

Let's protect Waterside Hill from thoughtless forestry

Many readers will have walked up 'our' hill across the Ken from Dalry: Waterside Hill. What a view we are blessed with: a full circle of Galloway's best. To the north east the bold rounded hill of the Cairnsmore of Carsphairn now tranquil after its fiery beginning a few hundred million years ago. The upper reaches of the Ken valley with the Galloway Power Scheme infrastructure now well settled in the landscape. The magnificent ridge of the Rhinns of Kells striding southwards. And the view down the Ken/Dee valley with the loch shimmering in the sunlight and the wee hill of Screel showing in the background. It is a fine place to see sunrise and sunset and to see and hear a variety of moorland birds. Or just to sit on the top and to contemplate. How lucky we are to live in such a place.

Let's not forget also that this hill is the setting for Dalry. It is seen from many part of the village, enclosing our view, giving us a guide to immediate past and present weather. At a time when the setting of settlements is at long last recognised as being important for residents this 'sense of place' is not to be tampered with without residents views being properly sought.

Are we to lose all of this, and the easy access up the hill because of an unthought out scheme to grab government funds to plant yet more conifers? Surely not. Given 5 weeks and two days to consult, and without any public presentation to the Community Council is hardly the way to gain community support for the planting scheme. Have we not too much conifer monoculture already? Do our views not matter? Is grabbing grant for short term gain really appropriate? Surely not!

But there is an alternative. In true Dalry fashion, we have chatted about in our little impromptu gathering in the middle of Main Street. Rather than giving us a very limited time to respond to a 100% conifer planting application, why not ask us to develop our own ideas for the hill? This is fully in keeping with the much vaunted Scottish Government mantra of community participation. I'm sure we do not want to own the land, but we do want some ownership on what happens to it. That is at the heart of the Scottish Government's Statement of Land Rights and Responsibilities, a really trail blazing initiative.

The local community and experts resident in the area, of whom there are many, should be invited to develop a scheme which safeguards the environmental, including ecological, cultural, access and visual aspects of this important piece of land. This could comprise planting more trees to supplement the deciduous ones already there, provide a link to the deciduous woodlands across the valley, and encourage more birds to use it, more native plants to grow, and capture some carbon in the by going. Sounds a better idea all together doesn't it?

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