

Assynt Development Trust

Draft Minutes of the meeting of the Glebe Land development Steering Group

Monday 25th January 2021 5:00pm via Zoom

1. Introductions and Welcome

As Chair of ADT Willie Jack introduced himself and gave an update on the Glebe Land Development Project. ADT were successful in gaining funding from the Scottish Land Fund and HIE for the Stage 1 feasibility study and business plan development in February 2020. Unfortunately, due to Covid, this work was delayed but from June – August 2020 the work was undertaken and completed leading to the Scottish Land Fund Stage 2 application to acquire the Glebe Land from the Church of Scotland for the independently assessed valuation of £65,000. In November 2020 ADT was informed that they were successful with the SLF application. Presently solicitors acting for ADT and the Church are discussing the purchase and sale of the land and with the hope that this will be completed before the end of March 2021. The original business plan envisaged a mixed use development headed up by affordable housing but also including tracks for cyclists/ walkers, Woodland Crofts, Educational facilities and Tourism facilities. WJ explained however that the mix of the different elements could take place over different time periods and would be dependent on what funding streams are current and available.

WJ introduced the members of the steering group individually and asked them to say a few words about their area of special interest and/or their knowledge of the Glebe Land and how they thought that it could be developed.

Liam Taylor introduced himself as Chair of Assynt Community Council. He said that he had no issues or ideas at this time about the project but that the Community Council are all for housing on the Glebe. He asked to see a map of the Glebe Land which Kirsty shared on screen. He would far rather see affordable housing than pods going up everywhere; it would be good to get families moved in. With regards to the other aspects of development nobody has yet come back with any ideas so when there are other ideas going forward he will pass these on to the other Community Councilors and hopes that they will support it as well.

Iain MacLeod introduced himself as the new Church of Scotland Minister for Lochinver. He explained that the land presently belongs to the Church and that it is great to see the land possibly being used for affordable housing. He noted recent conversations on the Assynt Activity Facebook page where a couple of folk are looking for property and struggling to find it. He said that If Lochinver has a future in the coming years then more young families are needed in the area.

Nigel Goldie explained that he is currently on both the Assynt foundation and ADT boards and represents both areas of land along Canisp Road. He is currently working to obtain funding to improve and enhance the stretch of Road on Foundation Land. He feels that this development would be a great stimulus for both organisations and could act as a bridge with the community at large. It could provide the scope for the Foundation and the Trust to develop other projects together.

Brendan O’Hanrahan, former Chair of Assynt Foundation, explained that his main interest is housing. When he was with the Foundation they ‘inherited’ the previous CHT plans for developing Foundation land for housing just beyond the Glebe; this was something that the Foundation had always promised to deliver to the Assynt community. He feels it would be a great achievement if ADT and the Foundation could develop a housing project on the Glebe Land. If it were possible to incorporate Woodland Crofts into the plan that would make Brendan even happier. However he would be concerned about pushing different developments together in directions where they wouldn’t really fit, although if there is a broad consensus amongst the Steering Group and the community then that would be acceptable.

Elaine MacAskill currently works for the Woodland Trust specifically on the Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape project. CALL is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund which currently has an end date of September 2021. Hopefully she can help with any woodland plans for the Glebe. There is great potential for

tie-ins around the Village between Culag Woods and perhaps joining up with the Foundation extending what is there already. There is a desire and need for locals and visitors for more footpaths and low level sheltered walks. The housing development goes without saying, as this is really needed. It will be good to see if there is any funding available for woodland development.

