

Breakish Community Planning Appraisal:

Executive Summary

Dr Geoff Fagan, Phil Matthews (CAG), Sarah Menzies University of Strathclyde

This report has been prepared by CAG Consultants in partnership with CADISPA. There were two separate elements to this research:

- A detailed consultation of the local community to establish their views as to the current state of the community. This element of the research was conducted by CADISPA
- An analysis of the main development options identified by the community and the potential for these development options to provide economic, social and environmental benefits for local people. This research was conducted by CAG Consultants

Below the conclusions of the two elements of the research are summarized:

Community Consultation

There were three objectives defined by the Steering Group and fundamental to our remit:-

- To provide local people with the opportunity to identify their concerns and needs within the context of their place
- To allow local people to envisage potential developments over the next 10 years
- To identify what kind of development is acceptable to local people

Through a process of progressive focusing, a postal survey, a photographic deconstruction process followed by a series of focus groups, and by endeavoring to reach as many people in the community as possible, CADISPA engaged local people in a process that allowed them the opportunity to fully explore their issues of concern.

Breakish and Ashaig, like many other townships in the Highlands and Islands, is a place that is going through a number of changes. The key to achieving sustainable change (or development) is to ensure that what happens is controlled

and needed by those that have to live with the consequences of such changes – local people.

The initial findings of the survey revealed that the community of Breakish has many factors already acting in their favour in terms of community development: there are many skills within the community, there is a consensus over many development issues and there is much activity within the community, such as the Community Café group and the Environmental Action group, that people are doing for themselves – by themselves.

However, the community also has a number of divisions and it would seem that attempts to explore some development issues have, so far, resulted in disagreement and some hostility amongst a few members of the community.

From this research, the themes that have emerged are listed below.

- The need for more information on windfarms to be circulated followed by a healthy, informed debate on all related aspects
- That other forms of energy development be considered
- The need to improve the township infrastructure, especially with regard to the issue of pavements and increase and maintenance of paths
- Development of a limited air service and the conjoining infrastructure would be welcomed
- The need to provide more social and sports facilities locally, within the community, especially for the youth of Breakish, of whom there are substantial numbers
- The need to diversify the economy away from traditional sources of employment, whilst ensuring that the existing crofting and tourism sectors are helped and encouraged to develop new and better ways of working
- The need to ensure that economic developments are in balance with environmental or social development in Breakish
- The need to stimulate economic development, job and wealth creation and service provision through enterprise and training
- A more effective system to ensure widespread and effective community consultation and decision-making. Only with this in place can there be considered a mandate to act
- There was a need for transparency in all decision-making processes
- The community needs to ensure that a few dominant voices do not overpower proceedings
- There is a need to rebalance the influence that the Crofting committee(s) has on potential development of the area
- Crofters need help with identifying use for their land : information and co-ordination on rural stewardship and diversification needs to be made available
- The lack of affordable housing for young, local people and for families

- The need to ensure that there is critical consideration of housing development especially concerning style and distribution
- The need to support the ongoing promotion of Gaelic culture and heritage, while recognizing that non-Gaelic speakers make an important contribution to the culture of the area, and support a diverse range of cultural activities
- The need to ensure that tourism remains low impact, and is better managed
- The need to ensure that the environment and essential rural nature of Breakish are conserved, with special care being taken towards Ashaig and Ardnish
- That the tensions and issues underpinning a community buy-out be fully investigated
- There is a marked need to improve community relations and cohesion
- Incomers (and their contribution to the Breakish community) need to be welcomed and strident attempts made to overcome some deep-seated and excluding behavior. There is also a need to define exactly what an 'incomer' is

Through the consultation, the following were identified as the three most pressing development issues:

- A Windfarm
- The Improvement and Preservation of the Local Environment
- Improved local facilities and infrastructure

Analysis of Development Options

Drawing on the issues highlighted by the community, the consultant analyzed specific development proposals that appeared to offer the greatest potential for enhancing the local community. In addition to the three issues prioritized by local people the plans to reopen Ashaig (Broadford) Airport were also considered, representing as it does what could be a major development in the Breakish area. In detail the proposals analyzed were:

- The development of a windfarm in the area: The potential community benefits of both a large scale windfarm as already proposed by Scottish and Southern and also the possibility of developing a smaller community windfarm in the area were assessed. It was found that although the community scheme would require considerable work by members of the community, it could provide benefit comparable to the land-rents and community dividend from the large-scale scheme.
- The proposed expansion of Ashaig Airstrip to hub Airport : The benefits to Breakish of the plans by West Highland Air Transport (WHAT) to re-establish flights between Skye, the Central Belt and England were considered

- The Improvement and Preservation of the Local Environment: The potential to enhance land management practices and improve the local environment was evaluated. This was based on an independent analysis, conducted on site by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG)
- Improved local facilities and infrastructure: Breakish residents noted a range of improvements that they would like to see to local facilities and infrastructure, most notably the development of a community cafe, the provision of a pavement on the main road to Broadford and the creation of footpaths and information boards to local points of significance. For each suggestion, the range of possible grant funding was assessed

The conclusion of the evaluation is that there is the potential for significant funds and economic opportunities to be generated through the development of the windfarm and the re-opening of Ashaig airport. There is also the potential to increase income from land management in the area while enhancing the local environment, and the possibility of obtaining a range of grant funding to support new community facilities and the improvement of infrastructure. Some of the opportunities are available to the community regardless of whether the estate continues in current ownership or is bought by the community. However the most important consideration must be that the landowners share of revenue from a windfarm and the funds likely to be generated through the use of land at Ashaig for the airport development will accrue to whoever owns the land when these agreements are realized. The crofters' share will remain unaffected.