



**STÒRAS UIBHIST**  
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### **Letter to Members – February 2008**

Dear Member,

A year into the Community Ownership of the South Uist Estate, Stòras Uibhist has now employed a full compliment of development staff to join the existing staff of the Estate and the Administrator who was appointed shortly after the buyout.

The new Development Manager, Kirsty Campbell, joined the company from the HIE office at Lionacleit on January 28<sup>th</sup> and the new Development Officer, Marion Ferguson, is returning to the Uists to take up her post on March 1<sup>st</sup>. We now look forward to progressing at full speed the development projects that were at the heart of the buyout process.

#### **Communication with Outside Agencies**

In the past six months since the August newsletter Officers and Directors of the company have met formally and informally with a number of partner agencies to present details of the progress made by Stòras Uibhist since the buyout and the progress made with the development plans contained in the business plan.

The list of agencies met with includes HIE, HIE-IG, CnES, Scottish Government, CalMac Ferries, Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd, Scottish Crofters Foundation and the Crofters Commission. All have been broadly supportive of the plans for the Estate.

#### **Crofting**

The croft invoicing system has now been computerised and though the invoices were sent out later than planned due to processing difficulties, the issuing of invoices in November 2008 should be a much easier process. We would ask that if you have noted any errors in your invoice or statement that you contact the office at the above address as soon as possible so these can be rectified.

The interim report of the Shucksmith Enquiry into crofting is due shortly and a copy of the Stòras Uibhist submission to the enquiry has been placed on the website for your reference.

#### **Askernish Golf Course Restoration**

An Askernish Shareholder recently filed a Writ at Lochmaddy Sheriff Court in an attempt to halt the restoration work on the Old Tom Morris Golf Course. The application for an Interim Interdict was refused on February 13<sup>th</sup>, though a full hearing will need to be held in the future to finally determine the case.

Though I cannot comment on the detail of the case, I can say that the Board of Stòras Uibhist and the Chief Executive have met with the Grazings Committee and representatives of the Shareholders many times in an effort to reach a resolution beneficial to all parties. However, the Grazings Committee has refused to meet with us for many months unless it is agreed to abandon the golf course restoration project.

The process of restoration, having begun in 2006 when authorised by the former Chairman of South Uist Estate Ltd, David Ruck Keene, before the buyout was completed, is nearing completion. The Board of Directors believe this is a vital project that will bring jobs and income to the island and contribute significantly to the overall economic regeneration of the islands of Benbecula, Eriskay and South Uist.

### Housing

A housing needs study has been commissioned by Stòras Uibhist to determine the need for housing within the community. The study will attempt to establish both the actual need for housing from people with sub-standard, over-crowded or multi-generational occupancy housing, as well as the aspirations of residents looking to move to bigger, better or more practical accommodation.

This study will be used to assist Stòras Uibhist develop its housing policy, promote sustainable housing projects and source funding.

### Grogarry Lodge

Bookings for the 2008 season at Grogarry Lodge are already better than they were for 2007 and we have even taken a booking for 2009.

In addition to the traditional guest bookings, the Lodge has been used for the HICEC Western Isles Renewable Energy Conference and the Loch Carnan Wind Turbine public consultation. Where possible we will be looking to expand the use of the Lodge for other events

A new website ([www.grogarrylodge.com](http://www.grogarrylodge.com)) went live just before Christmas and is receiving a good number of visitors. The website has produced some serious enquiries from prospective guests and we hope it will produce firm bookings for this season.

### Renewable Energy Projects

Progressing the renewable energy projects will be the prime task of the new Development Manager and meetings with HICEC have already been held to continue the progress made so far.

Following on from the public consultation at Grogarry Lodge, the presentations and a report of the event have been placed on the Stòras Uibhist website for everyone to access.

### Lochboisdale Port of Entry

Work is continuing on the Lochboisdale Port of Entry project and Stòras Uibhist is developing an overall project plan to secure funding for the project.

### Lochboisdale-Mallaig Ferry Service

Along with Huw Francis (Chief Executive) and Ronald MacKinnon, (Lochboisdale Community Council), I met with Stewart Stevenson, Minister for Transport, to discuss the Lochboisdale-Mallaig ferry service. The meeting was positive and the Minister made it clear the Scottish Government is keen to implement the service when an acceptable solution is found.

