

DURNESS DEVELOPMENT GROUP LIMITED

**DURNESS DEVELOPMENT GROUP  
LIMITED**

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## **Directors Report**

### **Walking, Footpath Network and Interpretation in Durness.**

The community council and Development Group are leading a local partnership that are creating footpaths in and around the village with interpretation, signing and way marking. Our community requires addressing informal outdoor recreational, health and social needs. From local knowledge and a record of discussing this intention for some time the community council has inherited a good idea of what already exists and what has to be done to improve the situation. We are intending to provide an informative notice board at the Tourist Information Centre car park, a central point where we intend the series of circular walks to commence. Each walk will be named and colour identified on a composite map. Each walk will be included in a multipart leaflet with a map and details of the graded walk with particulars about access and safety and self help information to motivate people about the many health benefits associated with walking and to encourage and promote people to walk in their local area.

Each will have an individual character and encompassing places of interest, landscape, history and wildlife, heritage, culture, architecture, archaeology, flora and fauna are examples. These will be described and the leaflet will highlight the interesting points and artefacts. We have a diverse and varied landscape around Durness and the network will reflect all the various environs with proper regard for nature and nature's processes integrated with farm, crofting and estate activities. Respect for the environment will be a repeated characteristic. In the area are some of Britain's rarest habitats and fascinating rock formations. This is an area rich in legend with many stories waiting to be told and a complex history to unravel with many mysteries to ponder. The walk network will take the walker into landscapes that are breathtakingly beautiful, exciting, wild and desolate, visiting invigorating costal margins and wind swept moorlands.

Assistance is being received from Scottish Natural heritage and Footpaths Officer of the Highland Council.

**Balnakeil Parish School restoration** Historic Scotland has visited the site and was encouraging. 4 names were given of people to contact and this has been done. Ishbell has agreed to reproduce and artist's impression of the building, as it was when last used.

**Ceannabeinne Township** This project is at the same stage as the school restoration and Historic Scotland are trying to arrange an archaeological survey.

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This is part of the report from consultants Rowantree. Funding applications were approved and we commissioned Helen Smith and Rowantree Consultants. Their remit follows:

### 1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Durness Development Group Ltd last year identified two local sites of archaeological and historical interest - Loch Croispol School and Ceannabeinne Township –, which members thought, offered interesting opportunities for interpretation and promotion both to local people and visitors to the area.
- 1.2 Rowan Tree Consulting visited these sites in the company of members of the Development Group in February 2002, and later met with the Highland Council's Senior Archaeologist, John Wood, to discuss options for the possible development of both sites and potential projects.
- 1.3 As a result of the site visit and the subsequent meeting with John Wood, we feel that there is an opportunity to look not just at developing the two sites already identified but also to consider a more wide-ranging initiative encompassing other sites - particularly in the Balnakeil/Loch Croispol and Ceannabeinne areas – as there is a wealth of archaeology in these areas which is of interest in terms of developing interpretive themes for local people and visitors to explore and enjoy.
- 1.4 At Balnakeil/Loch Croispol, there are archaeological remains dating from prehistoric times onward. The unusual geology and fertile land have made it an attractive place to settlers since early times and its archaeological landscape has a fascinating and distinctive story to tell. This area is close to Balnakeil Craft Village and Balnakeil Beach – both of which already attract significant numbers of visitors –and it therefore seems reasonable to suggest that investment in interpretive projects may help retain a proportion of these visitors longer in Durness, thereby increasing local spend to the benefit of local businesses. The wealth of archaeology may also, if appropriately developed and interpreted, attract visitors to Durness who might not otherwise have visited the village.
- 1.5 Ceannabeinne also has special features of interest – particularly its role as the location of the Durness Riots in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The site is adjacent to, and easily accessible from, the A838 road along the North coast, and there may well be opportunities to promote it as a site to complement the interpretation of the Rosal clearance village in Strathnaver. As with Balnakeil/Loch Croispol, with appropriate development and promotion, Ceannabeinne could perhaps not only help retain visitors in the Durness area but also attract new visitors.
- 1.6 Helen Smith of Rowan Tree Consulting would manage the project, with Hazel Anderson taking the lead on archaeological matters and Helen dealing directly with all interpretation-related work. We would propose bringing in Ken Mackinnon and/or Gill Murdoch of COMPASS to assist with the preparation of the Project Action Plan – particularly those aspects relating to capital and revenue costs, potential sources of funding and potential sources of income. Background information on Rowan Tree Consulting and COMPASS is attached.

