

# Formartine Partnership and The Ythan Project newsletter

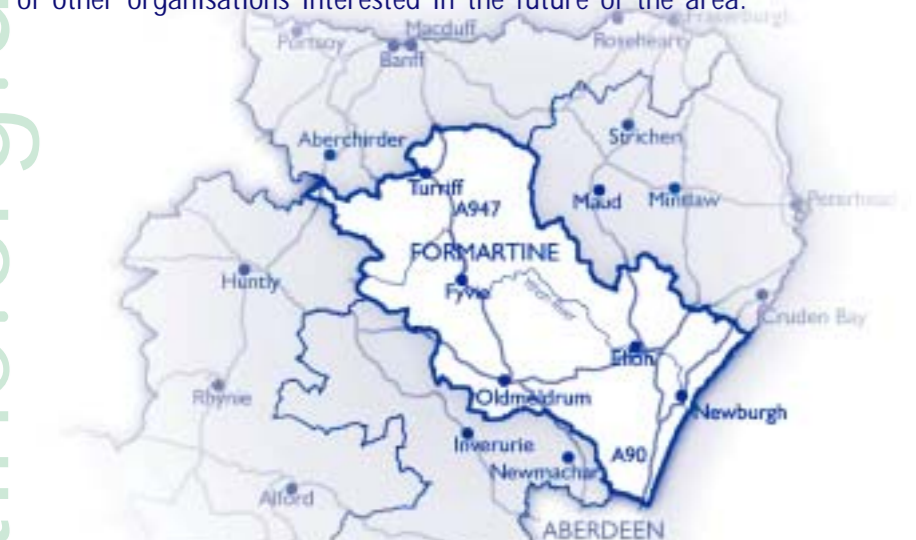


March 2003



## The Formartine Partnership... what is it?

A coalition of local people and organisations concerned about the issues facing the people of the Formartine region of Aberdeenshire. The Partnership is based on the 12 community councils in Formartine; it includes representatives from these community councils and from a range of other organisations interested in the future of the area.



## Why does the Partnership care about the river Ythan catchment?

The Partnership was formed in 1997 with a start up grant from the Scottish Executive and aimed to identify issues of relevance to the area. The map above shows that the Formartine region covers most of the catchment of the river Ythan. From this it is evident that what happens to the Ythan is important to the people of Formartine and the Formartine Partnership. In recent years there has been much discussion about the condition of the river and the adverse effects of pollution. The Partnership decided that a positive response was needed and produced 'The Ythan Project Plan', an action plan for the catchment. This was launched in May 2000 and funding sought for some of the proposed actions. The European 'LIFE' Environment fund agreed to support actions relating to agriculture and river restoration and the Ythan Project, with representatives from the Formartine Partnership and other organisations, began. More details of the work being done in this project are included on pages 4, 5 and 6 of this newsletter.



## The Formartine Partnership

Apart from the Ythan Project, the Partnership is involved in a variety of projects, some of which are:

### River Twinning

The Partnership received funding from the Scottish Executive Rural Challenge fund to undertake a number of activities, one being a river twinning project. This will establish links between the river Ythan and a European river with similar issues, a process similar to town twinning. The area of Hunze en Aa's in the Netherlands (an area in northern Holland some 30 kilometres east to west and 40 kilometres north to south, centred approximately 20 kilometres to the south east of the town of Groningen) has been identified as the most appropriate match. Exchange visits between staff from Hunze en Aa's Waterboard and representatives of the Formartine Partnership took place in March 2003. These will give both areas a chance to compare problems and solutions, and to gain an insight into alternative ways of tackling river related problems.



Rothienorman Planning for Real Event



The Ythan River

Location of Hunze en Aa's region



Hunze en Aa's

### Tourism

Promoting tourism in the Formartine area is a key aim for the Partnership and a set of three leaflets has been produced covering a range of sights in the area. These leaflets were launched in the summer of 2001, and have been such a success that a re-issue is needed this year. To generate continued tourist interest in the area, the Partnership intends to develop information on a 'food trail' and other attractions in Formartine. To ensure that all potential elements are covered, additional information on walks, food suppliers and producers plus local events and attractions will be welcomed. Please send your input to the Tourist Group Chairman at Formartine Partnership, c/o Aberdeenshire Council, 29 Bridge Street, Ellon, AB41 9AA.

