

Portlethen's Own Community Woodland

words and photo by Petra Vergunst

Portlethen Moss Conservation Group has planted 400 native trees and aims to co-manage the local moss and create a community woodland.

Last March community and BTCV volunteers and pupils of Portlethen and Fishermoss Primaries and Portlethen Academy planted Scots pine, blackthorn, hawthorn, ash, rowan, silver birch, alder and aspen along the

path that leads to Portlethen Moss. Denise Martin, chair of Portlethen Moss Conservation Group, said: "The area is quite open and we needed to screen off the dual carriage way and create a nice entrance to the Moss."

The group has an informal co-management agreement with Aberdeenshire Council, the owner of the land on the south side of the moss. Denise said: "Aberdeenshire Council works very closely with us. David Potter, the Aberdeenshire Ranger, is very supportive and organised the tree planting."

On behalf of Portlethen Moss Conservation Group, Aberdeenshire Council successfully applied for a grant from the Forestry Commission Scotland's Woods In and Around Towns (WIAT) initiative to clear gorse and plant native trees. They've also put in an all-abilities path, gate and interpretation board. WIAT aims to help communities of more than 2000 inhabitants with woodland within 1 km of a settlement - to create new

woodland, bring neglected woodland into active management and to help people use their local woodland. But Portlethen Moss Conservation Group has higher aspirations. Denise said: "We want to get a management agreement for the Moss so we can turn it into a local nature reserve. It is a true raised bog with orchids. SNH is also interested in the bog becoming a local nature reserve as it wants to keep wet areas wet."

Home to a healthy population of palmate newts, the bog has been halved in size since 1970, mainly due to housing developments. As trees will dry out the bog, the conservation group intends to keep the bog free from trees. But the group will work with Aberdeenshire Council to create a community woodland along Downies Road on the other side of the railway.

Denise said: "Steven Webbley from Forestry Commission Scotland will be working with us to get the community woodland project off the ground, getting ideas from local schools etc. We'll then look at the information, agree on a plan and then involve a landscape architect. The community will be involved in tree planting."

For more information contact <http://portlethen-moss.mysite.orange.co.uk/index.html> or find WIAT on www.forestry.gov.uk



Denise Martin next to the new Portlethen Moss interpretation board

INSCH MEADOWS TRANSFORMED!

words and photo by Griselda McGregor

An area of overgrown, neglected and altogether 'lost' land in Inch has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past year, and was officially opened this summer.

Inch Meadows lies just off the High Street and though I must have passed it hundreds of times, like many others, just never knew it was there! Fortunately members of the local community were well aware of its presence and decided to take positive action – a 'Meadows make-over' in fact! With the help of a Breathing Space grant from lottery funding they set about planning an environmental haven for the benefit of wildlife and people.

The group have installed picnic benches, a bird-feeding station and had the old stagnant weed-clogged pond excavated and given a 'face-lift' complete with dipping platform where local school parties can study pond life more closely. There are also information boards with artwork by local schoolchildren. Aberdeenshire Council rangers and local volunteers have sowed wildflower seeds over the site which will provide a rainbow of colours to delight walkers and attract butterflies and other insects.

On the grand and fortunately dry opening day I met Councillor Allison Grant who performed

the red ribbon-snipping ceremony. She told me of her delight that local people had just 'got up and done something' saving this beautiful spot from being built on.

The North-East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)

staff have also been involved, organising a programme of free courses to be held at Inch Meadows – on fungi, mosses, freshwater invertebrates and site management for biodiversity are just some of them. One of the key elements will be to help the local community compile a list of species to guide decisions for Inch Meadows



Some of the youngsters involved in the schools competition to design a new logo for Inch Meadows information boards

management in future.

Aberdeenshire ranger Fiona Banks was kept busy with crowds of youngsters eager to puddle about learning to identify the great variety of wildlife at Inch Meadows.

For more information contact Garioch Area ranger Fiona Banks on (01467) 681470.