

**DURNESS DEVELOPMENT GROUP  
LIMITED**

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**Secretary's Annual Report Year ending 2003**

**Introduction**

This is the second full year of the Durness Development Group and the Group is becoming a recognised body both within the Community and outside as an organisation working with the community to the benefit of the locality. The structure has given the group a formal base to initiate and commission several projects. The view of commissioning expertise and specific requirements for projects or aspects of schemes has been employed where relevant. This has meant that overall management and administration has had to be undertaken by the secretary and treasure. This has limited the amount of commitment able to be undertaken. A portion of funding for admin and management has been built into any project the group has taken on or applied for funding to but this would not cover the funds to employ an overall administrator to manage and direct the group. Work has started on a comprehensive job description for such a post and will require a considerable amount of community consultation to develop a suitable remit. Employing the person with the correct approach, should such an opportunity arise, would be the key to a successful community company reaching a full potential with community support.

**Archaeology**

The year started with the Report being received from Rowan Tree Consultants on the two cultural and environmental schemes, Ceannabeinne and the Ruined School at Crospoil. This was and circulated around the community for comments and feedback. All feedback was positive and it was recommended that the project be moved to the next stage. A Meeting with Helen Smith re next stage was arranged later in the year and the outcome was to request the consultant to pursue the best option. The consultant has built fees into the next stage and is currently discussing with the Highland Council and agencies to put the proposal in for funding. Copies of the Reports are on file.

**Bard Terrace**

In January Elaine Shaw was employed as Supervisor of Bard Terrace with funding from Case and CED. 2 applications for the post were received and interviews were held with representation from the NWYI.

In April we had the formal Opening of the Community House in Bard Terrace. All the funding was in place, the alterations carried out to building controls satisfaction and the planning criteria met. A good turn out of local people and agencies with a great deal of positive publicity was achieved. The facility is in two parts, the lower floor for the NWYI and the offices on the upper floor. Along with the weekly use by the project officer of the North Sutherland Community Development Forum the BBC rented the office for a week and CASE have held open days. The local Project Worker for the SIP has leased an office. The 1<sup>st</sup> Year Report for Bard Terrace to Land Unit had to be written prepared and submitted.

The computers in Bard Terrace have been successful and well used. Funds have been accumulating but a more secure method of collection would be beneficial. They have required some maintenance and have been restored and maintained as necessary. Lately some pornographic material has been found. This has led to a more secure system of access being introduced.

There is currently an ongoing correspondence with rates valuation and charities appeal for Bard Terrace. We expect to be eligible for at least 80% rate reduction but putting forward a case for 100% reduction.

A Youth worker application been submitted to Community Fund for a 3 year post. This project is to provide a supervisor - coordinator and leader for all the groups that involve youths in the parish of Durness..

We have several local groups that are run by volunteers and each has an aspect of youth input. We wish to coherently develop a plan and schedule to ensure that the established clubs continue to provide with expertise an opportunity for the young of the parish. Our proposed worker would work closely with all the clubs to develop an ongoing program of activities and workshops, maintaining the required administration for the youth aspect and organizing workshops and sessions specifically for the younger age group.

The proposed worker would work closely with the present volunteer leaders and organizing club committees to release the growing pressure on volunteers and provide a professional approach to the diverse activities currently available.

The proposed worker would build on what has already been achieved working in harmony with all of the clubs, seeking and identifying where overlaps occur and direct the clubs to avoid any duplication. A proposed worker will co-ordinate the youth aspects to ensure a full and comprehensive cover for opportunity in all the activities is available.

The proposed worker will become involved in all the groups that are appropriate and make links with clubs involving potential youth input now and in the future.

The Development Group are currently co-ordinating and employing a one to one mentor for a child to attend all the community activities. Funding is being sought for a more permanent post but through the KLB high school community liaison group and SIP funds are in place until March.

## Mackay Country

The project as a whole aims to re-identify the area of North West Sutherland in which the Clan Mackay predominated, focussing not only on the area in its historical context but also what life is like in the area today. This scheme is about identifying Mackay Country as it is today and showing direction for the future. It must be from the grass routes of today and not be a retelling of the past but encompassing the past and all the societies that archive and interpret the preceding times. Mackay Country is not just the historical homeland of the clan but today offers a much wider perspective and this is what the concept of Mackay Country is based on. Actual borders and exact locations of boundaries are theoretical depending on the events and periods from the past recognised embracing the multi cultural population who live and work in Mackay Country now.

