

Friends of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park Newsletter

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Our mission is to promote public understanding of the Regional Park and its environs; protect and safeguard the ecology and the landscape; restore the habitats and the biodiversity and promote inclusive access throughout the park in conjunction with landowners as detailed in the Land Reform Act and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Duchal Moor: Breathing New Life into Lost Landscapes

BY RONNIE COWAN

Back in June 2021, while I was the Member of Parliament for Inverclyde, I raised my concerns with Inverclyde Council that we were missing out on an opportunity to regenerate peatland in our area.

The Scottish Government had pledged to support the restoration of peatland with a target of restoring 250,000 hectares of degraded peatland by 2030.

In 2021-22, five organisations including NatureScot and Scottish Water were promised a share of £22m to deliver a range of existing and new restoration projects across Scotland.

WWW.FRIENDSOFMUIRSHIEL.ORG

Newsletter Highlights

DUCHAL MOOR: BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO LOST LANDSCAPES

PARK NEWS: DUCHAL MOOR RESTORATION NEARS COMPLETION; RARE OIL BEETLE SIGHTING

FRIENDS SECURE GRANT FOR TANDLEMUIR AWARENESS FILM

AN URGENT PLEA FROM SAVE COWAL'S HILLS



Greater Renfrewshire & Inverclyde Local Action Group

The Friends of Clyde Muirshiel would like to warmly thank the Greater Renfrewshire and Inverclyde Local Action Group for funding our new IT equipment. The support has allowed us to purchase a new laptop, software, and a rucksack carrier, making it easier for us to improve our PR, upgrade this newsletter, and support the work we do across the park.

I felt that Inverclyde was missing out. In raising my concerns, I attracted the usual criticisms. Some of which are understandable. It is hard for people to consider spending millions of pounds on land which is largely out of sight and therefore out of mind, while they are faced with financial hardship and experience difficulties day in day out simply trying to heat their homes and put food on the table. How does regenerating peatland help them? Well, I don't believe it has to be an either or situation. Harnessing nature and encouraging restoration and regeneration in a sympathetic manner is not just a nice thing to do, it creates accessible walks to encourage better physical and mental health, it traps water in the hillsides which in turn slows the release and improves flood management further down the hills.

An important factor is that a project like peatland regeneration doesn't stand alone. It encourages other green projects and they coexist in harmony alongside each other. We can create job opportunities, create greener, healthier communities and build a diverse range of clean, green, renewable and affordable energy for everyone.

In talking with NatureScot, the Yearnstane Project and Inverclyde Council about the restoration of peatland at Duchal Moor, it became obvious that this is not a short-term project, but the benefits will be recognised well into the future.

Historically, Duchal Moor was drained to create grouse moors. We even built a railway in the 1920s to carry shooting parties to the moors. The grouse shooting parties have long since retreated and the railway closed in the late 1970s. What they left behind was a land that has been decimated and with that, any semblance of a natural infrastructure of flowers, insects, small mammals and bird life.

We could lament that and move on, but instead in 2022 Inverclyde Council secured support from the Peatland Action project, part of NatureScot, for an investigation of council-owned land to see which areas could be developed. Consultants carried out a study of tenant farmers' land at Garvocks/Dowries and Hardridge and published their findings. They were far better than we could have dreamt of and the first stages of regeneration are now complete and are yielding impressive results. But why stop there? This is not just about peatland. What about hemp? The growth of hemp could employ local people and offset the environmental damage that we are doing.

The evidence of the benefits of the hemp industry has been available for centuries. Indeed, it was promoted and even enforced by King Henry VIII in the 16th century. Back then, a quarter of all arable land was dedicated to growing hemp. Hemp production was encouraged in the 16th century in order to manufacture rope and canvas for the King's Navy, but now we can also make clothing, shoes, biodegradable plastics, insulation panels, food, paper and biofuels. Currently, the UK Government are spending billions of pounds on retrofitting homes, but they are using products made from petrochemicals, which release harmful, volatile, organic compounds emissions into the air of buildings.

It is estimated that a medium-sized, economically viable establishment would employ 120 people, all paying tax and supporting their local communities.

The UK government should be encouraging local farmers to grow hemp and supply local contractors with carbon-negative natural fibre alternatives at scale.