### 2 PROPOSED APPROACH

- 2.1 In order to identify and cost potential projects, we would recommend that the following inter-related survey and plans are produced:

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- a. ***an archaeological survey*** – to identify the visible and accessible archaeological features in both of the areas, assess them in terms of their suitability for development/interpretation and identify any work which may be required to consolidate or conserve them if they are to be interpreted and promoted to the public. No excavation will be undertaken.
- b. ***an interpretive plan*** – to identify appropriate themes, objectives and methods of interpretation in relation to sites suitable for development/interpretation.
- c. ***a project action plan*** - a prioritised programme of possible projects, showing options for phasing where appropriate and including indicative timescales and costings.

### 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

- 3.1 The survey proposed would NOT be a full archaeological survey of the areas concerned but would aim instead to identify sites and structures which offer the potential to be interpreted and promoted to the public. We would intend to concentrate on upstanding monuments and visible features which are within easy walking distance of existing roads and paths (or which are located in places which could be linked in relatively easily to existing paths). We will also take into account public safety considerations. Last, but by no means least, we will look at the capacity of individual sites to accommodate increased visitors without incurring damage, and identify options for consolidation/conservation works where appropriate.
- 3.2 The survey would be undertaken in the following stages:
  - a. **Desk Based Assessment** – using sources including The Highland Council Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), The Highland Council Archives, The National Monuments Record, locally-held private records and other sources of local information, and any aerial photographic coverage of the area.
  - b. **Fieldwork: Walk-over survey** - A walk-over survey will be made of the two areas, to enable identification of any upstanding remains and visible features meeting the criteria outlined in para 3.1 above. All features noted will be photographed and located on a 1:2500 plan, and their general condition and position in terms of accessibility will also be recorded. We have included provision for obtaining a specialist technical opinion in terms of recommended approaches and likely costs of consolidating/conserving upstanding monuments such as Loch Croispol school and ruined houses at Ceannabeinne.
- 3.3 Details of any unexpectedly significant or complex discoveries made during the survey will be reported immediately to the Durness Development Group and to the Highland Council's Archaeology Unit.
- 3.4 The survey report will include:
  - Location plan showing the project area and archaeological sites and features affected. Grid references must be included.
  - Circumstances and objectives of this work, including a copy of this specification.
  - Weather and other conditions affecting fieldwork.
  - Scale plans, and photographs of all archaeological features noted.
  - A full index to any records or other material generated by the project including its location.
  - A brief analysis of the project results drawing in comparative data as appropriate, and a statement of the significance of the results for future research. Note that a negative result may itself be significant.

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- General comments and proposals for future archaeological projects arising from the carrying out of this project.
- 3.5 We will notify the Council's Assistant Curator (Archaeology) at Inverness Museum, before the survey commences. The Assistant Curator will in turn notify local museums of the fact that there is archaeological work ongoing in the area. Details of any finds will be recorded in the required format for Treasure Trove reporting and notified for Treasure Trove before the report is submitted.
- 3.6 We recommend that a copy of the final survey report be submitted to the Highland Council's Archaeology Service.
- 3.7 Copyright of the survey report will rest with the Durness Development Group Ltd.