The Development Group regarding Mackay Country has closely involved the North Sutherland Development Forum in the discussions and interpretation of the concept put forward. Funding was received from this Forum to pursue **the signage strategy**. With the funding came the services of the project officer one day a week in Durness. The secretary has been meeting with the project worker and visiting gateways and drawing to gether a document to be distributed to community councils and groups in the area for finer detailing. All the Community Councils in Mackay Country have been visited and there support enlisted. Ongoing reports have been made to the forum. There are six road gateways into Mackay country and we envisage that each is identified with a subtle landmark that will in the first instance mark a entrance into somewhere that is conceived to be an area with an identity other than political and geographical. This should be innocuous, be in sympathy with the environment interesting and appropriate.

**SCARF Back to the Future** stage 1 was secured and we Commissioned Issy MncPhail to assist with the Stage 2 SCARF application. This was successful and the Back to the Future project is ready to be initiated. With the SCARF application were applications to Lotteries Community Fund and the Sutherland Partnerships Graduate placement scheme and CED/CASE

The Community Fund passed the application to Heritage Lotteries and further details were required. We received notification that Heritage Lotteries could take until the end of the year to make a decision. Sutherland Partnership withdrew their funding but negotiators are ongoing with CASE and if a positive result is received from Heritage Lotteries we should be able to fulfil the funding package.

Our Research Question is what is MacKay Country today, what was it in the past and what do we want it to be in the future?

Our Aims are

- To find a way of gathering together all of the research, writing and other types of accounts or images relating to MacKay Country
- To complement these sources with a new oral and visual record created during the project

- Using these sources to create a MacKay Country Area Profile which speaks to people's everyday lives, concerns and aspirations through a range of media (instead of just reports and socio-economic approaches)
- Creation of vibrant, multi-media 'Area Profile' - this will be the start of the creation of MacKay Country's 'Back to the Future' events and materials - a video, a book, a B&B 'Bedroom Pack', a schools pack, an exhibition, dissemination of the findings by local young people through the oral tradition at a range of events and a launch event.

From a suggestion through the NWSCDF a funding application for an **Intervillage Marketing** scheme was prepared. This includes video recording, web development, collection of pictures and text for a draft brochure on Mackay Country. Successful Applications were submitted to Leader +, SNH SIP CASE. All on File) Tenders were invited by placing adverts in the local paper and local notices. Only one applicant and Studio 17 was Commission (Briefs and Tender on file). This scheme is underway and will be reported on separately. As the secretary in personally involved delegation of the Developments Groups liaison is with other directors. Studio 17 reports to those directors. We want to bring people with diverse interests that make up the character of the area into a completed achievement that represents the different and varied features of the locality This project is about taking the project to the people of Mackay Country, listening to the contribution from the various sections, recording the inputs and delivering a concept in three medias.

- Produce digital video footage of a diverse nature with areas of specific interest throughout one year in Mackay Country. On completion it is envisaged that there would be relevant and copious footage of all aspects recorded showing the ways of life and the various activities, scenic, environmental, cultural and historical that represent the locality.
- Compile and draft for circulation a pioneer brochure that depicts the Mackay Country
- Gather information that can be included in the continual development of the Mackay Country web site

The scheme is also importantly about ensuring the concept of Mackay Country is continually taken to and discussed in all of the villages and communities. Each village and community will have video recordings made depicting the area with local input. Each locality having it's own determination of their recording with themes and threads running through the whole area known as Mackay Country. Several visits would have to be made to the communities and villages to record their input at different times of year and during any events that were to be incorporated. People that would be prepared to be interviewed on relevant topics would have to be identified and where appropriate arrangements made to carry this out.

The 3 projects undertaken are all interlinked and the aim for the summer of 2004 is to have the gateway signs in situation and the Mackay Country brochure distributed making a first step in the reidentification and highlighting of the area s an entity.

There are several further ideas for the development of the Mackay Country Scheme and effort is being made to ensure that momentum and enthusiasm is maintained. This is important for the population to see results and ideas being put into practice. It is also recognised that each scheme must be thoroughly thought through and the work involved understood and able to be executed prior to initiating the project. This is the nature of project that could become overwhelming and befall into misunderstood complexities.

## Estate

In March The Development Group were asked from the grazing committee to arrange a meeting with community representatives and the Durness Estate to research "What can be done for the good of the community with the Durness Common Grazings?"

