

Kirkcudbright Red Squirrel Group (KRSG)

The Barhill Wood project started in 2014 when Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) were planning to lease the entire 40 acre wood for commercial extraction, a wood I knew to be a Red Squirrel stronghold. With the backing of a local charity, The Kirkcudbright Forum I set about finding out what the community wanted. Once the main objectives were established a plan was put together and costed and work began seeking funding. After a massive effort, we eventually secured the funding from The Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership and Leader. Work commenced in May 2018 and was completed by late July the project now coming under the newly formed Kirkcudbright Development Trust.

We have still not negotiated a lease with FCS after 3 1/2 years, as different parts of FCS have different ideas about what should happen and they seem reluctant to follow the Government's direction on community asset transfer. Negotiations continue. The building of a Forest Classroom, a Red Squirrel Hide and the resurfacing of 1km of path were all done on the basis of a letter from the Forest District Manager. It is now an established 'fact on the ground' and is very much the property of the Kirkcudbright Community.

The hide has been a big success and now is regularly visited by groups of children from local schools, nurseries, brownies and Forest Schools as well as local families and visitors.

KSRG has received many offers of help through a poster within the hide and our volunteer numbers look healthy. We do not have a large Grey Squirrel problem in our area (we do have Pine Martens) and the GS recorded do not appear to settle – of 7 sightings 3 were removed and 4 never seen again. We have contacts in the shooting fraternity and 6 or more who will readily dispatch GS but want no part of form filling or online registration. All have their own insurance and have been in game management for years. We have spoken to many local landowners and all are committed to removing GS themselves or contacting us to arrange somebody to do it. We will continue talking to local landowners aiming to eventually contact every farm in our area.

Because of the huge amount of time involved in completing the Barhill project, the KRSG has been rather neglected and we need to engage more with local volunteers. In future months, we need to survey woods throughout the area and possibly through a spring survey establish a baseline record of RS inhabited areas. We will be starting a Facebook page for both the Barhill Woods and KRSG to engage with a wider section of the community and promote KRSG. In the long term, we will take the message of RS conservation to local schools and groups.