### Grants

The partnership administers the following grant schemes:

#### Community Council Project Grants

These are only available to community councils and are for a maximum value of £750. They can be used for a percentage or the whole cost of a project.

#### Environment Grants

These are available to community groups and individuals for work on projects that are in some way related to the local environment. They can be used for up to 50% of the total costs of the project and have a maximum value of £1,000.

#### Rural Youth Transport Grants

These are for groups of young people who live in rural areas and want to travel to use town facilities. The grant is for up to 50% of travel costs up to a maximum of £150 per group per year. Many youth groups have benefited from this grant scheme and have used it for trips to the theatre, ten-pin bowling, camping and other events.

### The Partnership's future strategy

Until recently the Partnership has been focused on trying to enhance and protect the river Ythan. Now that the Partnership has been successful in gaining funding to do this, much of the work on the river will be taken forward through the Ythan Project. The Partnership still has a key role to play in the Ythan Project, but it also now has the time and resources to look at other issues in the area. In order to find out what is important to local people, and to explain more about the Partnership's role in community planning, the Partnership plans to hold a workshop on May 7<sup>th</sup> 2003. If you would like to know more about this workshop, and contribute to the ideas discussed there, please contact Margaret Loblely at Gordon Rural Action on 01466 793676.

The Formartine Partnership is assisted by:



## The Formartine Partnership

### Planning for Real

This project is supported by Aberdeenshire Council and Shell and will involve three communities in the Formartine area in the Planning for Real process. Planning for Real was developed by the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation and is a novel way for local people to identify their desires for their local area. The process starts by the community identifying , and then building a model of, the area in question. Local people then have the opportunity to indicate their concerns and ideas by placing their comments and ideas on the model. The range of ideas are catalogued and addressed by the community and local service providers.

The Partnership is assisting the communities of Rothienorman, Oldmeldrum and Woodhead in the Planning for Real process. Rothienorman created a village model and held an open day in November. Oldmeldrum will be focusing on specific areas of the town and Woodhead will use the method to find out what people would like to see happen at the newly acquired community nature reserve at Windyhills.

### Community Planning...What does it mean for me?

Community planning is a way of working in partnership with all sectors, including the local community, to plan how work is effectively prioritised and resources used. Local Authorities have a statutory duty to lead community planning partnerships in their area and for the NHS, Scottish Enterprise and Police and Fire Boards to engage with the process.

A key part of this duty will be to ensure effective engagement of local communities in planning local services. Local Rural Partnerships will have a key role to play in supporting communities to play a full part in the community planning process, and to

help identify and prioritise local aspirations. The Planning for Real project is one way of doing this. Additional funding has been given to the Partnership to assist it in this work. The Aberdeenshire Community Plan sets an agreed strategic vision to achieve the best quality of life for people living and working in Aberdeenshire. It was published in 1998 by eight public sector organisations Aberdeenshire Council, Grampian Police, Grampian Fire Brigade, the NHS, Scottish Enterprise Grampian, Scottish Natural Heritage, SEPA, and Communities Scotland.

The vision is pursued through four major themes:

- community well being
- jobs and the economy
- learning; and
- a sustainable environment.

The partnership is beginning to look at developing the Council Area Plans into local community plans and the Formartine Partnership has been given a key role to play as this develops.

To help communities gain a better understanding of what this all means and how they can get involved, come along to the workshop on May 7<sup>th</sup> 2003.

### Planning For Real- the Rothienorman Way

Marion Ewenson from Rothienorman Community Association describes how they have tackled the Planning for Real process

Rothienorman undertook a Planning for Real event in November 2002 and had a turnout of around 200 people with lots of local interest generated and people of all ages from all parts of the area, taking part.

