



The National Trust  
for Scotland

# *Balmacara Estate Quarterly Newsletter*

Issue 18 – November 2004

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## **Progress on House Sites in Plockton**

The story continues with some progress being made towards a satisfactory solution. The Plockton & District Community Council held a meeting with Lochalsh & Skye Housing Association and NTS on 27<sup>th</sup> September to discuss proposals for affordable letting accommodation at Burnside. The meeting James Stevenson from the housing association explained that they were minded to take forward the proposal from the Plockton crofters and NTS that Burnside should be developed for housing if there was clear community support for the project. The meeting unanimously supported this and it was agreed that the housing association should submit a planning application accordingly. Mr Stevenson outlined a rough timescale for the development that will hopefully provide housing sometime in 2007. Iain Turnbull from NTS reported that the Trust was in principle willing to release the land subject to agreement of terms between the relevant parties. These included concerns about the need for a local letting policy to ensure that the risk of the house being acquired and eventually becoming holiday homes is minimised. Mr Turnbull also reported that the Trust was going to appoint consultants to develop a site servicing plan for the Innis 'Rhuairidh (Tin Church) area and determine the feasibility of releasing up to six sites there. If this is determined to be feasible the Trust will seek outline planning consent and will draw up a disposal procedure in conjunction with the community council which will include measures to reduce the risk of the houses passing into holiday or second home use.

## **Updated Data on Otters on the Estate**

During the summer months biologist Roger Cottis from Sleat has been carrying out a survey of the otter population on the Balmacara Estate. The Trust's Ranger Service carried out an initial coastline survey in 1995 and Roger has used this as a starting point to record otter activity around the coast and further inland on the estate. The survey has shown that otters are active all round the estate with well over 300 recorded sites that otters frequent. These sites include holts, natal holts where young are born, feeding areas, spraint knolls, tracks, etc. The survey has not provided an accurate population figure for the estate because otters can move around and use more than one site, but Roger has estimated from data from other areas that the population is in the region of 25 adults. This information has already been put to good use in relation to Scottish Water's proposals to improve sewage treatment at Drumbuie. Their plan is to extend the sewage outfall pipe and SNH asked that they take into account any otter activity in the area. The survey was used to assess the potential impact of this work and should ensure that this protected species does not suffer as a result. The Trust intends to monitor the population by repeating the survey every four years to ensure that there are no long-term patterns of decline.

## **Rural Skills Training Feasibility Study Results**

The feasibility study into setting up an integrated rural skills training programme that the Trust commissioned earlier this year has now been completed. The study was set up to consider the level of demand from potential trainees, land managers, employers and trainers for a co-ordinated training programme for traditional rural skills. The study was also required to investigate ways of delivering rural skills training that matched the demand and to find ways of funding such a programme. Skye & Lochalsh Learning Centre Network were contracted to carry out the study and delivered their final report to the Trust in late October. The report produced very interesting results that showed there was a real need for a more co-ordinated approach to delivery of rural skills training in the area and that there was considerable demand for training. However, the report also indicated that most people could not commit to a prolonged period of training due to cost and other work commitments. The study considered options for Modern Apprenticeships, short training courses with appropriate certification, provision of training to younger people, i.e. secondary school age, and raising awareness of possible careers in the rural sector. As a result of the study the Trust has decided not to proceed with an integrated long-term course or a Modern Apprenticeship, but it is intending to work with the Scottish Executive's Education in Enterprise Programme to deliver a rural skills course at Plockton High School for pupils in S2 upwards. It is hoped that this will fit in with the development of a Scottish Progression Award in Rural Skills being established at present by Inverness College. This course could be chosen by pupils instead of a standard grade qualification. The training in a range of skills, e.g. footpaths, dyking, fencing, deer management, etc., will be carried out by NTS staff and possibly other specialists. It is hoped that we will be able to start delivering the course in the next school session, i.e. after August 2005.

## **Allotments – Next Meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> November**

Following an initial meeting of interested parties regarding the proposed allotments at Reraig on 15<sup>th</sup> July the Trust has submitted a planning application seeking consent for the proposed development. The application is in outline only at this stage but will determine what, if any, conditions will be applied should the proposal be taken forward. The proposal at this stage is for up to 24 small allotments serviced by access off the A87 trunk road just east of Reraig village. There will be adequate parking for the allotments and hopefully some screen planting of native trees and shrubs which should serve the dual purpose of shelter and screening the development visually from neighbouring properties. A further meeting of interested parties is scheduled to be held at the Balmacara Hotel on 11<sup>th</sup> November at 8:00 pm. If you are interested in attending the meeting please call the Balmacara Estate Office beforehand so we can confirm numbers.