What could be a better use of public money? In fact, there are more than 50,000 known uses for the hemp plant, so finding markets for hemp would not be a problem. It will sell, it will be profitable, and the UK Government could reap the benefit, but it does not end there. A hectare of hemp absorbs 22 tonnes of atmospheric carbon during its four-month growing cycle. Hemp produces four times the biomass of the same-sized area of forest, making it a far more sustainable source of material. Hemp does not need pesticides, insecticides or even fertiliser to grow in the UK. Hemp has natural antimicrobial properties, so it passively cleans the air in buildings. Hemp has a high capacity for moisture absorption, allowing for a controlled atmosphere within buildings. Hemp construction materials act as a long-term carbon sink.

A £60 million investment would create a facility that is capable of growing 32,000 acres of hemp per year, which would sequester more than 207,000 tonnes of CO2 per annum.

That is just the CO2 photosynthesised by hemp in its four-month growing cycle, and does not include the carbon sequestered into the soil or the net effect of replacing high embodied carbon products from international supply chains and their emissions. As a wee bonus, hemp regenerates the soil it grows in, so it would work well in crop rotation. Winter wheat and spring barley yields increase by 16% to 18% when they follow hemp in rotation, and hemp cleans groundwater because it has a deep root and a root mass that absorbs residual pesticides and insecticides from the soil, preventing run-off into streams and rivers and thereby avoiding costly remediation by the water companies to achieve UK drinking water standards. Peatland and hemp should not be confined to history. They can be the gateway to a cleaner, greener future, and their benefits are clear for all to see, if we are prepared to open our eyes and ears to the possibilities.

This isn't just about a few hectares of land. It's a vision for a sustainable future, a gateway for green growth, and a call to arms for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and the public to unite in accelerating the UK's and Scotland's transition to a greener, more sustainable economy.

Regional Park News

BY CHAIRMAN
JOE GREENLEES



Welcome to the latest edition of the Friends newsletter.

In this issue, we feature a call to action from the team at Save Cowal's Hills, highlighting the visual impact of proposed developments on the protected views of the Clyde coast. Their striking image serves as a reminder of the challenges facing many communities across Scotland, where large-scale developments often receive rapid approval while delivering only a small proportion of the profits as community benefit.

We are also pleased to include an article by Ronnie Cowan, a member of the Friends board, outlining his campaign in partnership with Inverclyde Council to restore Duchal Moor. This major peatland restoration project is now nearing completion, with Ronnie continuing to champion the replacement of plastics with natural fibres. Over the past four years, he has worked closely with Councillor Michael McCormick and Council Officer Kenny Lang from the Environment and Regeneration team. The restoration work has deservedly earned Inverclyde Council recognition at both the COSLA Excellence Awards and the Sustainability Award at the 2024 Scottish Public Service Awards.

The judges praised the strong partnership approach between the Council, Peatland Action, and the Clyde Peatlands Initiative.

The project has delivered a significant environmental impact, increasing the water storage capacity of the restored area by 25% — equivalent to approximately 2.5 million cubic metres. This enhancement offers meaningful benefits in reducing flash flooding, protecting farm roads, and improving water quality across the catchment.

Elsewhere in this edition, we feature a short film produced by Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust showcasing their proposed work within the Regional Park. The film was made possible through a small grant from Renfrewshire Climate Action Network.

Finally, our most exciting record from the park this season is the discovery of an oil beetle by Isy Agnew on 28th May, which was shared on our [Facebook page](#). According to the NBN Atlas, this marks only the fifth recorded sighting of this beetle within the park.

Thank you once again to Isy and to all our members and supporters who continue to contribute to the Friends' ongoing efforts to protect and restore this special landscape.



Friends Secure Grant for Tandlemuir Awareness Film



We're excited to share that earlier this year, Friends of Clyde Muirshiel received a grant from Renfrewshire Climate Action Network Hub to support a new project in partnership with Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust (LCDT).

With the funding, LCDT created a short promotional film highlighting their vision for the Tandlemuir site—an area of degraded peatland with huge potential for nature recovery. The film explores how restoring this land can help reduce local flooding, boost biodiversity, and empower people to take positive climate action.

We're proud to have played a part in this collaboration, and we'd like to say a huge thank you to everyone who helped bring the film to life, including the funders, the LCDT team, and the local voices featured in the video.

The message is clear: protecting peatland isn't just good for wildlife- it's vital for our communities.