We have since had a small meeting to catalogue all the comments made on the day. It was very useful for the Community Association to find out what the areas of concern in the village are.

We hope to deal with some issues locally right away – e.g. dog fouling. We are running a campaign to bring the problem to everyone's attention with a feature in the local press and leaflets available in the local shop. The dog warden is to be invited into the school to speak to the children on the issue and we will be requesting another dog litter-bin in an area where there is a particular problem.

The need for better leisure facilities was raised many times but in a small village some of the suggestions would not be realistic. The planned new primary school will however have some much-needed sports facilities.

The lack of a play area in the new housing development was highlighted many times on the day. There were requests for an adventure playground for older children and a secure safe play park for toddlers being made. The planned skate-park naturally generated many positive comments also.

The only negative factor we found from the process was that some participants saw it as some kind of a "wish-list" where all their problems could be dealt with. There were many suggestions of new uses for the disused buildings in the centre of the village but since these are in private ownership we can have no influence on the issue.

We have many suggestions to look into over the future months and years. It was encouraging to have many of the Community Association's current plans endorsed in this way as well as new projects suggested. We intend to keep the people of Rothienorman involved and well informed about the progress of their Planning For Real in the coming months.

# The Ythan Project



## What's it all about?

The Ythan Project was developed by the Formartine Partnership, and is now managed by a partnership of organisations which includes:

- Aberdeenshire Council
- Forest Enterprise
- Formartine Partnership
- Macaulay Institute
- River Restoration Centre
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- Ythan District Fishery Board.

The Project is supported by the time and expertise of these organisations and a financial grant from the European Commission's Life Environment fund. Funding began in August 2001 and runs until January 2005, and in this time the Project hopes to achieve a variety of things, including:

- Involving local people in protecting and enhancing the river Ythan
- Demonstrating to European policy makers that you can, and should, involve local people in environmental decision making
- Assisting farmers to undertake nutrient budgets on their farms, which will help to protect the watercourses from inputs of surplus nutrients
- Helping farmers to apply to agri-environment schemes for funding to create wildlife habitats on their farms
- Undertaking projects to restore the river at key sites
- Learning more about the river through monitoring and survey work

By involving local people throughout the project, we hope to show that protecting the environment can be more effectively achieved by the voluntary actions of local people, rather than by giving them a set of rules and demanding compliance.

## What's happened so far?

The project has been funded since August 2001, so a variety of things have taken place in the last 18 months.

Two river restoration projects have been undertaken near the village of Tarves and Haddo Country Park. These sites were chosen by local anglers as being important sites to target, so the project undertook work there in the summer of 2002.

At the site near Haddo Country Park, an area of Norway Spruce conifer trees, which were overshadowing the burn and making the banks unstable, have been removed. The trees were felled and some of the trunks were removed by a horse, rather than heavy machinery, to minimise damage to the banks. The site was then replanted with broadleaved trees which will create dappled shade over the burn and help to stabilise the banks.



Clearing felled trees by horse power

The site near Tarves was on the Youlie burn, and involved the creation of a spawning bed for sea trout. Sea trout used to use this burn for spawning, but in recent years the gravels have become silted up and are too solid for the trout to use for laying eggs. By putting in a small weir structure to hold back the gravel, but not the water, and then adding new gravel behind the weir, we've created a new area for the trout to use for spawning.



River survey work

In both cases local people were involved in the work as well as choosing the sites in the first place.

## Finding out more about the river

Local people have also been involved in surveying the river, so we can find out more about it, and build up a picture of the areas that need the most work. Other volunteers have also helped us to find out more about the water quality in some of the smaller burns, by collecting water samples at regular intervals. These should demonstrate changes in water quality as a result of actions farmers might take through the project.

We've also been doing some tree planting at various sites around the river catchment, and in the next few years these trees should have a significant impact on the landscape as they grow and mature. We're still looking for more burn-side sites for tree planting, so if you've got any ideas, please let us know.



