flexibility in the format of agreements, allowing due consideration of the future commitments they specify for both FCS and the community. Given the organic nature of partnership development and changing dynamics in the community, long term implications need to be considered; what is an agreement tying each party into and how easily can an agreement be changed in the future if required? The concordat model, as used by a number of partnerships, has been found a useful tool to define, in broad terms, guidelines and the mode of operation for a partnership relationship.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Partnership Format and Agreement

Clearer guidelines should be provided by FCS on the full range of options for partnership format, including informal arrangements, to help both communities and District staff identify the most appropriate structure for the circumstance.

There is a strong need to retain flexibility to respond appropriately to the specific situation, in recognition of the study feedback that "one size cannot fit all". The following aspects should be clarified for each option:-

- **an agreed timeframe and procedure required to establish the structure**
- **the levels and frequency of both FCS support and community contribution that can be expected (time input, funding, materials)**
- **the degree of flexibility to change the agreement in the future if the partnership direction changes**

5.2 Partnership Operation

Communication

The study confirms that there is in general very good communication in both directions, with communities reporting FCS District staff as very accessible. However, the nature of partnerships means there are ongoing tensions in both directions to be managed, and that proactive effort is required to maintain dynamic relationships. Communities are constantly changing in their composition, needs and level of activity. FCS has to respond to these changes, whether it is an increased activity level or a falling away of interest; likewise the community has to respond to FCS staff and policy changes.

In some areas (e.g. budget planning and resource availability, operational policies and rules) clearer and more accessible information provided by FCS could help prevent misunderstandings or resentments developing, often caused by community members not being aware of the reasons and mechanisms behind District decision-making.

In a small number of cases, there has been dissatisfaction that, following partnership agreement on a design plan, forest operations have proceeded without further communication with the community. Significant thinning or clear-felling programmes can have a dramatic impact aesthetically, and raising the awareness of and prior discussions with the local community can help prepare them for this.

The Community Input

Community involvement in partnerships is characterised by small numbers of dedicated volunteers (commonly 6-15 people) who regularly undertake planning and implementation work, augmented by a similar number for occasional work days.

Limitations and frustrations were reported by both community representatives and FCS staff to mainly arise from:-

- Reliance on a core number of people with difficulty in identifying successors
- Lack of interest/time by the majority of forest users to volunteer in partnership activities
- A sometimes very limited focus and interest of community group members.

It is common for more than one community group to be involved in the partnership, and many groups have reached out to involve other local or regional organisations as the partnership has developed.

Operational and Legal Issues

Information and guidance on insurance requirements, and which elements are covered under FCS provision, has been raised as an area of lack of clarity and mixed messages.

Feedback indicates that FCS insurance requirements for community partners have tended to be set at a blanket level, with little flexibility to tailor to circumstance and need. Community activities are usually of a small scale, non-mechanised nature and can become overshadowed or blocked by procedural requirements out of proportion to their nature and scale. However, it is understood that FCS practice is dictated in some areas by legislation (e.g. Health and Safety) and that as a public body it has to demonstrate responsibility for public safety.

There is a clear request from both staff and communities for FCS to offer the flexibility to tailor insurance requirements to circumstance and the degree of risk, and to acknowledge that "one solution is not appropriate for all". For example, community work groups carrying out basic path maintenance and tree planting with hand tools should not need the same cover as felling contractors; a low level usage mountain bike trail for local people should not be required to have the same level of cover as a high profile, intensively used national mountain bike course.

Community expectations need to be informed by FCS policy and the degree of operational flexibility that is possible. In a few instances, ambitious expectations have led to some community suspicion that FCS was using legislative and health and safety constraints as an excuse for not pushing the boundaries further. This is understandable against a background of evolving community partnership work which requires an element of exploration and experimentation. In a small number of cases, frustration has arisen surrounding initial community ambitions for local job creation, which has not subsequently been delivered.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Insurance Cover

Clear and consistent guidelines need to be developed and available on the insurance requirements for community groups to undertake different activities on FCS land, and which elements are covered by FCS provision. This could be developed as a short guidance note or information pack.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Induction on FCS Policies and Practice

An induction course and/or users' guide on national FCS policy and practice pertinent to partnerships should be developed to introduce new community groups and office bearers to FCS partnership work. Issues identified for coverage included FCS organisational structure and decision making processes, priorities and support for community partnerships, FCS planning and budget cycle, grant and national schemes, and health and safety policies. This could be structured to bring together new volunteers from different partnerships.

Community partners should also be encouraged to provide a proper induction for their new Board or committee members at the local level on the workings of their own organisation and the partnership interface with FCS.

There is potentially a role for CWA to play in taking forward these developments.