### **Traditional Croft Land Use Survey**

In the last issue of the newsletter we referred to the Trust's intention to carry out a Croft Land Use Questionnaire survey. The deadline for return of the questionnaires has now passed and we have received about 25 responses out of 75 that were sent out. If you have not responded it is not too late to do so. Please complete the forms and return them to the Balmacara Estate Office, preferably before the end of November. The questionnaires have still to be analysed but there has obviously been a wide variety of comments and the responses will help us enormously to sort out our estate records and improve our understanding of what is actually going on in the crofting townships. The Trust had applied for funding to develop a Management Scheme but unfortunately was not successful but we hope to secure support through our ongoing Management Concordat with SNH for the next three years. Remember though, your views count so please return your questionnaire if you have not done so already!

### **Balmacara Woodland Park – The Way Forward**

The future of the Balmacara Woodland Park initiative was discussed at an open meeting hosted by the Lochalsh Community Council on 6<sup>th</sup> October. The meeting was open to everyone in Lochalsh and was held at Auchtertyre Old School with the aim of determining the way forward and what types of facilities people want to see in the old campsite if it is to become a Woodland Park. The meeting was attended by Bruce Taylor from the Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), Iain Turnbull (NTS), several members of the Lochalsh Community Council and a few other residents of the area. Bruce Taylor reported that FCS were developing new arrangements for community ownership or participation in forestry land and expected these guidelines to be confirmed by March 2005, however, as far as the old campsite is concerned all options are still available but it is likely that it will be disposed of if park proposal does not become a reality. It was agreed that the project should be taken forward by a steering group that represents all the communities in Lochalsh and that a meeting should be set up with each community council being invited to send a representative. A provisional date for the meeting was set for the 7<sup>th</sup> December. Fiona MacEwan, Chair Lochalsh Community Council, is co-ordinating the arrangements. A range of suggested uses for the park were discussed loosely with sporting and social facilities receiving by far the greatest level of support.

### **New Skye & Lochalsh Local Plan**

The Highland Council's existing Skye & Lochalsh Local Plan is due to be reviewed and updated over the coming year. Staff from the Council will be undertaking the review over coming months and expect to carry out a substantial amount of public consultation. Based on previous experience it is likely that the plan will cover important subjects like housing, economic development, land use, recreation and conservation. It is important that residents take this opportunity to express their views on these important subjects, especially given the concerns that have been made clear over recent months about the lack of affordable housing, absenteeism and holiday homes in villages like Plockton. This is your opportunity to influence Council policy for the area so we would encourage you all to take an active part, we certainly will be at the Trust.

### **Auchtertyre Wins NTS Junior Shinty Challenge Shield**

Despite a gloomy weather forecast and threatening clouds the annual NTS Junior Shinty Challenge took place at Plockton on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> October. Four teams participated from Auchtertyre, Glenelg/Loch Duich, Kyle and Plockton primary schools. The competition format consisted of a round robin where each team played the other three and the top two teams then played in a final to decide the overall winner. After the round-robin section Glenelg/Loch Duich had a 100% record and Auchtertyre were in second place on goal difference from Kyle. Thus we had a keenly contested final between Glenelg/Loch Duich and Auchtertyre that yielded only one goal but was tense throughout with many goalmouth incidents to keep the fans happy. At the end of the day Auchtertyre ran out winners by one goal to nil and took the shield home for the first time. The standard of shinty was excellent and the spirit of play would set a fine example to many professionals in other sports. Our thanks go to Johnny 'Ach' MacRae for his continued support in acting as referee and to the staff and coaches who put in the time to support this activity.

### **Dragonflies Become a Priority**

The Balmacara Estate is home to a significant population of dragonflies and damselflies most notably at Loch Achaidh na h-Inich. The loch is part of the SSSI designation on account of the nationally rare species of dragonflies and damselflies that breed there. The Trust has been aware of these species at Loch Achaidh na h-Inich for a number of years but did not have any data on their presence or absence elsewhere on the estate. Hence, earlier this year the Estate Conservation Officer and the Ranger Service began surveying likely areas of the estate to establish what species are present elsewhere. Accurately identifying these insects can be difficult while they are in flight since the difference between some species may be relatively minor and hard to spot. So, larvae were collected for identification during the winter and early spring and some checking has been carried out during the flying months in the summer. The process has only just started and will take several years to complete for the whole estate but early signs are that we have a highly significant population and the survey will provide valuable information to help us make future management decisions.

### **Do you have Email?**

Since the inception of this newsletter the Trust has sent paper copies to every household on the Balmacara Estate as a means of providing regular updates on our work here. However, we would now like to distribute as many copies as possible of the newsletter electronically, by Email. Not only does this save the Trust postage but it also makes the administration much easier as well, allowing us more time to get on with the other important work we have to do. With this in mind we are asking people who read this to send us their email address so that we can add them to the list for electronic circulation. We will continue to send out paper copies to those who don't provide us with email addresses, so don't worry you will still receive your copy. If you wish to receive future issues of the newsletter by email please send your name, email address and postal address to Jenny Hey at the following email address: [jhey@nts.org.uk](mailto:jhey@nts.org.uk) and hopefully we will have a more efficient system for the next issue.