

SGOIL AN IOCHDAIR AGUS A CHOIMHEARSNACHD

The Inaugural meeting of Sgoil an Iochdair agus a'Choimhearsnachd took place on Tuesday 8th December 1998 in Iochdar School, at 8pm. That is only just over a year ago, and the length of these notes attests to the amount that has been achieved since then.

Just to recap, the association exists

1. To promote interest and participation in sport, and related recreation in the Iochdar area, especially in the interests of education, social welfare and health.
2. To assist in the coordination of various sports clubs and recreational organisations operating in the Iochdar area, both generally and in relation to specific projects.
3. To examine the available sports and recreation facilities in the Iochdar area as against current and anticipated need and to make applications to the local council, local enterprise company and any other appropriate body in this connection.
4. To liaise with the councils sports development staff in furtherance of these objects.
5. To raise funds for such charitable purposes as the association may deem appropriate.

At this meeting, as well as adopting our constitution, and electing office bearers, we discussed the problems of lack of outdoor facilities around Iochdar, which are long-standing. From this discussion arose our first main objective as an association. This has been to examine the available facilities, to find out what current and anticipated need might be, and to find out how we might meet these needs.

The needs that we identified were:

1. Outdoor playing field at the school, on an all weather surface, multipurpose.
2. Upgrade of football pitch at Tall an Iochdair, with alternative parking
3. A footpath to link the two and improve access to shop, hall and play park.

Our first task was to find out if the wider community felt the same way.

The community appraisal

A survey form was sent to all households in the catchment area of Iochdar School, asking questions about recreational and sporting activities, and what respondents thought of local facilities. We also asked demographic questions about access to private transport, age, and gender.

A report of the results was published in spring 1999. It bore out our initial impression that facilities in the Iochdar area left much to be desired, particularly with regard to younger people. The key points that it highlighted were:

1. Support for a footpath/cycle path with trees.
2. Upgrade of football pitch at Iochdar Hall, perhaps increasing the range of sports it is used for, depending on the existence of clubs forming.
3. Facilities for children at Iochdar School, chiefly athletics and football.
4. Increasing access for sports such as basketball, tennis, and netball at Lionacleit.
5. Investigating further the interest in table tennis.
6. Increasing awareness of existing club activities such as canoeing and diving, and climbing facilities in Lochmaddy
7. Investigating the possibility of starting a windsurfing club.
8. Investigating further the suggestions about starting a swimming club and an athletics club.

The feasibility study

With the help of Helen MacDonald, of the Southern Isles Amenity Trust, we put together a brief for consultancy work by a landscape architect, and sent it out to 5 such consultants. This was to look for a competitive quote before applying for funding.

The key features of the brief were decided from a number of discussions that had taken place over the first 4 meetings. We had discussed 4 main areas for development.

School playing fields

Initially, we had thought that an all-weather surface at school would be the best idea. We talked about including mini-sized facilities for basketball, football, shinty etc. plus mini-running track and changing facilities. However, during our meetings we discovered that all-weather surfaces elsewhere had not met the needs of children. The surface is expensive, and required maintenance over time to keep it drained. It may also restrict options for use, not being suitable for shinty, and being unpleasant to play football on (painful to fall on) The all weather pitch at Lionacleit has a hole. Parents comment that it is now uneven, and the red pigment stains clothing and trainers. Astro turf would cost over £118,000 to install. Emma Beaton, the sports development officer is in favour of a grass playing field.

A group of committee members met on 2nd March. They found that the loch at the southwestern end of the field encroaches onto the field in bad weather. The ditch across the centre of the field is home to a pair of snipe. There are rocks protruding from the centre of the field, and many holes, some as deep as 8". The main issue for the field will be to raise it and improve drainage. Emma Beaton thought that an all-weather surface would be expensive to install, and maintain, and restrict options of use. All options need improved drainage.

Mairi Bremner had passed on a letter (dated 1995) from Malcolm Burr confirming that there is no relevant restriction on title for the playing fields site. The council also agreed that the pitch could be leased if required to the association for further development and maintenance.

We discussed the provision of separate changing facilities at the school, as opposed to converting and upgrading existing space within the school buildings. The facilities need to be available outside school hours, and not restricted by school janitorial time. In addition, the head teacher at the school needs to be assured of the safety of pupils, and the security of the school buildings.

The brief asks for separate changing rooms to the school. It also asks the consultants for a grass or Astro turf pitch, suitable for junior shinty and football, with a short running track round 2 sides, suitable for school sports.