5.3 Partnership Funding

Partnerships have indicated a wide range of expenditure, from no cash input to a few partnership investments of over £1 million. However, expenditure patterns are masked and difficult to compare due to a number of factors, including:-

- FCS expenditure on partnership project activities is often in-kind as materials and staff time; this is not usually costed against the partnership and is sometimes seen by the community as part of FCS core work, rather than an additional funding contribution towards the partnership.
- In most cases of large expenditure, additional funds are levered from external sources. These are often channelled through the community group, rather than the partnership itself, or sometimes through another appropriate local organisation that has experience in managing large projects.
- Some FCS expenditure linked to partnership work is for FCS core work (rather than project activities) which has been shaped by community partnership input.

Cost-benefit analysis is therefore very difficult to undertake. However, it is clear that some types of benefit are not related to levels of expenditure; all the partnerships recording zero expenditure reported perceived benefits through better

communication and resultant actions. Two of the partnerships flagged up economic impact studies that they had undertaken as part of their management process.

Sustainability

The majority of partnerships have no income, aside from small funds generated through membership subscriptions, and are dependent on grant funding and ongoing FCS support. This works well for liaison type partnerships and for low key, low maintenance groups. The few partnerships that have aspired to generate income have found progress slow.

Given that access has been a key activity to date and features strongly in existing partnerships' future plans, infrastructure maintenance costs are going to become an increasing overhead in the future. Whilst communities are able to contribute to maintenance through volunteer work parties, they reported difficulty in identifying any funding sources willing to support ongoing maintenance costs.

Some of the more ambitious groups wish to expand their involvement in the woodland, possibly engaging staff resources to undertake management tasks. However, most project officer posts established by community partnerships have been short-lived (2-3 years) and unsustainable, based on fixed-term grant funding. Ideally to support such posts, regular revenue sources need to be developed.

Specific actions raised in the study to address some sustainability issues were the need for:-

- Increased promotion of volunteering opportunities in upkeep of the woodland and project activities, in parallel with promoting use of the facility
- Development of a clear strategy to meet long term maintenance costs of partnership-led infrastructure projects
- Wider sharing of information and experience on local revenue generation, including research and development work on local added-value products.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Financial Sustainability

There is a role for awareness raising among partnerships of the free advisory support available in Scotland on financial sustainability issues.

This includes social economy and social enterprise development organisations such as Highlands & Islands Social Economy Zone (HISEZ), Social Enterprise Academy, Senscot, Community Energy Company, Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS).

This could be achieved by FCS, at a central level, and the CWA increasing links with these organisations to raise their knowledge of FCS-community partnership growth and issues, and encouraging contact between them and individual partnerships as appropriate.

5.4 Partnership Activities and Achievements

Range of activities

To date community engagement has centred most strongly and successfully around recreation and access, with a mix of beneficiaries between local residents and visitors. Benefits include increased exercise leading to improved physical health, increased social interaction opportunities addressing isolation issues, education and learning, and engaging young people.

Economic development objectives, including the creation of local work opportunities, have been more complex and challenging to deliver. Consequently, progress has been slower on this front: several partnerships have contributed significantly towards the local tourism-based economy; a number of locally based project posts have been created, although these tend to be short-term in nature; a small number of forest management and timber processing jobs have developed through 3 partnerships in the study, although a number of issues remain to be addressed, including contract requirements, training and standards.

There is a perception, by both staff and community respondents, of a lack of willingness on FCS's part to engage in projects which fall clearly out with the FCS main remit. Examples given were specialist types of heritage projects with potential to offer economic, social, cultural or environmental benefits.

Activities have commonly broadened out from a single-focus starting point e.g. habitat restoration leading to access; access leading to education or health promotion. New links and dialogue have also developed between different user groups within a community, and between different communities, as a result of the partnerships.

Benefits have mainly been located in rural areas, with a small number of partnerships on the outskirts of small towns or city peripheries

Inclusion

Many beneficiaries are those with access to cars to reach the wood, and volunteers those who have sufficient leisure or hobby time to get involved. However, there has been a growth in partnership activities that focus on reaching specific target groups e.g.:-

Working with:

Families, infirm and disabled

Young children

Unemployed

The less fit

Through use of:

- All abilities paths

- School link and special projects

- Training for Work

- Green Gym

Reduction in anti-social behaviour was also raised a number of times, but this seemed to be more in terms of reporting and managing it rather than working with a specific client group to address the root issues.

Measuring Change and Benefits

The difficulty of quantifying partnership benefits was raised by a number of respondents. The only formal measurement of that FCS currently monitors at the global level is "total number of partnership agreements established". This is a limited indicator as, although it does recognise a wide range of partnership working including some informal arrangements, it does not consider the impact or performance of activity being undertaken.

The two sets of FCS case study material (1999 and 2005) provide good documentation of local experiences, perceived benefit and lessons learned. These could potentially be used as a base-line for comparison, by revisiting the same partnerships at their 10 year anniversary.

At the individual partnership levels, a number of cases have monitored usage levels using people counters on paths or at car parks, or takings in the car park meters. Two of the partnerships referred to evaluation studies undertaken at their own hand (Mull Eagle Viewing, Sunart Oakwoods Initiative) which both captured economic impact assessment in the tourism sector.

