



## Woodfuel Factsheet 9

# Developing community woodfuel

## Co-operation is key

Working together to source, process and supply firewood is a great way to cut costs, labour and effort.

Cooperation on woodfuel can take many forms, from large-scale district heating systems to neighbours clubbing together to source logs directly from woodland owners or managers.

In countries with a long tradition of using wood as a main source of fuel, cooperative schemes are common. For example, in Finland, a long tradition of collaboration on heating has proved strong foundation upon which to build a network of robust, cooperative woodfuel systems.

Homes are kept cosy in even the harshest of winter conditions using heat generated by energy supply companies (ESCOs) which produce heat from woodfuel and deliver it through a heat grid.

This model has been pioneered in Scotland in schemes like the Aviemore North district heating system. At Hill of Banchory, just outside the eastern edge of the Cairngorms National Park, a district heating scheme feeds as 25 houses, with potential to link up many more homes, as well as community buildings such as a primary school and planned care home.

According to chartered forester Andrew Nicol cooperation is key to creating stronger, more resilient rural communities.

“What’s very exciting about these kind of developments is that they enable rural communities to take charge of their energy procurement,” he explained. “This puts them in a much stronger position as they are no longer at the end of a long, external supply chain, over which they have very little control.

“My main message to people in rural communities keen to get into woodfuel would be to check out what’s there already and cooperate. There’s no need to reinvent the wheel, it’s best to see what people out there are doing, and establish whether there is scope to work together.

“There is very definitely a building of momentum in the biomass sector,” he added. “If communities come together there are great opportunities for people to source woodfuel jointly. They can benefit from grants and incentives to help install wood fuelled systems in community buildings and heat multiple buildings through district heating schemes.

“Rather than each village paying external energy companies heating bills could be kept local, with great

benefits for the local economy. If this was replicated again and again the impact on the rural economy would be huge and very positive.”

Cooperation doesn’t need to be large scale or formal; it can be as simple as sharing tools or space to process firewood.

A Strathspey farmer, who manages woodlands on his land for biodiversity, livestock shelter and firewood, hopes to join forces with other local operators to expand the woodfuel side of the business. Alastair MacIennan of Balliefurth Farm near Grantown on Spey bought a block of mixed woodland next to his farm in 1999. According to him, farmers are increasingly recognising the advantages woods can bring.





Councillor Ian Ross and Strathspey farmer Alastair MacIennan getting interviewed by Helen Needham of the BBC for Out of Doors

to collaborate with neighbours and other farmers and share equipment."

One question often raised is that of supply of woodfuel; is there enough woodland to fuel stoves and boilers if lots of people in the Park convert to woodfuel?

Forester and Highland councillor

Ian Ross, chairs the steering group for the Woodfuel Action Plan, a detailed document produced by the Cairngorms National Park Authority which explores issues of supply and demand.

"There are enough trees to support a lot more burning of wood in the Park, and many of the woodlands would benefit from thinning and being managed for woodfuel," Ian said.

"There is around 20% forest cover in the Cairngorms National Park and much of that woodland is currently undermanaged. Trees get blown down by the wind and can be used for fuel. Thinning and managing woods for fuel can be compatible with environmental interests too; allowing more light to reach the forest floor boosts biodiversity.

"Farmers, land managers and contractors can get into the supply of woodfuel and there are opportunities for new businesses to grow, working in the supply of logs, woodchips and pellets."

"Cooperating and using woodfuel quite simply makes sense," he added. "Wood is a renewable resource. We can see what's happening in terms of fossil fuel based products, oil and gas. The reality in a rural area is that fuel poverty presents a real challenge.

"Having woodfuel means that you've got a renewable fuel choice, and one which ultimately will be cheaper."

The Cairngorms National Park's Woodfuel Action Plan is available for download from both the CNPA website at [www.cairngorms.co.uk](http://www.cairngorms.co.uk) and [www.lowcarboncairngorms.org](http://www.lowcarboncairngorms.org)

"If you're in control of your own woodland it's a great benefit to the farm," he said. "One of the reasons I wanted to buy the wood was for shelter; we didn't have enough woodland or shelter on the farm and I don't have enough farm buildings. It saves me putting up a building to shelter my cows and also it saves me a fortune in straw."

"We've got wood burning stoves in our house and we get logs for them from the farm woods. Last winter a lot of trees were put down by the weather, the ice and the snow, now there's quite a bit of woodfuel there for the taking, because of all these fallen trees."

"You get two heats with woodfuel - one when you're actually cutting it down and processing it with a chainsaw and an axe, and another one when you burn it!" Alastair added. "Processing the wood is quite hard work but there's machinery that can help with that nowadays and we are looking at ways we might be able

## Other sources of help and advice

Community Woodlands Association  
[www.communitywoods.org](http://www.communitywoods.org)

Reforestation Scotland  
[www.reforestingscotland.org](http://www.reforestingscotland.org)

Forestry Commission Scotland  
[www.usewoodfuel.co.uk](http://www.usewoodfuel.co.uk)

Use Greenheat  
[www.usegreenheat.co.uk](http://www.usegreenheat.co.uk)

