

New Office/Information Centre Set to Go Ahead in 2010

The Trust was delighted to receive confirmation of approval by the Regional Proposal Assessment Committee (RPAC) of the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) Rural Priorities grant application at the end of December. The application was for 50% of total eligible estimated costs (£108,000), with the remainder to be met from reserves.

Trust Administrator Joanne Murray is co-ordinating the project, reporting to the Executive Committee. Kirsty MacLeod is to deal with the grant claims.

Service connection applications have been made and quotations for the building itself have been obtained.

Meanwhile, the building warrant application is underway and ground works are expected to proceed very soon.

The planning approval is for a timber frame building with wood cladding and a slate roof, to be sited on the B869 Lochinver to Drumbeg road, between Rhu Stoer Village Hall and the Albyn houses at Lochend. The existing car park is to be extended as part of the project, and will be shared by the two buildings with a footpath leading to the Trust office.

There is a joint proposal with the Hall Committee to site two 6kW wind generators on the hill behind — one

for each building. This will not only help to meet renewable energy targets for the area, but by selling excess capacity to the grid should significantly offset running costs if not result in a net income to both groups. Grant applications are being made simultaneously. Thanks go to Director Bob Cook who has taken this forward.

The new building will be used as the main base for ACT, making the Trust

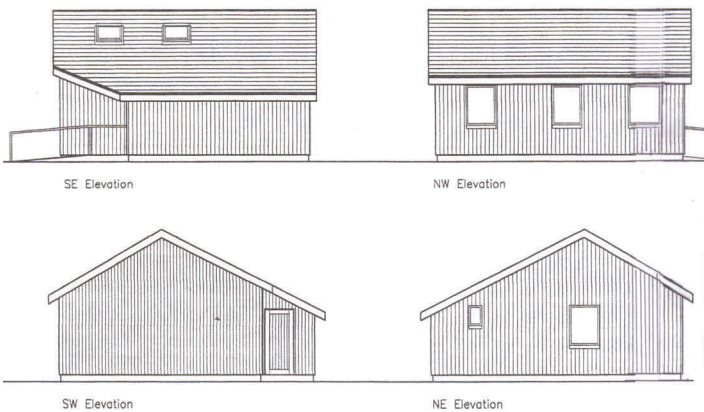
Crofting Administrator will be based in the building. As well as face to face access to ACT, local businesses and individuals will have access to information on crofting, grants and so on, as well as access to facilities such as colour printer, photocopier, fax and PCs with internet access (e.g. for on-line filing of agricultural returns, SDRP applications and general research).

Visitors to the area will be able to find out more about the Trust's history, and about the estate itself. Information will be available on angling, stalking, and other outdoor activities, as well as crofting, local history, local wildlife and community activities.

It is proposed to create a further part-time post in order for the facility to be manned full time during the summer months, when there are many visitors in the area. This post could be filled by a student, for example.

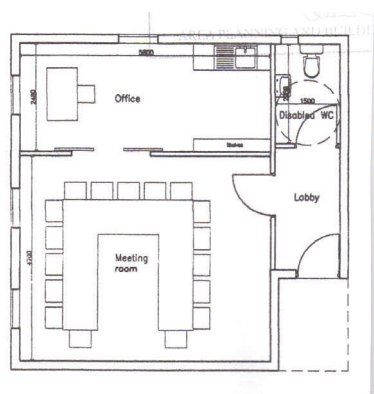
The facility will be used for training courses, meetings and other events, while not crossing into the activities of Stoer Hall. The Trust currently holds its Board Meetings, AGM and General Meeting in the Hall, and provides an annual donation to the Hall Committee. This donation will continue after the new building is in use.

Chairman Allan MacRae said "It is heartening to see this development going ahead. A proper base for the Trust is long overdue, and has been discussed for a good many years now. Hopefully this will help to show people what can be achieved with hard work and determination — and a bit of patience!"



more accessible to its members, other local residents and visitors to the area.

The part-time Administrator, the Secretary to the Board and the



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Fishing Permit Sales up Again

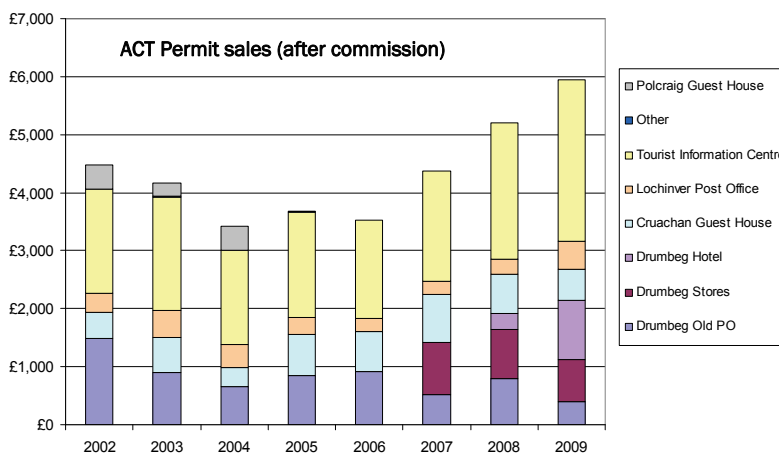
Permit sales increased by 14% in 2009, continuing the rising trend of recent years. Gross sales totalled £6,600, of which 10% commission went to the various vendors. The increase has been virtually across the board with all outlets showing improvement (taking three Drumbeg sellers as a combined total).