Colin Masterson explained that he has been headteacher at Lochinver Primary School for a year and he has been glad to be involved with ADT and ACC through the resilience Group which has provided funding to the Primary School through the Covid Emergency which has allowed the school to continue with distance learning. His main interest is affordable housing and having just moved to the area he has seen how little housing stock there is here and not just affordable housing. The key issue for the school is that housing is available for those who stay here and for those who move here from elsewhere. He worries about employment in the area, also child care and has heard that some families may have left the area due to lack of child care. The Glebe Land offers possibility of an outdoor nursery similar to the Kinder Croft operating at Leckmelm. Colin used to work in outdoor activities and has a passion for mountain biking and kayaking and feels that dual purpose paths for mountain biking and walking have great potential especially with the growth in Scotland of Mountain Biking. The Glebe is such a large area of land and the land should give a return to the people who live on it or work on it.

Claire Belshaw explained that she is Chair of Assynt Foundation and she is absolutely delighted that this project is going ahead at long last and that the Foundation as neighbour will help in any way possible. She hopes that ten houses is not the limit, she is very interested in crofts, although it doesn't have to be crofts, as she would like to see any and all other ways of using of the land. It is unlikely that there will be any common grazing available so possibly allotments could work. Giving people access to land to grow things is important. Possibly a larger garden area or separate crofts down the hill towards the loch. She would like to see houses having a studio/garage/workshop area at or near the houses with, please, bigger gardens than in the affordable housing development at Stoer. Let's be innovative to allow people to do anything they wish to do. The Glebe Land is surrounded by Badnaban Common Grazings, which is why there won't be any common grazing available nearby any crofts that are developed. Please let's think carefully about where the houses will go; is there any space for a library or a shop or anything else that the village needs. Let's not just plonk houses by the road without thinking through other aspects of the development at the same time.

Jamie McIntyre works as main contractor for the Woodland Crofts partnership which works alongside the Scottish Crofting Federation, the Community Woodlands Association, the Woodland Trust Scotland and the Communities Housing Trust. All aspects of Woodland Crofts are represented. He has been working with Woodland Crofts for over ten years. If Scotland can develop more Woodland crofts we will catch up with how other countries work. He has been interested in the Glebe land for a very long time and has been in previous discussions with Colin Morrison from Mull about the use of AF land; on Mull they have created new Woodland Crofts. No particular knowledge of the site. The key issue is that most people will want a house with a woodland croft so the house must come first as there is more flexibility with developing the land as a woodland croft than there is with finding a site to build a house on.

Brendan O'Hanrahan left the meeting

Kirsty Crichton has worked as communities officer for the Communities Housing Trust for the past year and is Project Lead for the Glebe has been to develop the business plan for the Scottish Land Fund Stage 2 application.

Morven Taylor has worked as communities co-ordinator at the Communities Housing Trust where she has worked for the past fourteen years. She works with community groups in the early stages of their projects prior to construction pulling together what communities want from their projects and acts as a central point of contact. She has worked with Assynt Groups for some time and helped to develop the Assynt Housing needs analysis survey in 2019.

Adam Pellant works as a half time development officer at Assynt Development Trust and previously worked at Assynt Foundation for ten years.

Ronnie Macrae is Chief Executive of the Communities Housing Trust and said that he is delighted to work with ADT on the really exciting Glebe Land project. It will be a mixed use project with a mixed tenure on a big site. He wants to help us deliver the project as he believes the project has the potential to make Lochinver a stronger, more resilient community.

2. Terms of reference, procedures, accountability

All agreed that this could be developed and that the group may function better by working as smaller sub-groups.

3. Project Overview and potential components

a. Affordable housing development

RM advised the meeting that the Rural and Islands Housing Fund (RIHF) has been hugely beneficial and it has been extended beyond its initial five year term and is expected to continue beyond the forthcoming parliamentary elections. Developments such as the Glebe which are of mixed use, mixed tenure and with mixed funding have been developed with RIHF funding. Live/work units, working from home and creating jobs along with commercial property, shops and retail units can all be part of the mix and can be brought about with different funding streams. Today, holistic development of a mixed project allows sharing of costs of roads and infrastructure. The RIHF has been really positive and the Scottish Govt are listening to local communities to deliver what is needed. WJ asked RM if in this 3D jigsaw puzzle that is the initial project development if HC planners will be of help? RM advised that in general planners are very helpful although they will not come to site and are instead very keen on giving pre-app advice. The new NPF4 planning framework allows for local place plans to be developed and the Glebe land is ideally located for this within Assynt and Lochinver.