The Minister asked Stòras Uibhist to develop a solution to implement the Lochboisdale-Mallaig service, in conjunction with CalMac and CnES, that can be presented to the Scottish Government as soon as possible. CalMac have already been approached and a meeting provisionally arranged to move the project forward.

### Estate Management

The review of Estate assets is progressing well and has produced a number of improvements in terms of administration savings and revenue generation.

The geese control efforts produced excellent results with over 2000 geese shot. We hope to follow this up in 2008 to further enhance croft protection. Shooting on the Estate area is reserved to the Estate and to ensure good management and control of shooting activities and goose control work reference should be made to the Estate Office, Nigel Taylor or Alastair Scott prior to any shooting activity.

### Drainage

Responsibility for the main drains is shared between SEERAD and the Estate and we have been working closely to ensure these are kept clear and the water flowing away after heavy rainfall.

Discussions are taking place to renew certain parts of the drain system this year and secure funding to carry out the work.

Smaller drains are the responsibility of the crofter whose land they run through and we would ask that these are kept clear if they run through your croft.

### Foreshore Sand

Foreshore sand has always been a resource used by the community and local businesses on crofts and for construction projects. However, with the increasing problems of coastal erosion the removal of sand and shingle from the beach is contributing to the problem and removal from one area of beach has implications for the entire coastline of the islands.

In some areas the problem of coastal erosion is critical and significant amounts of money is being spent on coastal protection work in South Uist and Benbecula.

As the foreshore is part of the community owned South Uist Estate, Stòras Uibhist has taken the decision not to allow the commercial removal of sand from the beach or other areas of the foreshore, to help maintain the fragile coastal structure that protects the islands.

We would also ask that members of the community stop removing sand and shingle for their own use as the cumulative action of many small loads of sand being removed contributes to the coastal erosion problem.

### Education Provision

The Board of Directors of Stòras Uibhist submitted a proposal to the Education Committee of CnES, as part of the Daliburgh S1/S2 School closure consultation process, calling for an improved education provision in South Uist rather than a reduction in it.

Stòras Uibhist requested that the Comhairle provide increased education and skills for work training via a network of linked training establishments throughout the islands of North Uist, South Uist, Benbecula and Eriskay, which would use the existing facilities at Lionacleit, Paible and Daliburgh.

Stòras Uibhist also called on the Comhairle to carry out a comprehensive review of education provision in the Western Isles rather than approach closures and re-organisations on a piecemeal basis.

A copy of the submission is attached to this newsletter.

### **Membership and AGM**

A membership form is attached and we would encourage all who are interested in the regeneration of the islands of Eriskay, Benbecula and South Uist to join the company. At the AGM in May only full members will be able to vote and we would like to see as many people as possible contributing to the future success of Stòras Uibhist.

Angus MacMillan  
Chairman  
Stòras Uibhist

## Members Contact Information Reply Form

We are continuing our drive to increase the number of newsletters sent out by email and would ask that you return the slip below so we can add you to the email list, if we have not already done so.

Please also remember to notify us of any change in your contact details and/or email address.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

## **STORAS UIBHIST EDUCATION PROVISION IN THE LIGHT OF THE COMMUNITY REGENERATION OF THE SOUTH UIST ESTATE AREA**

### **Background**

Stòras Uibhist is the company which in December 2006 purchased South Uist Estate on behalf of the community. The purchase, management, and development of the Estate assets by the community has, as its aim, to redress chronic problems of depopulation and economic decline within the Estate area. Stòras Uibhist has ambitious development plans for the Estate which will bring diverse employment opportunities for our young people. The company is naturally concerned that full regard should be taken by those in charge of education policy of the need for skills training for our young people which will meet the needs of this expanding and enterprising community.

The company is extremely concerned regarding the proposal of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to close the secondary department at Daliburgh School not just on the grounds of the adverse affects that this will have on the children and parents already attending the secondary department of the school but because the company believes that an opportunity will be lost to put in place a creative and imaginative solution for educational provision in the South Uist Estate area which would meet the needs of a rapidly developing community enterprise.