The Trust would like to thank all permit vendors. Special thanks to Non Macleod for many years of invaluable

support, both at the Post Office after her retirement. Non will continue to sell bank permits to her regulars. Many thanks also to Maggie and Denis Campbell at Cruachan Guest House, who will no longer be selling permits after this season.

Drumbeg Hotel and

Drumbeg Stores are to jointly take over the issuing of boat permits for Loch na Loinne, Loch Braighe, Loch Poll and Gorm Loch Mor from Non, and for Loch Crocach, Lexy's Loch, Manse Loch, Loch an Tuirc and Loch cul Fraoch from Cruachan.



Deer Stalking

Gross fees from commercial stalking were up 7% to £7,175 in the 2009/10 season. This is still below 2007/08 figure of £8,350, but there has been a conscious effort to cap numbers due to activities of neighbouring estates, notably Quinag. A reduction in revenue from venison sales led to a slight drop in net income to the Trust after stalkers' and booking fees. Bookings are on track for 2010/11 season.

Enquiries are now being dealt with by the General Administrator. Bookings can also be made directly with the main stalker, Calum Millar in Drumbeg (01571 833364, mobile 07768 106158).

Crofting Reform Bill

The Draft Bill received the backing of the Scottish Parliament on 13th May 2010. The bill will now return to the Rural Affairs Committee for further in-depth scrutiny before returning for a final vote in the Holyrood chamber.

The first version of the Bill included two controversial provisions; the grant of Standard Securities over croft tenancies and an occupancy requirement applying to decrofted house sites. The largely negative responses led the Scottish Government to drop these proposals and a second draft was published on 10th December 2009.

The second draft covers:

The Crofters Commission

The Crofters Commission will become responsible for promoting the interests of crofting and implementing regulation. Crofting development will pass to Highland and Islands Enterprise. Crofting grants therefore fall out of the Scottish Rural Development Programme.

The Commission will report annually to Scottish Ministers, assessing issues affecting crofting communities and the contribution crofting makes to sustainable development.

Creation of a definitive Crofting Register

Registration may be voluntary by a crofter or compulsory at trigger events which are:-

- Transfer of ownership
- Enlargement or division of a croft
- Exchange or assignation
- Succession
- The making, variation or reversion of a Resumption Order
- Approval of letting under Section 23(3) of the 1993 Act
- Consent to the grant of a "Short Lease" by an owner/occupier
- A de-crofting direction

Scottish Ministers may modify this list.

Applications will be submitted to the Crofting Commission which

will check the application against its existing register and forward it to the Keeper of the Land Register.

If the application is accepted the Keeper will issue a certificate to the applicant and the Commission confirming the registration.

Various interested parties will be notified by the Commission:-

- The owner and the landlord of the croft
- The owner of any adjacent croft
- The landlord of any adjacent croft
- The crofter of any adjacent croft
- The owner occupier of any adjacent croft

A non-crofter neighbour or a township which does not lie adjacent will not be notified. Interested parties will have the right to challenge the registration via the Land Court within six months from the date the Commission receives the Certificate of Registration.

There will be a right of appeal to the Lands Tribunal against any act or omission by the Keeper and a right for anyone suffering loss as a result of a mistake by the Keeper to be indemnified for that loss.

Duties of Crofters and Owner/Occupiers

The Bill requires crofters to put crofts to productive use and to reside on or within 16 kilometres of their crofts, unless with the Commission's consent.

Owner/occupiers will no longer be landlords of vacant crofts but will have their own special status as owner/occupiers with the same obligations as tenants. The Commission may consent to an owner/occupier leasing without conferring security under the Crofting or Agricultural Holdings Acts for a period not exceeding 10 years (a "Short Lease").

Resumption and De-crofting

The Land Court and the Crofting Commission, as appropriate, will have to take account of the effect resumption or decrofting will have on the sustainability of (a) crofting (b) the crofting community (c) the landscape or (d) the environment in/of the locality.