### 4 INTERPRETIVE PLAN

- 4.1 As indicated above, the purpose of preparing the interpretive plan will be to identify appropriate themes, objectives and methods of interpretation in relation to sites considered suitable for development/interpretation once the archaeological survey had been undertaken.
- 4.2 The plan will be prepared in accordance with the strategic framework for interpretation promoted by Scottish Natural Heritage and endorsed by the Highland Council and other public agencies. We would propose the following approach:
  - a. Identify an appropriate over-arching interpretive theme for areas surveyed, along with a number of sub-themes exploring particular aspects of the main theme.
  - b. Identify SMART interpretive objectives, in consultation with Durness Development Group Ltd, for the interpretation, looking in particular at desired learning, behavioural and emotional outcomes for visitors to the various sites identified. These objectives might include:
    - Learning objectives – for example, achieving a situation where the majority of visitors to the sites interpreted will be able to describe the main features of Durness's archaeological landscape.
    - Behavioural objectives - for example, focusing on what the interpretation aims to encourage visitors to do as a result of their visit (for example, stay longer in the Durness area and/or visit other sites of archaeological or historical interest in the village).
    - Emotional objectives – for example, making local people and visitors feel that Durness's archaeological sites are an important resource which should be preserved and interpreted for the benefit of current and future generations.
  - c. Identify the audience (including various distinct market segments), using available visitor profile information for Sutherland and archaeological/historical interpretive facilities elsewhere in Britain or abroad.
  - d. Provide guidelines for the design of interpretive materials – taking account in particular of the need to make materials accessible to a wide range of users (including non-English speaking visitors and people with special needs) and looking at the incorporation of Gaelic within the interpretation.
  - e. Consider links with relevant sites both in Sutherland and further a field and make recommendations as to how information on these might be incorporated within interpretive materials in Durness.

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- f. Make practical recommendations as to how the interpretation of local sites could be monitored, evaluated and reviewed.

### 5 PROJECT ACTION PLAN

- 5.1 The overall aim of the Project Action Plan would be to recommend how the interpretation of the suitable sites identified during the survey process might be achieved. We will provide an Action Plan covering the area as a whole but will also identify key priority projects and possible options for taking forward the interpretation of individual sites on a phased basis while working to an overall interpretive plan.
- 5.2 The Project Action Plan will include indicative costings and timescales for the design and production of interpretation materials on a site by site basis, as well as estimated costings and timescales for other works which may be required (for example, paths, consolidation/conservation work and potential excavation/reconstruction projects). These individual costings will also be aggregated into a total estimated budget for the area as a whole.
- 5.3 We will consider not only capital costs but also ongoing revenue implications (for example grounds maintenance and maintenance/ refreshment of interpretive materials) – again, both on a site by site basis and for the area as a whole.
- 5.4 The Project Action Plan will, as required, highlight issues which may require to be addressed by the Durness Development Group - for example access and management issues, resources (personnel and budgetary etc) – in order to progress the interpretation of appropriate sites.
- 5.5 Potential sources of funding (capital and revenue) will be identified, along with recommended approaches for putting a funding package in place. The potential for generating income (for example, through sales of materials related to the sites and/or admissions will also be investigated).
- 5.6 The Plan will also identify potential spin-off tourism and other business development opportunities for local operators.
- 5.7 An outline marketing plan for implementation once interpretation starts being developed will be included in the Action Plan, along with indicative costings.

Visits have occurred and we are waiting on the final report.

### Mackay Country

Letters have been sent to the various Community Councils and the Northwest Sutherland Forum throughout the area and have been keeping the Sutherland Community Development Form involved in our aims and intentions. They have given the project their support. The venture is being planned for a long-term strategy in raising the awareness of the life and times and the ways of life, highlighting the undertakings that are currently going on, in the Land of Mackay. We wish to achieve this with a reference to the historical story of the Reay Country and develop a logical and coordinated approach to give the population of the area, visitors and potential visitors a view of a unique, interesting and coherent locality of the Scottish Highlands.