Footpath and tree planting

There was a lot of support in the community appraisal for more footpaths and cycle routes, as well as tree planting. We thought that this could start as part of our project to upgrade the facilities at the school and at the hall. We looked at developing a connecting path including a cycle route and an environmental interpretive area and indigenous tree planting.

Possible routes were discussed. At the very least, the old road could perform this function from the turning into Iochdar all the way to the shop. Alternatives include providing a footpath along the far side of Loch nan Ceann. This land is mostly common grazing for crofters in Bualadubh. The general opinion was that such a track could also be used to improve access to the common grazing. Maximum access could be gained by making it a cycle track/footpath combined. The footpath would probably reach the old road between Cuidhe na Gamhne and the Hall, where it is very boggy. It was also generally agreed that the track should be closed to general traffic.

Several members of the committee, including Mary Harman for Scottish Natural heritage, looked at the path. The members of the grazings committee asked that the path should not be fenced, since the loch is used for watering livestock. A number of interesting environmental points were also noted. 2 sites suitable for tree planting were suggested on these visits.

Assistance from Jon Hollingdale (forester with Southern Isles Amenity trust) was invaluable in assessing the areas to be planted. The two areas are amenable to planting, but will require some work to improve access, local drainage, and soil improvement. The areas are peaty and very wet, so trees will need to be planted on mini-mounds. The soil may need the addition of rock potash, and we also discussed an initial mulching with seaweed. Because of the wetness of the soil, short boardwalks may be incorporated.

Mr James McLetchie, countryside ranger also with Southern isles Amenity Trusts, has assessed the proposed route, and a report will shortly be available on various aspects of developing the footpath. The path should

- a. Take a direct route across the grazing.
- b. Allow access from the path to areas of interest
- c. Allow livestock to have access to the water
- d. Avoid going so close to the loch as to disturb wildlife.
- e. Be part of a circular route
- g. Could be made suitable for pushchairs and the elderly
- h. Provide access to the play park from Bualdubh

Ian MacDonald (council offices) has written back concerning the land next to Rubha Chlachain, saying that the council would be delighted if we put trees on the land.

The hall football pitch and parking

The football pitch at the hall, in its present state, is not suitable for playing football, because of extensive car damage. It needs substantial re-draining and pitch surface improvements, as well as changing facilities.

It is also not suitable for parking for the annual show, and that SUBAS recognised that this type of use might damage an upgraded pitch, even for 1 day a year. The existing show ground and hall parking is enough for most other activities including football matches.

Alternatives include developing new land to the south of the Hall. This could either become a new pitch, or a new parking area. The pitch should be protected from grazing animals. The show overflow car park would only be used once a year, and such stipulations are not so vital. A site visit found that the land to the south of the hall is quite rocky, with a wet area near the road, containing the hall septic tank, tree planting, and a drain. It would be more suited to upgrading to a temporary parking area than a football pitch. The brief asked that this area be made suitable for grazing most of the year, and suitable for parking once or twice a year for major events

Mr Angus MacPhee, 98 Bualuachraich, Iochdar is the tenant of the proposed parking area. He lives in Glasgow, and has no objection to the proposed use of the area for SUBAS parking

Other projects for possible integration

While we were considering our ideas, we had been talking to the riding club, who were looking for a suitable site to develop as stables and an indoor riding school. Eventually, they found a more suitable area.

Latterly we have been liaising with the Bowling club, who are rethinking their plans for local

facilities.

Briefs were sent to five firms/individuals initially. In the event, 4 firms submitted bids. Of these four, RPS Cairns submitted proposals, which included a lot of experience working with similar groups and projects, and were also very user friendly. Their bid was within the budget that we had set. We used their bid to form the basis for applications for funds.

We are on the brink of getting the funding together for the feasibility study, with promising responses from Western Isles Enterprise and Shell Better Britain Campaign. Written confirmation is awaited.

Logo

At the start of the year, we had asked school children to design a logo for the association. A number of refinements had been worked through, and after a postal vote, a round logo, showing an Iochdar swan encircled by two hands joined in partnership, was chosen. This symbol will be there to remind us of all the groups in partnership within the association. It will also be there to mark out our publicity and to raise our profile within the community in the years ahead.

Conclusion

Through the year we have achieved a lot. The community appraisal has informed our discussions about what improvements are needed. We have established our identity, and are on the brink of securing the funding for the feasibility study. The coming year should see us with a completed feasibility study. With work on improving facilities in progress, the committee are in a good position to address the need for clubs to support recreational activities.