

ALPS Management Group Meeting

Monday 7th February, 7pm, Estate Office, Applecross House

Present

Archie MacLellan, Chair (Applecross Trust)(AM), Owen Kilbride (Archaeological Society), Derek MacLennan (Bealach Group), Alistair McCowan (AMC) (Historical society), Alasdair Macleod (AML)(Community Council), Mike Summers (Applecross Crofters), Gill Fairweather (Walks and Traditional Crafts Group), Tom KilBride (co-opted member), Jacqui Liuba (co-opted member), Mary Gibson (Adviser SNH), Bruce Taylor (Adviser Scottish Woodlands). Sam Bridgewater, Elodie Chopin.

Lorna Lumsden (Applecross Trust) attended the meeting by video link.

Proposal of minutes of Group Meeting 10.01.2010

The minutes were approved by all present and will be displayed on the ALPS notice board.

Project Update

A planning application has been submitted for the four Applecross bay paths. The main planning issue is likely to relate to the entrance point near the coal shed, as a statutory 60m of sight will be required in all directions from the proposed path entrance. The beechwood path was walked by AMc and SB in January and sites of historical interest were noted and marked. These will be discussed with the contractor. Assuming planning permission is granted, work will start in April 2011.

The broch path has been completed. Final landscaping will take place at Easter.

Application forms for the Crofting Agricultural Grants Scheme are being drafted. These will need to be approved by crofters before they can be submitted.

A meeting was held at Clachan Church on Tuesday 18th January to discuss plans for its renovation. Those present were Sam Bridgewater, Gordon Cameron, Alistair McCowan, Elodie Chopin, David Somerville (architect), Nicola Tallach (SNH) and Bill Hall (heating engineer). David Somerville is currently revising plans for the church, and after approval from the management group, will seek a revised tender from Laing, the contractor that originally put in the best tender. Listed Building Consent has still not been approved for the windows. It is likely that due to bats, all other work on the church will not be able to start until October 2011.

A number of successful public events were held in January including a community moss walk (22nd January; 11 attendees), a lichen education event (10th January; 13 attendees) a geological talk (28th January; 19 attendees), a geological tour of Applecross peninsula (29th January, 13 attendees) and a weekend training workshop on Bronze Age building techniques (15th & 16th January; 31 attendees). The latter was arranged as a precursor to the building of the round house. In addition, three special separate events were organized for the primary school related geology, moss and lichens.

Six people participated in the first drystone dyke course between the 20th and 26th January. Led by the master dyker Seumas Campbell from Uig, Skye, this beginner's course was aimed at teaching essential construction skills with a view to attendees attaining the Drystone Walling Association (DSWA) Initial/LANTRA Level 1 Certificate. A number of suitable sites for the course were suggested to Seumas after discussion with crofters, the Trust and the Community Council, with the final selection made by him based on the needs of those

participating. A number of the holes in the Culduie dykes were repaired, with the broken walls at the public toilets and close to the White Gate also rebuilt during the five day period. An examination date for certification (which has to be separate from the course) has been scheduled for the 19th March. Due to many of the participants being busy with other work during the summer months, the next dyking course aimed at attaining DSWA Intermediate/LANTRA Level 2 will take place in the autumn.

Work has begun on the second ALPS newsletter which should be ready for printing by the end of February.

A response has been received from Historic Scotland (HS) related to the earlier enquiry about the potential scheduling of the Hebridean barns. HS seems to consider that they are of national importance and hence worthy of scheduling; however, because of an accelerated programme to review listings on which they have already embarked, this is seen as a low priority. The response was surprising given that we were given a strong prompt to go down this route. It has been suggested that we attempt to secure a building repair grant, but have been warned that the form is problematic and the process fraught with uncertainty.

A report has been written based on the responses to the fuelwood survey. It is proposed to release the findings of this report in the next ALPS newsletter.

A meeting was held with Angling Society on Tuesday 1st February to discuss plans for Milton Loch. Research is being undertaken on the best means of controlling rushes, with advice sought from RSPB and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV). The slow infilling of the loch is of concern. Rushes were formerly cut at the site. Further information will be sought on historical management techniques.