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We have discussed the outline of our project with a consultation company Seabridge and in their reply they stated:

*“We have addressed four questions. Firstly what do we see as the key issues facing the Group. Secondly, what skills and experience does Seabridge have to contribute? Thirdly, how can Peter Needham and I help, and finally, what might the cost be. The following sections address these four questions. Key Issues*

- 1. There is a need for a clear plan of action.*
- 2. Realism with respect to what can actually be achieved is essential too is. Realism about timescales.*
- 3. Group must think in terms of years, not months .*
- 4. A management process is needed to ensure that the action plan is implemented.*
- 5. Local ownership and action is essential, as is the involvement of a number of communities and community-based groups. We will be delighted to assist, but the plan is YOURS .*

As a rural business in an area facing similar problems to those experienced by the Durness Development Group, Seabridge is sympathetic towards the sorts of issues the Trust faces. We have worked with community groups and Trusts in the north of Scotland to develop strategies and plans to help them tackle the problems they face, and are experienced in facilitating the group discussions that are an essential way of securing involvement in the planning process.

*Peter Needham is an experienced designer and artist. As well as his design skills -essential in order to ensure effective communication- he is a trustee of the Westray Development Trust and of the Westray Buildings Preservation Trust, and is a Director of the limited company in respect of each. He played an active part in the preparation of the Westray Development Plan and remains involved in its implementation.*

*I was a founding trustee of the Orkney Archaeological Trust and served as honorary executive director during the early years of the Trust. Having retired as trustee I remain an adviser to the Trust. I assisted the Dunbeath Preservation Trust with its development and marketing plans, and am currently supporting the newly founded Caithness Archaeological Trust and Yarrows Trust. The majority of my consulting work is in tourism and heritage, particularly in the emerging genealogy tourism sector, in the UK and overseas.*

*Our web site [www.seabridge.org](http://www.seabridge.org) provides more information about the business.*

*How can Seabridge help?*

*We can help the Durness Development Group in a number of specific ways, as follows*

- Facilitating the development strategy formulation and planning process through discussions and workshops*
- Sharing our own practical experience of the process of development planning*
- Preparing strategy and plans on the group's behalf*
- Developing the Mackay Country brand*
- Developing promotional and other literature and media consistent with the brand and with the aims of the group*

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We believe that the whole development and communication process should be managed as a single entity from the outset and would propose to undertake any work with the group jointly i.e. both Peter and I would be involved throughout.”

The Development Group applied to Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise for initial funding for this and had a positive response. The Company were commissioned and the report has been widely circulated for feedback.

It is proposed that a response document is prepared and sets out the next stages and steps with a proposed budget and funding sources. A preliminary application has been submitted or is in process to the Communities Scotland Action Research Fund for some aspects of the development.

We have secured a domain name [www.mackaycountry.com](http://www.mackaycountry.com) and intend this to develop into a web site for the scheme. Before we start to build a site full of information we are seeking suggestions on the elements that should be included in a design. There are a few pages flagged on the site to start the discussion but the final designs are still to be decided. The information contained will appear as the project develops.

We are looking for feedback on all aspects of the activities that are happening within the in area. Any information about the group, individual and independent projects that could be mentioned with reference to the availability of further information could be included and used as basis for the activities currently being undertaken. The Mackay Country scheme could point people interested in specific aspects of Mackay to the appropriate quarter. We do not intend or wish to be replicating or imposing on any projects that are being carried out, only to work with these to raise their awareness and support where necessary and appropriate. A section of the site could serve as a reference to all the producers in the area whether food, crafts or otherwise. To this end people with this interest are invited to have their production process with relevant information included. For those with their own web site we could include a brief account and a link. For those without their own site we can include a more detailed account. Photographs and text can be supplied or we can arrange for photographs to be taken and text written.

The site could include a photographic gallery section of the Mackay Country. Villages and communities with their site could be linked. The eventual web site will have the potential to reach a lot of people and would be immense value to be a truly representative window to the project.

The development of the web site is underway.

We have made approaches to the Highland Council planning Department and Roads and Transport about signage. We envisage that the entrance roads to the area of MacKay Country be clearly identified and signed accordingly. It is a matter of an acceptable historical period being recognised as to where we ultimately acknowledge the boundary. This would be welcome point for opinion. We hope then to encourage the smaller villages and communities throughout the area to have an element of the sign included on their village signs. This will take a lot of agreement and co-ordination. The first steps are to decide on a suitable master design. This would be a job for a professional as there are many technical and legislative requirements to fulfil but we are seeking suggestions that can be included in a brief when we reach that point.