The Commission need not consider a de-crofting application if it

(Contd. p3)

TOWNSHIP DIRECTORS ELECTIONS 2009

In 2009, Ray MacKay, Donnie Macleod and Anne MacCrimmon were re-elected as township directors for Achmelvich, Drumbeg and Nedd, respectively.

The appointments were confirmed at the Board Meeting following the AGM, along with the re-appointment of the Executive Committee. John Mackenzie and Hugh MacRae (both Culkein Drumbeg) were once again co-opted as Directors.

Two new Directors were also co-opted—Willie Macleod (Achmelvich) and Iain “Sheffield” Matheson (Clachtoll). Both are well known to most in the area and very welcome additions to the Board. Willie is to assist Ray MacKay with looking after the boats on the estate. Iain is Area Assessor for the Crofters Commission.

Following Issie MacPhail’s recent resignation, there will be an election for Clashmore & Raffin this year instead of next.

FORTHCOMING TOWNSHIP ELECTIONS

2010: Achnacarnin, Balchladich, Clachtoll, Stoer, Clashmore & Raffin

2011: Culkein Drumbeg, Culkein Stoer, Clashnessie, Torbreck

2012: Achmelvich, Drumbeg and Nedd

NEW CROFTING ADMINISTRATOR APPOINTED

The Trust is pleased to welcome John Robinson, Nedd, to the team, as the new Crofting Administrator.

Following Kirsty MacLeod’s decision to step down after four years, the post was advertised and interviews were held in December. The Board approved the new appointment at a special meeting on 14th December. The handover process began in mid-January.

John grew up on a poultry farm in Yorkshire. As a young man he studied Medical Science at St Andrews University, and, more recently, Rural Resource Management at Plymouth. In between he worked as a tractorman on an arable farm in Fife, then as a technician and later a Drilling Fluid Engineer in the oil industry—work which took him all over the world.

John, who moved to Assynt in 2003, is an active crofter in Nedd. He has also been retained lighthouse keeper for Northern Lighthouse Board since 2004, looking after Stoerhead and Loch Eriboll lights.

All crofting administration enquiries should be directed to John, whose contact details can be found on p4. Enquiries of a general nature should be made to the Secretary or General Administrator.

Crofters’ Bull Hire Scheme to Continue

A modern, streamlined bull stud facility will continue to be run by the Scottish Government to secure the quality of livestock in crofting areas, it was announced in February.

Roseanna Cunningham today agreed to upgrade the Government’s bull stud farms at Inverness and maintain the Crofters’ Bull Hire Scheme. However she emphasised that, in the long term, communities should keep and maintain their own bulls.

The Environment Minister said:

“The best way to ensure the continued quality of livestock in crofting areas is a reduced, streamlined stud base at Inverness.

“I asked the Review Group to consider community-run studs. They concluded that this is not practicable in the short term for a number of reasons.

“Nevertheless, my long-term view remains that communities should provide this facility for themselves. Community groups should start to build their own capacity with a view to running studs where bulls are needed most.”

A Crofters’ Bull Hire Scheme has been funded and operated by the Government since 1897. The scheme has enabled crofters to access high quality bulls and supply quality calves to the beef industry throughout Scotland. The Government subsidises bull hire by some 60 per cent of the full cost. The most recent scheme, the Crofters Cattle Quality Improvement Scheme, was introduced in 2005, hiring bulls at a fee of £500, plus an overwintering charge of £350, £80 towards transport costs and £17 for insurance as well as VAT.

Between 2006 and 2008, on average, 120 bulls were hired to approximately 450 participants in 106 crofting townships. These bulls served 4083 cows in 2008 out of a total of 28,315 cows held on crofts, representing 14 per cent of crofters cows.

The Shucksmith Inquiry, reporting in May 2008, recommended that support for bull hire should change. The then Minister for Environment, Michael Russell, announced the setting up of an independent Review Group to look at ways of helping crofters keep or hire bulls in the future. This group was chaired by Sarah Allen, and tasked to look at the objectives of a bull scheme and identify practical and affordable options for maintaining quality livestock in crofting areas. The Group reported to ministers at the end of November 2009.

Crofting Reform Bill (contd. from p2)

has asked for the submission of re-letting proposals and the period for submission has not expired or no proposals have been submitted. Accordingly, de-crofting orders will not be given unless there is evidence that a vacant croft cannot be re-let.

Clawback provisions

The period in which landlords who have sold croft land to a crofter may share in the value will increase from 5 to 10 years.

This does not address the loophole in MacDonald v Whitbread 1991 SLR 23 and 1992 SLR 59 by which the clawback is avoided if the crofter nominates a non-family member to take title and title goes direct to that person.