b. Tracks for cyclists/ walkers

CM said that he uses Culag Woods extensively for outdoor education purposes and if it was possible to link the Glebe Land to the Primary school by means of a bridge over the River Culag it would allow pupils to explore a larger area, one which is far more rugged. If possible mountain bike trails in the Glebe would be very beneficial. LT advised CM that he knows of two young lads who would be very keen to be involved in developing mountain bike trails in Lochinver. EM said that it would be good to consider opening up from the Glebe through Assynt Foundation land and out towards Elphin; opening up from Culag Woods through towards Glencanisp with an all-abilities bridge connecting the land to the primary school. This could also appeal, not just to residents but also to visitors with the Glebe Land becoming a key link area of ground with multipurpose paths.

c. Woodland Crofts

JM advised that woodland crofts are just crofts, which then enables an extension of crofting into woodland management. Woodland crofters need to have somewhere to live and now the croft house grant scheme can be applied to houses which are not built on the croft. Check out the website woodlandcrofts.org and the "About" tab. The Glebe land is not necessarily the best site for woodland crofts in Assynt but it is available for development and it could be the first phase of something that could be more widely developed. Some communities seek to have woodland crofts to serve existing families or welcome families from outside the area, but this is for the community to decide. Woodland crofts are timely, they introduce resilience and low carbon living. There is the timber aspect of the trees on woodland crofts but also it allows households to sustain themselves through provision of food and fuel. It is possible to have woodland crofts with different tenures, possibly even owner occupier crofters with a rural housing burden to protect community interests. The

community will need to draw up an allocation policy and it is for the community to decide upon their objectives. CB asked can you create a woodland croft with no common grazing? JM replied "yes". CB asked is possible to have a woodland croft with no trees? JM replied "the woodland croft is just a croft, but the stated intention is that it should be a woodland croft which connects with the Scottish Govt's ambition for more woodland planting."

d. Educational facilities

EM spoke of CALL coming to an end in 2021 and local individuals scoping to create a social enterprise for outdoor learning. CM spoke of a possible permanent outdoor classroom in a changed location. The Glebe could be a base for such a business, possibly also with provision for visitors children. RM said that the educational use could be mixed including geology, culture and tourism.

e. Tourism facilities

WJ explained that the initial community survey carried out in August 2020 did not show much support for provision of motorhome 'aire' type sites at the Glebe. EM wondered whether the Glebe could be a base for bike and kayak hire?

4. Action plan and Timeline

The Glebe business plan that was produced last August was for the Scottish Land Fund stage 2 application. MT advised that the next few months will be seeking to develop the scope of the project and build partnerships. Housing requirements in the project will be decided by the community deciding on its priorities. After the initial project development work is completed, later in the summer work will begin to prepare tender documentation and to seek planning with construction possibly starting on site in late 2021.

CB asked how it is decided as to how many houses are built and where. MT replied that this is largely decided by the features of the landscape, the topography, the drainage requirements, utility provision, the design and layouts that are possible on the site, the funding which is available, planning aspects including an appropriate density of buildings and partners who become involved for example: if Highland Council are interested in developing houses themselves on site. LT asked about the number of houses and sizes that could be built, KC replied that this the housing needs analysis showed for example a greater demand for 1 and 3 bed roomed houses rather than 2 bed roomed houses. RM advised that he felt that MT had explained and described all elements of the project, he said that the Glebe is a challenging site, it will require work to identify the best sites but there are issues with most sites these days.

5. The meeting closed at 6:20pm

Date and time of next meeting: Tuesday 2nd March 5:00pm