This led to Liaison with the Scottish Land Unit & HIE and applying to these agencies for funding to commission consultants to carry out 2 feasibility studies

We had to Write 2 Consultants briefs, (Drafts were first circulated to all those attending the meeting in March) one for renewable energy, and one for a general feasibility study. These we then put to tender. - Distributed and liaison with consultants during the process. In September the consultants were commissioned and an inaugural meeting with community representation and the estate has been held. The tenders, briefs Funding applications are on file.

## **Feasibility study on Durness Estate**

- To evaluate the feasibility of Community ownership of Durness Estate Common Grazings and inbye land and encourage community involvement
- To give the community an opportunity to understand the true potential of the estate and address the needs of the inhabitants.
- To ensure that the present population does all that is necessary to ensure that the future of the locality is socially, environmentally and economically secure.
- To be able to have a input in determining any developments of the area ensuring that the quality of life is kept paramount.
- To facilitate positive use of the land and enhance the environmental diversity improving opportunities and reducing local disadvantage

## **Renewable Energy feasibility study on Durness Estate**

- To evaluate the feasibility of developing a renewable energy programme on Durness Estate and encouraging community involvement and participation in any subsequent renewable energy developments
- To provide the community with an understanding of the potential for renewable energy on the estate and local capacity for both construction and maintenance, i.e., engineering, trades etc
- To facilitate positive use of the land and enhance the environmental diversity improving opportunities and reducing local disadvantage through (amongst other things) exploitation of renewable energy opportunities

## Other Business

- On behalf of the village an advert was taken out in the Day Tripper Village Marketing, encouraging people in the Highlands to visit Durness
- A meeting was held with the Grazing Committee clerk and Mark Brennan Crofting Commission regarding the Crofting Community Development Scheme- It was discussed that the Development Group could umbrella an application in this scheme from the Grazing committee and Gardening Group. Although it was a financial rewarding scheme the complex implications have dictated no further progress.
- The secretary attended a Meeting in Tongue with Eann Sinclair CASE, Anna Macconnell, CED Issy Mc Phial the stage1 scarf mentor to discuss the present and possible future projects of the Development Group.
- Details of packages to encourage recycling schemes were received. Due to the imminent feasibility studies on the estate this was delayed.
- A Membership drive letter distributed along with individual lobbying has proved successful. Membership is at 50 and new members are coming forward.
- The Pier group made an Enquiry about the pros and cons of setting up anew structure or using the Development Group to progress the project. A detailed response (on file about setting up a company limited by guarantee with charitable status was given in reply).
- The secretary met regularly with the Treasurer and updated the chairman on the activities regarding carrying out the agreed projects.
- Meeting with GUARD to discuss a five-year plan for Archaeology digs working closely with the Development group. This idea is waiting on the draft summery from GUARD.
- The secretary met with and discussed Village Hall site with small housing trust, Community Council and Cllr. Keith. This was at the request to Estate factor Ian Wilson. This process is progressing and understood to require a plan for use of the site to be proposed within 18 months.
- Roxanne Meechan Arts Development Officer – Sutherland The Highland Council To work with Young People of all abilities from 14 to 25 years of age living in Social Inclusion Partnership areas within the Highland Region to produce both individual and group work (collaborative) visual and sound material (animation, film, video and new media). The Artwork produced will be projected & displayed in Public places involving the whole community in a sharing/ showcase event.

- Met with Lord Thurso twice at his request to discuss the Development Group and in particular Mackay Country projects.
- On behalf of the community and through the Community Council with the suggestion form CASE and Application to Calor Community awards was submitted. Durness was short listed in 3 categories and was visited by the 5 judges. This was given great commitment from all the groups of the community and we gave a united presentation on behalf of the village. The outcome is currently unknown.
- The Development Group joined the association of Highlands and Islands heritage Societies
- Met Jean Sandison and working with other village groups to write and submit outlines of proposals that can be included in a package of funding.
- Japanese contingency Visit regarding work of the Development Group
- Indian Contingency Visit regarding the Developments Groups Youth concerns.

## **Future**

Noted here are points that are worthy of discussion as they are pertinent to the future of the Group.

- The North Sutherland Community Development Forum is coming to a conclusion
- New projects- Ideas, research development and funding. The current situation regarding this from volunteers is perhaps at the limit and this could be the biggest stumbling block facing the group
- Training Group