(Source: Anderson Strathern, Solicitors)

Reach 80% of households in North Assynt - and further afield - through the ACT Newsletter Notice Board

ACT Meetings 2008/2009

Board Meetings 2010

Monday 25th January
Monday 22nd March
Monday 17th May
Monday 12th July
Monday 20th September
Monday 1st November
[Executive Committee meetings are held in the intervening months]

Annual General Meeting

Monday 28th June 2010

General Meeting

Monday 13th December 2010

ALL WELCOME

Please contact the Secretary or Administrator if you have any comments on the Newsletter or if there is anything in particular you would like to be included in the next issue.



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or admin@assyntcrofters.co.uk

www.assyntcrofters.co.uk

ACT Mission Statement:

“To manage the Estate in such a way as to conserve and advance the social and economic livelihood of the communities, and to foster, preserve and improve the natural environment”.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Dr Isobel MacPhail

Issie MacPhail has recently resigned as Director for Clashmore & Raffin. The Trust was very disappointed by the news, and would like to thank Issie for her many contributions over the years.

Issie continues as Clerk of Grazings for Clashmore & Raffin, and a Board Member of the Crofters Commission.

Drumbeg Village Hall – Extension & Renovation Project

An application to SRDP Rural Priorities was submitted on behalf of Drumbeg Development Association in February, for consideration in the Spring round of RPAC meetings. The outcome of the application, for up to 90% of eligible capital costs (a newly increased intervention rate for community groups), should be known in May.

The project has already been awarded a grant of £12,000 from the Highland Cultural Programme, and hopefully further assistance will be forthcoming from the Highland Council's Ward Discretionary Fund and HIE Community Development. There is around £12,000 in the bank from fundraising activities and donations to date. If anyone would like further information on the project, contact DDA office bearers Andy Saunders (Nedd), Anne MacCrimmon (Drumbeg) or Derek Spencer (Culkein Drumbeg).

New Estate Signs

New Trust signs will be put in place shortly at the Stron viewpoint, Stoerhead Lighthouse car park, Drumbeg viewpoint and Glenleraig, replacing the old signs which are in poor repair as well as being out of date.

Vermin Control

With a number of crofters reporting significant losses of newborn lambs and poultry to fox predation, the Trust has contracted an experienced gamekeeper who has recently moved to the area to assist crofters with vermin control. Numbers have apparently increased since the demise of the Fox Club several years ago.

ACT Directors, Office Bearers & Grazings Clerks – contact details (tel. prefix 01571)

Executive Committee:

Allan MacRae (Chairman)
Donnie Macleod (Vice Chairman)
Ray MacKay

Supported by:

Ian Colston (Secretary to the Board) (855345)
Joanne Murray (Administrative Assistant) (855298)
John Robinson (Crofting Administrator) (833251)

Township Directors

Achmelvich - Ray MacKay, Redbraes, Achmelvich (844337)
Achnacarnin - Iain C MacKenzie, The Gate (855241)
Balchladich - Ian A MacKenzie, Bordan, Balchladich (855315)
Clachtoll - Bob Cook, 132 Clachtoll (855301)
Clashmore & Raffin - vacant
Clashnessie - Roddie Kerr, Hill Cottage, Clashnessie (855359)
Culkein Drumbeg - Marion Macleod, Polchapple (833245)
Culkein Stoer - John Morrison, Cnoc Uaine, Culkein (855331)
Drumbeg - Donnie Macleod, 340 Drumbeg (833256)
Nedd - Anne MacCrimmon, Crithinn, Drumbeg (833237)
Stoer - Durrant Macleod, Hillhead, Lochinver (844206)
Torbreck - Allan MacRae, 83 Torbreck (844335)

Co-opted Directors

John MacKenzie, 307 Culkein Drumbeg (833258)
Hugh MacRae, Braighe Raineach, Culkein Drumbeg (833212)
Willie Macleod, 102 Achmelvich (844250)
Iain Matheson, 125 Clachtoll (855320)

Township Grazings Clerks

Achmelvich - Ray MacKay, Redbraes (844337)
Achnacarnin - Iain C MacKenzie, The Gate (855241)
Balchladich - Ian A MacKenzie, Bordan, Balchladich (855315)
Clachtoll - Graham Gordon, Briar Cott., Lochinver (844607)
Clashmore & Raffin - Issie MacPhail, 204 Clashmore (855297)
Clashnessie - Kenny MacKenzie, 1 Canisp Road (844487)
Culkein Drumbeg - Amanda MacRae, Braighe Raineach (833212)
Culkein Stoer - John Morrison, Cnoc Uaine (855331)
Drumbeg - Anne MacCrimmon, Crithinn, Drumbeg (833237)
Nedd - John Robinson (833251)
Stoer - Ishbel Macauley, Ard na Mara, Stoer (855214)

Email contacts:

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Administrator: admin@assyntcrofters.co.uk
Croft Admin: croftadmin@assyntcrofters.co.uk