



Coigach Community Development Company

NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2015

CCDC are the proud new owners of **Achiltibuie Schoolhouse!**

After a long, long process (involving c500 emails and many site visits ...) the Schoolhouse is now in community ownership and will be converted into 2 flats for rent. The building will be leased to the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT) who will oversee the renovations and manage the tenancies. Many thanks are due to the Highland Council for agreeing to sign it over and to the Scottish Land Fund for meeting the legal fees. It will cost about around £165K to refurbish the flats and the next step for us is to raise our part of the money needed for the refurbishment. Crowdfunding is one possible route so please look out for more details: all ideas welcome! We're also planning a work party to clear out the garden in readiness for building work to begin. If you can, come along and help. Please bring your machetes (or preferably, loppers, spades, shovels and saws)!



The former **Smokehouse** in Altandhu has been home to the creative workshops of Heather Ablett during the summer and a pop-up exhibition with a display by Coigach Heritage Group about Isle Ristol. Alison Sinclair, the Development Officer, has successfully submitted a Round 1 Application to the Heritage Lottery Fund so that the building can be refurbished to a standard which will attract businesses. She is also looking into options as to how the community can best use the land and building, whether that be for housing or business use. We are working with a local resident to help get a new business off the ground using the current premises, which is looking very promising.



Acheninver Youth Hostel: There has been broad interest in taking over the Acheninver Youth Hostel lease since SYHA are no longer tenants. Although owners, Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), announced their intention to sell the hostel in Spring 2016 (with burdens to ensure local social and economic benefit), they have since stated they plan to delay marketing the property until other options have been explored. CCDC has received at least 20 expressions of interest and these have been passed on to SWT.

Piers and Harbours remain a critical interest for everyone in Coigach and CCDC are committed to helping the Pier Users Group in whatever ways we can. There is a funding stream – the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) - opening in early 2016. We have been advised that any application to this has to be fully costed by a professional consultant to ensure the project is “shovel ready” and an attractive proposition for funders. We have partially secured the money for this and continue to work to this end.

Path Projects: We continue to work with Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape Partnership (CALLP) to realise path projects in the area. CALLP’s final funding application is going in later this month and we will keep you posted of the outcome.

CALL are currently recruiting: Tree Nursery Outreach Officer to be based at Little Assynt Tree Nursery. Closing date 11th December. For details see www.swt.org.uk



Broadband: Decent broadband provision is a huge issue for many of us. Whether for leisure or business, good connectivity is vital to keep Coigach competitive. The new fibre optic line will be running from Ullapool to Lochinver, bypassing Coigach. Other areas in similar geographical situations have come up with solutions to use nearby fibre optic lines to improve their broadband. We are really keen to look at solutions for Coigach: to do this we need some input from locals who have some expertise and/or interest in broadband. If you are interested, please let us know. A broadband working group wouldn’t need to have lots of meetings: lots of discussion can be had by email. If you have any thoughts or ideas please get in touch - even some suggestions to get us going would be great. Community Broadband Scotland’s website <http://www.hie.co.uk/community-support/community-broadband-scotland> has some information on what’s going on elsewhere.

What’s happening with renewables? Ben Mor Hydro (BMH) landowner agreements are in place and the grid connection is now secure. The CAR licence (Controlled Activity Regulations licence) is in place (issued by SEPA) and SEPA are allowing us to take the amount of water we need from the burn, as long as sufficient compensation flow is left to maintain the burn. There are some problems: although hydro is a benign technology it is very costly to install and any hydro scheme is a capital heavy project. For instance, BMH have to get a few hundred tons of concrete up the hill to build the intake weir and nearly 3km of ½ m diameter pipeline has to go in all the way down to Acheninver. Due to new deadlines imposed by the Westminster government contractors are becoming thin on the ground as they are being headhunted for hydro contracts which are further ahead than ours. This has resulted in quotes for installing the scheme being much higher than budgeted for. As a result there is a big hole in the finances and it’s looking difficult to fill it. By the end of November a serious financial commitment has to be made if the project is to proceed and all the finances need to be revisited to see if it is viable. This is really disappointing given the sheer amount of volunteer effort and hours which have gone into the project so far. Ben Mor Hydro would provide CCDC with 50% of the profits if it does go ahead.

Coigach Wind Power (CWP) is on track and has positive news to report: CWP has succeeded in gaining a new grid connection at a substantially reduced cost which enables them to connect to the existing local grid, thus negating the need for 5 miles of brand new additional overhead line. An application has been lodged with the land court regarding the loss of common grazing land. Soil surveys have been undertaken this autumn and samples of bedrock have been sent off for analysis to enable the turbine manufacturers to

determine the best foundation. Last week the turbine manufacturer did a dry run with a test load to make sure that it can get down the single track. All this is positive, however it must be remembered that we are working to the same new deadlines imposed on us by the Westminster government so we have to keep our eye well and truly on the ball. CWP is a subsidiary company wholly owned by CCDC and run entirely by volunteers, and CCDC would like to note their thanks for the huge amount of time and effort given over many years by everyone involved. Whilst it can be perceived that wind turbines might not add anything to the visual landscape, they are the most cost effective way of generating renewable energy. The turbine is wholly owned by CCDC and so 100% of the profits retained will be used for projects in Coigach.

You can follow progress and keep up with news on our website www.ccdcompany.wordpress.com , by “liking” our page on Facebook (Coigach Community Development Company), or by following us on Twitter (@coigachcdc). And of course you can speak to either of the Local Development Officers Linda Macleod (who is covering while Anne Campbell continues with her recovery) or Julia Campbell.



New Crofters!

Congratulations to Lucy and William who not only got married this year but became crofters! Will and Lucy came to CCDC to ask for advice about getting a croft. We put them in touch with the Crofting Federation and pursued their case with Scottish Wildlife Trust who assigned the tenancy of a vacant croft to the couple. Within weeks they had the land drained, fenced and ready to grow. An encouraging sign and we hope to see more of this sort of progress!

If you're not already a member and would like to support CCDC then do join up! Full membership (with voting rights) is available to those on the Coigach Electoral Roll, but even if you're not you can still support local projects by becoming an Associate Member. Adult membership is £5 p.a.; juniors are free. Membership forms and the Articles of Association are on our website.

And if you really want to help, then please consider becoming a Director. The current board is made up of volunteers with a variety of skills and experience and meets once a month: we would be delighted to hear from you if you can help by joining them. (Directors need to be full members but we also have the freedom to co-opt anyone with particular skills that will benefit the Company and the Community).

Coigach Community Development Company

Registered Office: Coigach Community Hall, Achiltibuie, Ullapool IV26 2YL

info@coigachcommunity.org.uk

Tel: **Linda Macleod** 01854 622 372 **Julia Campbell** 01854 622 379 **Smokehouse Office** 01854 622 744

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