Now that community involvement is embedded in the Scottish Forestry Strategy and the FCS remit, there is likely to be a greater requirement to measure impact. The intangible benefits are intrinsically difficult to measure – attitudinal changes, increased understanding and awareness and social capital – and these are likely to become more important as focus moves into social inclusion and health benefits. FCS has initiated some research in this area, including Scotland-wide public opinion survey work and an evaluation of the "Forestry for People" programme looking at the value of forestry to people across Scotland encompassing livelihoods, community capacity, health recreation, quality of life and education.

A concern was raised during the study that communities and staff are not burdened with additional, time consuming recording requirements, given that resources are already stretched. The challenge is to identify meaningful indicators that can be recorded relatively easily. Some ways of approaching this are:-

- Using existing community and FCS records and reporting systems to feed into a monitoring framework, for example records that are kept by communities for their own governance and other funding requirements.
- Use of informal participatory appraisal methods for occasional information collection.
- Combining forces with other public bodies which are also required to demonstrate Best Value. Voluntary groups are expected to report and account to a range of supporting bodies, and as agency agendas converge (healthy living and fitness, social inclusion) and joint working develops so too could the integration of impact measurement, rather than each agency accounting for its impact separately.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Measuring Change and Benefits

There is scope for both FCS and individual partnerships to explore joint working with other agencies or research bodies to develop better indicators and establish a shared measurement framework. This may open access to resources and experience in social research of partner agencies which have a mutual interest in impact measurement in the same fields.

Case studies and story telling often provide one of the most effective forms of assessment in such multi-objective social programmes, and should be retained as an element of any measurement framework.

5.5 Future of Partnerships

Activity focus of FCS partnership work and resource implications

The consultation raised questions about the future level of FCS priority and resources assigned to specific activities and benefit areas for both existing and new partnerships. Whilst the "Working in Partnership" publication identifies FCS partnership commitments in broad terms, it was felt that a step change is taking place in the focus of the impact of partnership benefits. It was perceived that this includes increased delivery in areas of more concentrated population, especially of social inclusion and health benefits. "Woodlands In and Around Towns" (WIAT) was cited as an example of such a new urban-oriented initiative. This has raised concerns as to potential resource implications for the current predominantly rural programme, although the WIAT example is being delivered using an additional dedicated budget allocation.

Community aspirations are often of a long term nature (e.g. habitat restoration, rural development) and need consistent long term support. It is important that partnerships know where FCS plans to expand effort and target its investment in community involvement, and in which activity areas communities can expect continued support.

The people resource available for partnership work is stretched. FCS staff remits often cover large geographical areas, a range of responsibilities, and face increasing demands in community engagement. On the community side, the resource is often fragile and unstable - although enthusiastic - with succession problems, reliance on a few individuals and volunteer fatigue being commonly reported.

Community engagement is now a significant area of work for District staff at all levels and is in many cases mainstreamed within staff roles. However, the provision of FCS staff with a specific "community involvement" remit varies greatly between Districts. Community response to ranger-type contact has been positive, perceived as improving access to FCS and as a channel to seek authorisation to proceed with their activities.

The increasing demand for FCS community involvement will put pressure on a fixed resource and both staff and community respondents were keen to resolve how to service both the existing strong rural interests and the developing agenda to reach the more populous areas.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Future Focus of Activities and Benefits from FCS Community Partnership Work

FCS needs to clearly communicate to community partnerships its specific future priorities for activities and benefits as the new Scottish Forestry Strategy evolves, and related resource implications.

In particular, confirmation is needed as to whether existing resources will be targeted on emerging priorities, such as WIAT, which service more populated and urban areas, rather than the predominant rural focus of partnerships to date, and whether additional resources will be available.

Learning and Support

Productive networking was cited during the study e.g. within the District (Aberdeenshire first network gathering with CWA) and between Forest Districts (c.f. occasional rangers meetings). Many groups have also benefited by visiting other partnership projects although comment was made about the varying objectives between groups and the fact that only a small number of initiatives are held up as good examples to visit. CWA is also currently exploring networking potential through twinning arrangements.

The use and value of networking to partnerships, both within and between Forest Districts, could be increased to good advantage. Networking could promote and enable increased self-help between partnerships, easing demand on staff resources. For example, the Cairnhead partnership engages several village communities through the one structure, and disseminates information through local newsletters and press.

A lot of useful information is available on the FCS and CWA websites, but access to this may be improved by further developing strategic two-way links to and from other sites which the community sector uses regularly.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Learning and Support

A proactive, strategic approach to networking between partnerships to share experience and expertise should continue and be further developed, led by FCS and the CWA.

Partnerships should be encouraged to make greater use of existing forums such as the CWA, Scottish Community Land Network and the Development Trusts Association Scotland. They offer a range of services including e-newsletters, training workshops and networking events, advisory services and funding information.

This could relieve the level of demand for FCS staff contact by community partnerships, and improve resource use, by developing communication and support channels between groups with similar objectives and activities.