

DURNESS DEVELOPMENT GROUP LIMITED

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We are seeking funding to preserve the history of Loch Croispol schoolhouse, which was built by the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge to provide education for local children, gives us a fascinating insight into education and society in the Highlands in the 18th Century and early part of the 19th Century. The school was built on church land in 1766 by the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge and supported by the Presbytery of Tongue and the Rev Murdoch MacDonald of Tongue. The SSPCK was set up in 1709 and aimed to establish schools in the Highlands and Islands in order to promote Christian learning and to help stamp out Roman Catholicism and Gaelic. This sub-theme could look at who build the school and why, the influence of the SPCK and its role in encouraging the use of English (and discouraging the use of Gaelic) by Highland children, the story of other schools in the area and the introduction of compulsory education later on in the Century. There is a great deal of potential to research the school house further – both by researching SPCK and other archival material and by investigating the structure itself to see if light can be shed on how it may have looked and functioned when it was complete. The schoolhouse is an interesting site its in own right, and there are various possibilities for consolidating the building, researching its history and interpreting it to the public. As the building is currently in a very fragile condition, priority must be given to stabilising it to avoid further deterioration and to make it safe for public access.

Our project will leave a permanent legacy. After the work is carried out there will be detailed record and physical interpreted cultural building that is otherwise falling into a state of ruin. Our project is created in the ethos of creating sustainable communities, where people can live and work in attractive, healthy and accessible environments. We foster the initiative of people working together to create places where a better quality of life is achievable now and for the long term. our comprehensive approach is the creation of “places” which have identity and which have benefits for the wider area, the existing community, the people who will live and work there and the environment. With our research and interpreting we will increase the public appreciation and enjoyment of this historic environment. We try to create places that will be inherently sustainable as a result of their enduring appeal. Our project fits well in the local landscape, maximise the opportunities of the location and is fully Integrated into the bigger picture. Our aim is to create places which meet current requirements and which can

evolve to meet changing circumstances and thus have continuing relevance with longevity without leaving any damaging effect for future generations

We believe this project will deliver all Historic Scotland objectives. our summary of the work we plan to undertake will involve

Carry out in association with local footpaths officer, countryside ranger, Local Access panel, risk assessment and to Stabilise schoolhouse to prevent further deterioration and make safe for public access In consultation with archaeologists, building control and builder

We will involve volunteers with a professional researcher into archival materials (for example, SPCK records and plans etc) too encourage the development of local skills and knowledge. And commission archaeologists to undertake limited archaeological excavation to shed more light on how the schoolhouse might have looked and functioned when in use as a school where there would be scope for community involvement in these activities.

We plan to install way markers directing public to schoolhouse with small interpretive panels and include schoolhouse site on programme of Countryside Ranger guided walks (and/or look at opportunities for other local people to provide guided walk service). Findings of archival and archaeological research will be incorporated into the production of a leaflet guider.

The area appears to be abundant in archaeological remains from a variety of periods. Good examples of a number of different types of features are visible, and it seems likely that further, currently unrecorded, features will be identified during future fieldwork. We believe that there is excellent potential to interpret the area sensitively for the benefit of both local residents and visitors to the Durness area.

The Loch Croispol area is scattered with remains from different periods and although it is a particularly rich archaeological landscape, the types of features you see here can also be seen in variety of other locations around Sutherland.

1. we would aim to help visitors to the site identify the main types of archaeological features visible – particularly burial cairns, hut circles, pre-clearance settlement remains and “ improved” agricultural landscapes – and aim to encourage them to look for other examples as they travel around Sutherland
2. The features here belong to a range of different archaeological periods from prehistoric times onwards and give us interesting clues about why and how people lived here at these different times. We would aim to set the various types of features visible within an archaeological timeline for visitors, and give them an idea of the way of life of the people who built and used the features. Interpretation could look at why small settlements were situated in such seemingly isolated positions, the type of building visitors are likely to find and why they were abandoned. This encompasses issues such as the Bronze Age and subsequent climate change, the early church at Balnakeil and links with St Maolrubha, the Reay Lords, agricultural improvements, fishing, the Highland Clearances, crofting and tourism etc.
3. The limestone landscape was good for farming and also provides a special habitat for plants, some of which would have been used in folk medicine, cooking and dying cloth for thousands of years we would explore the limestone geology of the area and the

lime-loving plants which can be seen in the fields and on the hillside. Interpretation would include identification of plants and details of traditional folk uses in the form of an environmental report.

4. Loch Croispol is part of a bigger archaeological and historical jigsaw – here are other places which have interesting stories to tell about the area’s past. We would look at related sites in the Durness and North-west Sutherland area and encourage visitors to go and see them – including, for example, Balnakeil Church, House and Corn-mill; Ceannabeinne, Laid (prehistoric remains plus role as clearance settlement), Strathnaver Museum and Strathnaver Archaeology Trail, Assynt historic/archaeological site with exploration of the relationship between the features

We would produce visual as well as audio material in the form of video and photograph. A display would be incorporated into the Durness TIC. A completed video would take 2 forms.

- An explanation and recording of the project and all its aspects ongoing and completed.
- A edited documentary of the historical and heritage of the area with particular reference to the history and story of the school and its role in Scottish Education
 - Recoded all aspects of the project with interviews with all involved at every aspect. Compiling storyboards for developing Edited footage into programmes available for diverse uses writing and copying to DVD

There is a community website which carries information on the Loch Croispol site as well as a wealth of other information on the Durness area. Any new interpretive material produced for Loch Croispol will be incorporated within the website, along with hyperlinks to relevant external websites. Wherever possible, these should be set up on a reciprocal basis. Involve Durness web keeper and supply information to update web pages during the project and compile a section on the project.

Tenders are invited for aspects of the work

Archaeology
Research
Artist
Video
Leaflet production

Further information and tenders with quotes should be directed to Durness Development group