### **The Curriculum for Excellence**

The Curriculum for Excellence, which adoption is enthusiastically encouraged by the Scottish Government, seeks to implement 'a wider definition of how and what children should learn'. There should be 'more freedom for teachers; a greater choice and opportunity for pupils; and a single coherent curriculum for all young people aged 3 – 18'. The Curriculum for Excellence wishes all those involved in the provision of education 'to think imaginatively about how (educational) experiences and outcomes might be organised in new and creative ways'. Indeed, Learning and Teaching Scotland describes the Curriculum for Excellence as encouraging the formation of 'Schools of Ambition' whose characteristic thinking was 'creative and innovative that ultimately extended them beyond the norm'.

The Company notes that the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence is not related in any way to closure programmes nor can it be legitimately used to justify the same.

### **Schools of Ambition**

The Company is encouraged by the fact that the Nicolson Institute has been put forward/accepted as a 'School of Ambition'. The website states that '*the school has adopted a Transformational Plan that will support community regeneration.*' This involves the '*development of technological capacity and the expansion of vocational education provision which will allow pupils to become more confident. It will allow them to maximise employment opportunities. By embedding enterprise education across the school to create a more dynamic, ambitious environment, young people will be given the skills to create new industries. This will address the population drift from island life.*'

### **Comhairle nan Eilean Siar: Inclusion – A Policy for All, March 2005**

This document makes the following statement: '*Education is a striving to raise attainment, promote inclusion, and celebrate achievement. This is no longer a responsibility only of schools and parents. It requires communities, other agencies, the voluntary sector, the private sector and young people to work together to develop a system that works for our community.*'

It outlines four principles of delivery:

- *Put the needs of young people at the centre of planning and service delivery*
- *Continue to maintain and train our workforce so that they are enabled to meet the needs of young people*
- *Devolve decision making and resources as far as possible to a community level*

- *Delegate authority to staff.*

There was a proposal to establish five Learning Communities based on the community and/or school catchment areas. The Comhairle was accepted as a Pathfinder Authority for Enterprise in Education. This involved enterprise education for all pupils; work related provision for pupils S3 – S6; and business engagement. The Company notes that the SQA stated in August 2007 that focus on the world of work should start in S3 and S4.

### **Skills requirement of South Uist Estate Community**

Stòras Uibhist anticipates that in the expanding economy of South Uist Estates there will be a great need for training for our young people in a variety of skills both ‘traditional’ and ‘new’. While, the Company recognises that ‘education is for life’, it also recognises that ‘education is for jobs’.

As an enterprise itself, Stòras Uibhist has identified a need for skills education to train potential staff for jobs within the company that is not currently available in the Western Isles. These skills have traditionally been practiced in the Estate area but there is now no way to pass these on in a formal and structured manner as required by a dynamic and high growth company such as Stòras Uibhist.

Other enterprises and organisations have expressed a need for skilled staff that cannot currently be fulfilled and consider that a skills training facility on South Uist would greatly benefit the local economy and also greatly increase the career options for young people as well as other community members.

The skills required include traditional rural skills, business administration skills, marketing skills as well as a wide range of vocational skill required in a self-sufficient economy.

Indeed, it is well known that people leave the islands to further their education and this drain on the local community needs to be reduced through the provision of greater opportunity in the area, not less.

Increasing education and skills training on South Uist should be a Comhairle priority if it is truly committed to economic development and social regeneration of the community.

### **Stòras Uibhist Proposal**

- That the Comhairle should recognise that education has a crucial part to play in community economic and social regeneration in the light of the community purchase of South Uist Estate.
- That in the Uists there should be one secondary school with two/three campuses – Daliburgh campus, Paible campus, and Lionacleit campus.  
*(It should be noted that Paible lies outwith the scope of this proposal paper)*
- That S1 – S2 education should be delivered in all campuses through the general curriculum.
- That Daliburgh campus S3 – S6 should focus on work related provision and skills training in relation to the needs of the community
- That a Transformation Plan should be drawn up and put in place with urgency
- That the new school (with its two or three campuses) becomes in reality a ‘School of Ambition’
- That this proposal meets the requirements of the Curriculum for Excellence for creative and imaginative thinking which meets the needs of the community in the future.

As a community company, working closely with local businesses and organisations, Stòras Uibhist would welcome the opportunity to provide additional input to the Comhairle Education Department to help develop an ongoing development programme for Education and Skills training on the islands of South Uist, Benbecula and Eriskay.