We believe that this project must work from the bottom up; the people in the area must bring the living characteristics and environment to the attention of the many people around the world with Highland connections and interests. The concept is to market the Mackay Country as a territory and destination of interest, fascination and curiosity as it has always been throughout history but how it is in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Leading from identification of schemes within the Mackay Country we have envisaged a trail be recognized to direct and lead people around the region. There could be a main site or project within

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the diverse selection of communities that acted as a staging post to other features within the same community delivering an opportunity to link with individuality the schemes that identify that community. This could tell a story of the country with links and cross-references. We would hope that accommodation and eating establishment and those wishing to be recognised, as part of the Mackay Country would become involved. It must be stressed that this is not seen as a clan MacKay project or only for the people with the surname Mackay living in the area. It is about the country of Mackay and what happens now and who lives here now. This is envisaged as a continual developing story that has to be included with the well-documented historical account. We wish to relate the undertakings and endeavours of today. To make this accomplishment possible it will require community groups and individuals working with their own schemes but coordinating and cooperating with others.

We are anxious that we do not undertake more than can be dealt with by the participants. For the present the Durness Development Group structure are comfortable to take the lead and develop the initiative but recommend that a wider range of representation be involved in the developing of a project plan. It is expected that we will enlist interest as the project evolves and individuals or sub groups may take on specific roles. We are aware that this is not just a Durness project

We will be using the results of the Seabridge consultations and our feedback to take the scheme to the next stage. We believe it important to clearly define attainable steps and work with a positive attitude to achieve these aims. The minutes of the meetings held in Durness have been circulated

This project is seen as a starting point to encompass the concept of the area in an identifiable locality and develop a marketing strategy that can be built on. There is a need for a clear plan of action with realism with respect to what can actually be achieved.. We are progressing towards preparing a management strategy plan and researching the possibility of developing the Mackay Country brand.

### **Durness – Dover and Specialist Holidays.**

Some progress is being made on this. The national recognised cycling club are very interested and we are working on a route they will endorse. They have come up with some suggestions regarding a marketing plan and I am currently working on this. I hope to have a draft pamphlet in the near future.

### **Purchase of 1 Bard Terrace**

The property is now in the ownership of the Development Group. Planning Change of use, building warrant and a right of access over the Highland Council car park is all in place.

The applications for the funds to allow the NWYI to alter the house in Bard Terrace have all been submitted. £16 has been secured for the refurbishment and furnishings of the property.

The purpose of this project is to acquire accommodation for multi-functional community uses. The Development group itself requires office facilities to house the proposed development officer. There are many voluntary groups within the village that will use the accommodation facility for general purposes and specifically office and administration services and facilities hired from the group. Agencies have indicated their requirement of office space in the village and CASE and the Highland Council have agreed in principal to lease rooms for this purpose.

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We require a building that will fulfil a diverse requirement of needs. It is an objective to work closely with the North West Youth Initiative to provide a facility in Durness that can be used as a cyber meeting point with facilities for teas/ coffee and mature recreation. This is recognised as an important step. Until 1994 all the children of secondary school age were hosted away from home to attend school and returned to their community at weekends. Parents found this unacceptable and pressurised the Education Department into building a secondary school within daily travelling distance. Much research was carried out at that time regarding the impact, and the solutions to the problems, which would arise, with having an age group in the community, which had been omitted for over forty years. All the evidence suggested that to ensure a proper development and a situation for young people to grow up into responsible adults, the community would have to adapt and provide facilities and pastimes of significance. The community realised that they had to work in partnership with their education, to supply the means for constructive interesting recreational pastimes. We are a community undergoing a slow and measurable change with an opportunity to direct the adolescence into constructive alternatives to detrimental behaviour.

The Durness Local Studies Group and the Durness Field Studies group- two separate entities have a requirement for storage and display space of archived material and this accommodation would fulfil this purpose. It is imperative that we remain flexible for the uses as we intend to continue to adapt to the requirements of the community.