Watch the film now and find out how Tandlemuir could be transformed for people and planet
lochwinnochtrust.org.uk/yearnstone



AN URGENT PLEA FROM SAVE COWAL'S HILLS

Dear Friends of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park,

Many of you will already be aware of the looming threats of industrial scale energy infrastructure to our Scottish landscapes and wild habitats of industrial energy infrastructure. A recent article by Wendy Grindle in the John Muir Trust Journal captures well the concerns of many and draws attention to their newly created 'Fighting Fund' set up to oppose inappropriate siting of onshore wind turbines in Scotland. Our group here in Dunoon, Save Cowal's Hills, is currently working to oppose 2 windfarm proposals for the Bishop's Seat Hills, directly above Dunoon/Sandbank, and only 2 miles from the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park boundary at Holy Loch. As with other proposals across Scotland, the height of the new turbines proposed is 200m (656ft), almost twice the size of turbines people already know e.g. at Whitelees, Ardrossan, Greenock, Braes of Doune, etc. The 'new' 200m height of such turbines, if approved, would cause severe visual impacts over wide areas. Those affected of course would include the many who enjoy the beauty of Clyde Muirshiel, especially in the area of the Greenock Cut and Lunderston Bay.

Further to the news of the Giant's Burn windfarm proposal (Statkraft) in May 2024, there was further dismay at the news in January 2025 of the proposal for Inverchaolain Windfarm (E-Power), which could bring 13 gigantic 200m high turbines to the Black Craig Ridge just south-west of Dunoon's Bishop's Seat. The Inverchaolain site is adjacent to the Giant's Burn Windfarm site with its proposed (currently) 7 equally-giant turbines, so there could be 22 monster turbines grouped together on the hills above Dunoon.



This would truly become the March of the Giants, making the destruction of our scenic and physical environment much greater and affecting more people over a much wider area.

The Inverchaolain site's proximity to the Kyles of Bute National Scenic Area (NSA) is particularly significant in this respect. The close proximity of the Giant's Burn site to the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park, the combined windfarms' 22 turbines would make a mockery of the established history of this area as a "Gateway to the Highlands".

Make no mistake: if the Giant's Burn proposal were to be approved, it is virtually certain that the Inverchaolain proposal would as well. There could well be even more than 22 turbines, as both windfarm sites include sufficient land for additional installations; it has become an all too frequent occurrence in Scotland for developers to start with a seemingly limited proposal and then add additional turbines once initial approval is gained and/or change heights of said structures.

If these proposals were approved, the combined phalanx of 22 (or more) turbines would have a devastating impact, not only on the scenic and visual environment but... (cont'd)

also on the physical environment (damage to upland peat moors and their ecology) and biodiversity, running completely counter to the goals of the Scottish Government in relation to climate change. There would be huge damage to the vital tourist economy of the area, as well as to the local economy more generally - depressing house values and deterring in-migration; health concerns for near-by residents would be more widespread and affect more people. Previous proposals for smaller turbines have been made for these sites in Cowal – and have been rejected after extensive examination by official bodies. In 2009 for example the Black Craig Windfarm proposal (on the site of the Inverchaolain proposal) was refused at a very thorough Public Local Inquiry. The government Reporter recommended that permission should be denied because of the “significant detrimental landscape and visual impact” of the proposed 100m high turbines; that recommendation was upheld by the Government.

Biodiversity is a key tenet of NPF4, with clear recognition that Scotland is experiencing a nature emergency as much as a climate emergency. Multiple governmental and NGO reports note that the UK as a whole and Scotland in particular, are among the most nature-depleted countries on earth, with the latter ranked 212th out of 240 for quality of nature. This is high quality wet heath, peat habitat which would start to be eroded by any development here, starting the release of locked-up carbon by oxidation of exposed and drying peat (along with release of locked-up methane) into the atmosphere. The opinion of a local and esteemed ecologist Dr Neil Hammatt is that “this area should be/have been designated as a Scottish Nature Conservation Site on the local development plan, and added to Scotland's “30 by 30” protected land inventory”.

We ask that you follow our campaign, spread the word and urgently contact your community councils, Argyll & Bute Councillors, and Councillors in your own areas, MSPs and MPs to make your concerns known. The Giant's Burn windfarm proposal is expected to be submitted to the Energy Consents Unit (Scottish Government) very soon. Submission of objections to this are critical.

Please follow the [Save Cowal's Hills Facebook page](#) and subscribe to our email list at savecowalshills@yahoo.com to receive updates and information on submitting objections.

Please also consider contributing to our [fundraising campaign](#).

With many thanks for your support.

Mary Howley
On behalf of Save Cowal's Hills

