

## Assynt Development Trust

### Draft Minutes of the Land Sub-Group Meeting of the Assynt Glebe Development

Friday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2021 2:00pm

Present: Willie Jack, Adam Pellant, Kirsty Crichton, Colin Masterson, Brendan O'Hanrahan, Claire Belshaw, Jamie McIntyre, Nigel Goldie, Elaine McAskill. Apologies: Ewen McLachlan

#### Woodland Crofting

BOH undertook a habitat survey and map of the Glebe. He feels that there is some potential near to the manse, maybe some ground nearer the road than elsewhere as on the southern aspect its mostly rocky. The neighbouring Foundation land may be better for woodland. If you were to consider woodland crofting on the southern ¾ of the ground you would be starting from scratch. WJ mentioned that there was some scrubby woodland along the southern aspect of the Glebe adjacent to Culag Loch although BOH feels that size and access makes this area impractical for woodland crofting. NG mentioned that he and WJ had walked over the land and found it to be quite heavy going and challenging. The land doesn't readily present itself as suitable for crofting. He wondered if housing for woodland crofters could be on the Glebe land with the woodland on the Foundation land. BOH agreed and thinks that this approach would be the main way to go; once the house sites have been decided then it will be worth looking at the layout of the non-housing land to see if there is then any potential but it may be that the land may be more suited for some form of recreation and biodiversity management. There is some scope for planting but that may be best being divorced from the idea of woodland crofts.

JM his thoughts are hampered by not knowing the ground, and said that the current absence for trees isn't an issue and the potential for woodland is important there may be some possibility of scrubby birch woodland being established over a number of years. Not traditional woodland management but more using the woodland setting for other things, possibly a tourism opportunity. If there's already a community interest in the Glebe being used for other purposes, would woodland crofting be complimentary or conflicting. A multi-purpose access track and bridge could provide access to the school and the village across the river and also be used by crofters. On the other hand if the land were fenced and gates left open to let deer through it could be confrontational. Maybe use of the Foundation land for crofting would be better. Don't get hung up on woodland crofts, it could be that the land could be a croft with cattle grazing as producing any amount of timber is unlikely. It could be that any trees are a backdrop to other activity and a woodland croft would focus on other activity.

EM has not walked across the Glebe for some time, she agrees with JM & BOH that the land would be suitable for generally native woodland with potential to do some planting, maybe including pine, there is potential for more woodland if that's what is wanted. EM explained that ACC have asked her to look at the Lochinver village deer fence, and there a few ideas as to what route the fence should take around the Glebe from the existing western boundary which is the CC's main proposal, to possibilities on Foundation land which has been discussed by AF board. There will be a public consultation about the deer fence options including the possibility of an extension to include Cnocnaneach to the east of the Glebe; EM would like this to be soon, possibly in the next few weeks? EM said that even if the extension to Druim Suardalain to the east didn't happen, it would also be possible to include smaller areas of <2m height fencing within the Glebe which wouldn't cut off the shoreline with a full height deer fence. There a few different options for the fence route and with the Glebe development being considered now it is good to discuss all the options at the same time. EM feels personally that if a bridge over the Culag River is possible then the Glebe is a great connecting piece of ground between Culag Woods and the primary school to the south west and Glencanisp Lodge and estate to the east would allow the area to be opened up much more for other activities. BOH agreed and said that it would be wonderful to see that happen.

JM advised that most woodland crofters would require a house so is there any consideration to how many houses could be set aside for woodland crofters? With 18ha of land there would be room enough for 1-2 woodland crofts and still have plenty of other land available for wider community use. With a woodland croft you get a buy-in from crofters (on the spot 24/7) to ensure that any trees planted do grow, most woodland crofts are 2-5ha is the typical range of a woodland croft size; focussing on specific areas for discrete planting. BOH hopes that the Foundation plans and the possible fence route would allow room for possible crofts on Foundation land as well.

CB said that she is not convinced that crofts are required here, as she feels it depends who the tenants are in the houses. She feels that we are all in agreement that it would be very difficult here to get a houses on any area of croft land, the access doesn't help. Could we lease an area of land to householders so that residents can grow their own

food? This could be in addition to or instead of crofts. We don't yet know if there is any interest in crofting in the Glebe and any crofting would not have access to common grazings. Setting up crofts is a complicated procedure and it may not be necessary. So we don't know what the people in the houses want and creating a new croft for someone new may not be appropriate. CB agrees with EM about the Lochinver village fence and feels that it would be good to see all the options and work together to keep the deer out of Lochinver and the Glebe. Depending on the options it would be good, not to have the fence sited along the lochside, but maybe a quarter of the way up the Glebe.

NG feels that we will need to have a number of discussions about the various options that are possible. Maybe it would be good to see what it is required to allow a croft to be created and see how this would impact on other options. WJ explained that the Steering Group needs to have a very open and inclusive attitude towards options, getting as many different ideas on the table to be considered. The first thing to be identified through further site investigations is where are the best most buildable areas of land for houses; this will affect all other options.