Smiddy Wood

The bulk of the discussion at the meeting concerned Smiddy wood

There was significant discussion of work progress at Smiddy Wood. Everyone was present was pleased to see the progress made with the de-stumping which has greatly visually improved the area. TK expressed concern about whether it was going to be possible to attain the original specified vision for the woodland i.e. a community woodland of pasture, native plantings and food forest, given the degree of mulch resulting from the stump grinding and the retaining of all stumps at and below ground level. BT thought it was still possible to attain this, but agreed that it depended on ones definition of pasture i.e. something that you could strim or graze, or something that you could mow, with the latter being unlikely. OK enquired as to whether Scottish Woodlands had priced for actual job components, or to achieve an 'outcome' i.e. the community woodland vision. AM confirmed that it was for an outcome. There was some confusion about terminology in the some members of the MG thought the term 'de-stumping' used in the contract meant the actual removal of all stumps, whilst in practice, in this case it meant the grinding of stumps down to ground level, which might make some future management options to achieve the vision problematic. At the end of the meeting all MG members took a pragmatic stance and agreed that work was progressing well and appreciated the difficulties of converting a plantation forest into something of greater wildlife and community value. Many of the issues relate to attempting to quickly create something (within a few years) that might be easier to attain over the longer term (decades). TK thought a lesson should be learnt from this experience for future ALPS projects, which is to ensure that specifications of contracts are tied down and that any words where there is a possibility for multiple definitions to be tightly defined. This would avoid any misunderstandings. It was agreed that this project would have to proceed step by step with management choices potentially flexible as the results of each intervention are observed. AM enquired about the possibility of raking debris from de-stumping activities to improve the chance that and seeding of pasture would take and to clear the ground. BT said it was

possible, but wasn't convinced it was worthwhile as it might drag up timber fragments currently buried. There would be an additional cost for this activity, and BT also highlighted that Scottish Woodlands had incurred extra expenditure in de-stumping the top section of Smiddy at no extra cost to ALPS.

At the end of the discussion there was consensus for the following actions to be taken at Smiddy Wood:

- A deer fence to be erected around the site with work starting before the end of February. The exact positioning of this fence should be agreed in advance of work starting. Bruce should provide a map showing the proposed fence line.
- The 4 ha area to be replanted at the rear of Smiddy Cottage should not be mulched. Instead it will be planted using the traditional method of mounding with excavator. Gorse within this site will be largely destroyed as part of the mounding process and gorse and other debris will be collected in piles.
- The triangle, already roughly mulched, near to the deer grid will be mounded and planted.
- The 4 ha mulched area intended for grassland and scattered trees will be raked using the excavator. Debris will be collected from across the site and buried in suitable locations on site. The ALPS Board should then make an inspection of the site and be content that this process is adequate and that any 'burial' sites are re-instated to an acceptable standard. A site meeting with Bruce Taylor should be held at this point.
- Variation to the Scottish Woodlands budget will be a maximum of £1,500, this being attributable to the raking, with this some coming from contingency.

Subsequent action the mulched area will depend on the outcome of the site visit.

AM and the Management group thanked BT for attending, who was then absent for the remainder of the meeting.

Reporting

SB stated that a second report has been prepared for HLF and will be submitted prior to February 15th, with a claim and report to SNH imminent, which would be submitted before the next MG meeting. Payment for the first HLF claim has been approved, although payment has been withheld until some final ALPS documentation has been clarified related to management responsibilities, updated cash flows and an updated risk register. SB agreed to provide these asap, but would delay until attending a planned meeting with HLF in Edinburgh on the 15th February to discuss why the original documents already provided as part of the application were not suitable.

ERDF Funding

SB stated that although all funding has been verbally approved, a final grant offer has not yet been received. This has the potential to cause some cash flow issues, as there has already been significant expenditure on ERDF-funded projects e.g. the broch. AM and SB have been liaising with ERDF to try and complete this process. A further concern was explained by AM and SB that the exact partitioning of funds by ERDF in their most recent draft final offer grant did not replicate exactly those requested and provisionally accepted by ERDF during the funding application process. Although this doesn't change the broad funding landscape, an acceptance of this current offer letter would impact greatly on potential surpluses within certain programmes and AM and SB were keen to see it amended. AM stated that it was critical to make sure that ERDF and LEADER are not funding the same

projects, and AM and SB are working with Jamie Dunsmore to resolve this issue. They highlighted that it had been a frustratingly long process.

A&B list projects

ALPS has A and B listed projects, with those on the A list having a 'green light' to proceed with all funding in place. B projects still require a degree of counterpart funding before they can begin. SB stated that uncertainty related to partitioning of ERDF money meant that there was now a degree of confusion about the funding status of some projects, although none of those that are currently active. AM and SB agreed to resolve this as a priority, reporting back at the next MG meeting.

Other matter arising

Next MG meeting will be held Monday 7th March 2011.