**Sleat Community Council**

**Supplementary Submission for the West Highlands and Islands Local Development Spring 2015**

**Introduction**

In April 2015 the SCC submitted its observations to the consultation process for the West Highland Local Development Plan, which has been acknowledged by the Highland Council. The Community Council was keen to ensure that as many residents, organisations and businesses in Sleat were aware of the consultation process which is accepting public comments until 31st May 2015. As a result a further community meeting was held on 5th May to inform of the process. The presentation made by Tim Stott to the SCC meeting on 10th March was repeated for those who hadn’t seen it together with a summary presentation from SCC on the WHILDP and the current consultation on Wind Energy Guidance for which public comments are also welcomed. A number of additional points were raised by members of the public following the initial SCC submission in April and these are shown below in summary form. The principle input was from the Sleat Grazings Committee who have requested the SCC to include their comment in this second and final paper. This is shown directly below.

**Comment from the Sleat Grazings Committee**

Additional information for the Highland Council Local Plan for 'East Sleat'

The Sleat General Grazings Committee has read the submission of Sleat Community Council to the Highland Council’s local plan consultation, and would like to add the voice of Sleat's Crofting Community to it.

We would wish to emphasise the significant economic, social and environmental benefits Crofting provides. 40% of the land in Sleat is under Crofting Tenure, comprising 200 individual Crofts and 14 Common Grazings. The management of this land is the sole responsibility of Crofters or their Grazings Committees and no other groups or organisations including landowners have responsibility for development on this land. This represents a significant section of the aspirations of the Sleat community.

We would like to highlight the need for Highland Council to address the long standing concerns of Crofters with regard to speculative non-crofting developments within townships that bring about situations such as in Ferrindonald. The Grazings Committees have continually raised concerns about speculative developments on Croft land, an issue we believe that Highland Council has failed to take aboard. The point of greatest concern, regarding future development in Sleat, is the decision by the Highland Council to exclude Crofters from Neighbour Notifications. Crofters are therefore not notified of proposed developments by the Highland Council and are thus effectively disenfranchised.

The Sleat General Grazings Committee does not believe that the term ‘wild land’ is appropriate or relevant in relation to Sleat. The whole of Sleat is essentially a man-made environment, having been shaped, managed and maintained by generations of Crofters, Farmers and their livestock. ‘Wild Land’ is a controversial designation, created by environmental pressure groups to further their own agendas. Any attempt to designate parts of Sleat as ‘wild land’ or to institute a policy of ‘re-wilding’ will be opposed by all the grazings committees as we believe such a policy would be detrimental not only to Crofting but the whole community of Sleat. This is highlighted, for example, by concerns over the impact of the failed ‘re-forestation of Sleat’ policy. This does not, of course, in any way, lessen the understanding that landscape is a vital part of Sleat's tourism industry.

In other areas we believe that Sleat General Grazings is an important player in the development of Sleat. For example, Sleat General Grazings Committee refused to negotiate with Scottish Water over grazing-land access, until they had addressed the wider communities concerns. This diligence of the Grazings committees helped ensure Scottish Water's commitments to consult with the wider community of Sleat.

The Sleat Grazings Committee continues to work towards securing a sustainable future for Crofting in Sleat and would hope that the Highland Council keeps the wider concerns of Crofting concerns in mind in the general development of the community of Sleat.

Yours faithfully,

On behalf of the Sleat General Grazings Committee

Alastair Culbertson, Chair

Duncan MacDonald, Clerk

**Light Pollution**

Many residents at the meeting expressed concern at the increase in light pollution as a result of further development in the Sleat Peninsula. It was unanimously felt that preservation of dark skies is both a significant benefit to tourism in the area (Sleat has no less than four designated ‘Dark Skies’ sites) as well as improving residential quality of life by being an area where the skies are clear of significant pollution. This has been echoed the ‘Dark Skies’ marketing group in their submission to the WHILDP as well as comments from the Astronomer Royal for Scotland who is both a local resident and fiercely supportive of efforts to reduce light pollution.

**General Development**

Comments were received that echoed earlier views that the Kilbeg project should go a significant way to meet the housing needs of Sleat for the future. However one member of the Sabhal Mor Ostaig Management team reminded that that project is potentially spread over a 30 year time-frame and ‘would not happen overnight’. The College recognises the benefit to the community of the project but conceded that this would run in parallel with general exponential development.

**Forestry Development**

The meeting was reminded by a resident that whilst the major emphasis on the future development of Sleat was around housing, recreational facilities, job creation, preservation of the rural and remote feel to the area from crofting and farming, the issue of forestry development must be included in the Development Plan. The recent issue of the CDLT Woodland Creation Scheme was such an example where formal ‘Planning Permission’ was not required and as a result there was very little public engagement for the project. It was emphasised at meetings in late 2014 with FCS that it is essential that communities are included in the development process for Woodland Creation Schemes, this falling to the responsibility of the developer, the Forestry Commission and the Highland Council. Whilst this is a reversal of current policy such consultation will ensure that engagement and communications with local groups would, in future, avoid the fiasco that was deemed to be (from the community viewpoint) the process to create the CDLT scheme of more than 500 acres. This includes deer management, water supply issues, planting close to dwellings potentially causing blight to property in later years, threats to wildlife and archaeological sites, and concerns as to whether the terms of the FCS contract have been fully complied with. It was recognised that Woodland Creation Schemes are listed online in FCS websites but the complexity of locating the relevant files and pages makes it very hard for communities to understand what is actually being proposed for such schemes. Whilst this type of project is relatively infrequent in Sleat the SCC calls for a much-improved transparency for the process, and expects the Forestry Commission Scotland, the Highland Council and SNH to take the lead role.

**Deer Management**

It was advised at the meeting that a new Deer Management Plan for Sleat is to be introduced by SNH and the SCC is keen to hear of this so that local residents can be kept informed.

**Access**

One member of the public raised the issue of public access over newly developed land particularly in respect of shore-side located property where traditional access was readily possible. Some recent local developments have jeopardised this traditional access and the resident suggested that this must be considered as part of the planning process. Where issues may occur this can be referred to the Local Access Officer and relevant Planning Officer.

**CDI Hub Duisdale**

The meeting was briefed on the current state of the CDI project for the Community Hub at Duisdale although it is not known when the construction may begin. An update will be sought from the CDI Chairman.

The Community Council welcomes any comment on this and our earlier submission from the Development Plans team and trusts this will represent the view of the Sleat Community Council and from the Sleat Grazings Committee.

Rob Ware

Secretary, Sleat Community Council

25th May 2015