JM asks that in terms of woodland crofts, are we coming at it from the wrong view-point? The community needs to identify the wider objectives around creating new crofts and express what we are trying to achieve in terms of the people we are trying to encourage to live in the new homes on the Glebe. One is to attract local families that have an interest in living in a house with land; you won't know this number as it hasn't been identified in the housing survey. If we propose to use crofts to attract families into the area, (they may be returning families or have a local connection) there is likely to be massive interest and they can be selected by means of our allocations policy, and due to the demand you can be quite selective. WJ confirmed that the housing sub-group allocations policy will seek to address the wider objectives of the economic development of Assynt. BOH advised that Assynt Foundation commissioned a crofting study in 2016: over 20 people were interested in crofts and close to half were interested in woodland crofts. JM felt that looking at an aerial map of the area, the north side of the land between the boundary and the road was quite well wooded.

CB also feels that we must not assume crofts are appropriate for the Glebe when there is no-where else for the people in Lochinver village to access land which can be used for any purpose that local people choose. Before considering anything, including crofts, CB would like to hear what local people say that they want to happen on the Glebe.

#### Walking and cycling tracks and access

CM said that from the shoreline the Glebe looks to be rugged terrain with difficult access, and this would require a link bridge to connect to the school. CB feels that surveying the community on what they think is a good idea, it may be worthwhile to consider a bank of suggestions to allow people to say what they think. Under Covid restrictions it's hard for people to look over the land and see what they think is possible. It was good to see the Glenanisp plans. AP said that he had been in contact with the MOD as they are discussing with AF about replacing two foot-bridges, one at Ledbeg House and the second at Cnocnaneach. He had been advised by the MOD that a third bridge from the Glebe land across the Culag River was feasible perhaps next year. EM explained that the typical arrangement is that the materials are purchased by the landowner and the MOD will construct the bridge; MOD engineers will produce a material list. WJ produced a map showing the Glebe and showed where the bridge could be built.

EM said that she had been discussing access with those individuals who use Cnocnaneach for mountain biking. If this could be connected with the Glebe that would be fantastic. CM mentioned a group called 'Developing MTB in Scotland' who develop areas for MTB and would know sources of funding; he could make contact with them for advice. EM is aware of a desire amongst some to have bike trials areas they can use. WJ advised that there are also others locally that are keen to be involved in planning both walking and bike tracks. EM felt that a good crossing point for a bridge may be further down the river and back into the Glebe from the west. CB said she knows of cyclists who have been talking about having a northern cycling/MTB festival which could include an MTB course on the Glebe and Cnocnaneach.

BOH said that the Scottish gov't's SRDP 'improving public access' funding programme which specifically addresses walking and cycling tracks would be open for funding applications between March and June 2021 \*. EM said that it was possible that there may be money from CALL for a path survey and advised that we ask Chris Goodman and Boyd Alexander for more advice.

\* The Improving Public Access (IPA) option opens for applications on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021, and closes on Wednesday 30 June 2021. The format of the scheme remains in line with previous rounds with support available for a range of capital items for creating new paths or improving existing paths with the fixed cost payment rates remaining unchanged.

## Tourism

WJ asked if there were any ideas for tourism opportunities on the Glebe other than walking and cycling tracks? NG felt it could be difficult to allow usage for tourism given difficulty and therefore cost in constructing access tracks. It may be possible to consider tourism opportunities on Foundation land adjacent.

## Educational opportunities

CM said that he had been working with CALL within Culag woods since he started at Lochinver Primary school alongside Fiona Saywell; he is aware that CALL finishes in September. CM said that there is a feasibility study being undertaken by CALL to see if it feasible to establish a social enterprise which would create an outdoor learning area in Coigach although CM feels that Lochinver is far more interesting with more throughput of visitors. This would include taking children out for bushcraft and adventures and as a destination and with easy access from the school over a bridge would be essential; it is a different type of land than Culag Woods, gives another opportunity for children to learn in a different environment, so it would be excellent for outdoor learning. CM will discuss this on Thursday with Fiona. EM will mention this at the next CALL team meeting and feels that it will be brilliant to have this facility here in Lochinver. WJ felt that there could be opportunities on the south side of the Glebe across Loch Culag from the primary school.

Meeting finished at 15.30

## **Action points:**

1. EM to keep the group up-to-date on the Lochinver Village deer fence consultation
2. CM make contact with 'Developing MTB in Scotland' seeking advice on bike / MTB track design and funding
3. CM will discuss educational opportunities with FS while EM will bring this up at the next CALL Team meeting
4. BOH & AP to investigate the Improving Public Access funding programme and EM suggested that CALL could have funding available to produce a feasibility study on walking and bike tracks; WJ to contact Boyd Alexander.