The group itself is fulfilling a local need as detailed elsewhere. The acquisition of a property specifically addresses the need for the village to have an administration centre for co-ordination and developing community based projects. The independent territory will allow a location for employed and volunteer work that is a necessity for a constructive development of the community. Space to house material relevant to the village and archive material belonging to the village where access can be obtained is a need this project is addressing.

The key activities that will take place during this project are clearly defined as the acquisition and ownership of the property. During this time refurbishment and any structural improvements will be identified and costed. The alterations that are required for the change of use will be negotiated with the NWYI. This aspect of the property will be regarded as the financial responsibility of the NWYI and will be taken into account as part of a leasing arrangement.

The facilities that this project's success will allow are an integral part of the activities of the business as a whole. We will provide the conveniences for a presence of local representatives of the main agencies supplying services to the village. The results this will provide will be beneficial to the whole population of the parish. Information and advice for a wide range of local government services will be close to the point of requirement. The Development group will have achieved a result for the co-ordination and future local centralisation of community improvement.

The initial benefits we expect to give to the community from this project are the structural foundation and physical accomplishment for the initiation of community ideas. We will have the basis and the facility for the creation of employment. This we believe will have the long-term effect of retention of present employment. This Parish is currently suffering on all its mainstays, tourism, agriculture, fishing and fish farming with the loss of employment in all sectors. This project is the starting point of attacking the concerns at grass roots. We are broadening the economic base of the community and the group. New activities are being created with the aim for new income. We have to make local moves to help in decreasing the loss of income from the community.

This project has a wide range and high level of community backing. It has the support from individuals, community groups and local business. The group was established with encouragement from the community council and local enterprise company. Various groups within the village have discussed the project and this group was requested to establish the appropriate structures to activate the idea. The population of the parish is 320 The Durness development group has membership of 130 with representation from all sectors. Membership to make use of the projects accomplishment is not essential and any individual or group can utilise the facilities provided by the group and the services contained with in the property. This project is directly aimed at enhancing the local

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infrastructure with provision for local services. The provision of a property will allow easier access to information. The project will assist in providing a sustainable social aspect to the group. Acquisition of the property will allow an improved amenity for locals and visitors mainly in terms of display of interpretation. This will have an educational aspect.

We have arranged for a supervisor/ liaison officer for the job of overseeing the facility and reporting to the Development Group. Funding of £4000 has been secured from CED, Case and SIP

The group has also undertaken three events that will in part have an element to celebrate and commemorate the Queens Golden Jubilee. Each of the events will be assisted to provide materials or resources that will collectively involve the village community in additional activities.

1. Down memory lane. The children and youths of the village are having prepared a buffet picnic lunch and inviting all the residents over 60 years old. They will ask the senior citizens to recall their memories of the queen's coronation and how they see times have changed. This will be recorded on video and photographic film and written to electronic media adding to our local history archives of life and times by recording people's memories.
2. The Highland Gathering is adding another event to their programme for the children of the parish. This event will become an annual activity and will be recognised as a mark of the Queens Golden Jubilee. To initiate the inaugural year some of the grant will be used to sponsor the event.
3. Local Food Producers International Cuisine using local produce purchased from local producers and prepared locally into a variety of dishes by local residents. We have asked the different nationalities that live within our community to prepare dishes from their country of origin. This is truly and international and cosmopolitan event involving the multi cultural nature of the village. Cooks will be representing food from around the world German, Spanish, Italian, Indian, South African, Belgian, Austrian, Scottish, Turkish and Russian. We will be recording the current cultural diversity within the community and initiating a food producers group to encourage and promote using local produce. This event will be combining a range of community activities with musical performances.

A consultation process is in progress with studio 17 regarding developing a scheme to produce video film footage in close liaison with the community. We are researching the possibilities of funding an initial one-year project for consultants to organise workshops and involve all sections of the community in the project. An application for Funding from the Esme Foundation was rejected.

Ronald Lansley  
Director/Company Secretary  
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