Tree planting at Haddo

# The Ythan Project



## Working with farmers...

The project works with farmers in two main ways. One is raising awareness of the grant schemes that farmers can use to create wildlife habitats on their farm and the second is through assisting farmers with nutrient budgets on their farms. During the winter of 2002/03 we have been visiting farmers in the southern half of the catchment to make sure they know about the Government's agri-environment scheme (called the Rural Stewardship Scheme) and how they can maximise their chances of getting into the scheme. The scheme enables farmers to receive financial recompense for creating areas of wildlife habitat on the farm and this is particularly beneficial if the areas created are at burn sides.

The project team is currently developing a computer package for local farmers to use when they do nutrient budgets, and this should be ready for testing in the next few months. A number of local farmers are interested in testing out the software and this will ensure that the finished product does everything we need.



If you are farming in the Ythan catchment and would be interested in knowing more about nutrient budgeting and how it could help your farm, please contact the Ythan Project team (contact details on page 6).

## Getting the kids involved...

The project has also organised two big 'fun day' events, one at the Ocean Lab in Newburgh in March 2002 and one at Fyvie Castle in March 2003. Both events attracted large audiences and gave children and adults a chance to find out more about the river and some of the critters that make the river their home. Activities taking place on the day included salmon racing, willow fish weaving, badge making, designing the countryside of the future and a whole host of other things. The fun days are an important part of the project's work because they give us a chance to talk to people who might not be able to attend formal public meetings, or guided walks and other more 'traditional' methods of environmental education.

Willow weaving at the river fun day



Linked to the two fun days have been the visits to the catchment area of the Giant Yellow Fish! This is part of a project organised by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, which involves school children taking part in a campaign to raise awareness of the risk of pollution through road drains. Many road drains lead directly to the river and so they should never be used for the disposal of waste oil, paint thinners and other nasties. To remind people of this, the school children paint yellow fish next to the drains and deliver postcards to nearby houses to explain the significance of the painted fish. They are helped in this work by the giant yellow fish, who never fails to get their attention! So far the project has undertaken yellow fish painting in Newburgh, Fyvie and Ellon, with hopefully more areas to come.



Painting yellow fish

# The Ythan Project



## Spreading the word around Europe...

In order to receive grant monies from the European Commission, the project has to act as a 'demonstration project' for other areas in Europe. This means we need to make sure that people are finding out about the project; what we are doing and what's working well. The European Commission are assisting us with some of this message spreading work, and we hope that other areas around Europe will be interested in what we are doing and will take it on board for some of their own actions to protect the environment. This means that the River Ythan's fame is starting to spread far and wide!

## What's coming up next?

As we head towards summer 2003, we will be focusing on river restoration work at various sites around the catchment. The sites will be decided in conjunction with local groups, but we hope to undertake work at six sites around the area. The work undertaken is likely to include actions to ensure that fish can swim upstream without obstacles; protecting river banks from excessive erosion and enhancing the landscape value of the river. If you'd like to be involved in helping to select the sites, or if you have ideas for sites where we could be working to improve the river, please let us know.

We'll also be undertaking some major works at Gight Woods near Methlick, where local people have asked to see the flood plain area cleared of the coniferous trees planted there in the 1960's. The Forestry Commission will be undertaking this clearance work in the summer of 2003 and this should have dramatic benefits for the river as well as eventually opening up more footpaths around the area.

During the summer we will also be undertaking nutrient budgets with local farmers, who will hopefully provide us with feedback on our software, to ensure that it works effectively.

## Getting involved...

If you'd like to get involved in the project, we'd be delighted to hear from you. Contact details for the project are below.

The project has a website which gives details of up coming events and activities, and this can be found at: [www.ythan.org.uk](http://www.ythan.org.uk)

# Contacts

Both the Formartine Partnership and the Ythan Project can be found in the new Council offices in Neil Ross Square in the centre of Ellon. Contact details are as follows:

c/o Aberdeenshire Council  
29 Bridge Street  
Ellon  
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The following organisations are contributing time and resources to the Ythan Project. The project's logo was designed by a pupil at Newburgh Mathers Primary School, located by the Ythan Estuary, as part of an inter-school competition to produce a logo which showed the project's aims and activities.

