

ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022



– Community Development Trust –



**Dubh Thob Pontoon Development
at Kirkibost Pier**



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Welcome from the Chair

It's my pleasure to welcome you to the first in person AGM for the Great Bernera Community Development Trust for a while.

Although our AGMs have taken place online in the intervening years, there's nothing quite like meeting face to face.

Since our face to face AGM in 2019 we have come through Covid and that was challenging for us all in so many different ways. The community pulled together, as we knew it would, with Joan Macaulay working quietly behind the scenes in the way that she always did. She was the link between all the groups in Bernera, smoothing the way for us all to complement the activities of the others. Her loss, last year, left a huge hole across the community, and as a Trust it's important that we acknowledge the contribution she made to us. We wouldn't be where we are today without her, and as the pontoons development nears completion that is something we will do in discussion with her family.

As there may be some new members to our community present, it might be a good time to explain a little more about us. We sit alongside the Bernera Community Association and Bernera Community Council. Each of these groups have at their heart the desire to make Bernera a thriving and successful community and the Development Trust is no different in that wish.

We have a complementary focus to the 2 other groups as we all play our part in working with the community. We look to provide the housing and employment opportunities that can ensure the future of the people living here. It states in our Articles we have the objective "of improving the conditions of life of the Community". We began doing that by focussing on the opportunity for a Community Buyout and that still remains one of our key aims but we cannot sit back and see our community struggle as services in our community end. Everything we do at the Trust is to serve the community and to do that we need your input to get it right, so over the coming months there will be surveys and meetings that we need your answers, opinions and involvement with. It's easy to think someone else will do it but our community is small and we each have to play our part.

As Trustees, we step down in rotation in the hope that we can attract new trustees to keep the energy, vision and optimism alive. This year is no different and I thank all trustees for their involvement and hard work, but especially to those stepping down. It has been 10 years since we formed the group and I can honestly say that we are making more progress than ever before and this year coming we anticipate making huge strides forward. Our monthly meetings are still held by Zoom and as always, the invitation is extended to you all to watch what we do, and of course if you have skills or knowledge to help us with our work, we would be delighted if you would consider standing as a trustee.

I would like to thank Angus Macdonald and Julia Higginbottom for joining us as co-opted Trustees over the last few months. Their contribution as the workload increased has been invaluable.

I mentioned the progress we have made this year and that is in no small part because we secured funding from Highlands and Islands Enterprise to recruit our 2 Part time Development Officers. They have both risen to the challenge of working on a variety of projects that we will talk about later, spinning many plates in the air cheerfully and with enthusiasm. With their input we are seeing projects being delivered and funding secured for new ones, working with other development officers both on the island and working for other Development Trusts. That ability to network and learn from others doing a similar role has been very helpful. It demonstrates that communities that have faced challenges can overcome them with constructive energy. We have no desire to duplicate the work of other groups on the island. Indeed, funders would not condone duplication of effort and funding would not be made available.

We have completed the following projects

- We have Electric Bikes which will be available for hire, housed in a dedicated container.
- We have developed a website which has gone live with Trust information. We would be happy to host information from other community Groups to provide a one stop source for information
- We have developed a Welcome pack of useful information for new residents but which also holds information useful to all residents and tourists.

The year ahead will be a challenging one due to the cost of living crisis, especially in a rural one like ours. We have secured funding for activities to help individuals come together using the hall and Café. This programme will be delivered jointly with the Bernera Community Association, supporting some of their activities. I'm sure you'll all agree this kind of collaborative work where we recognise each others strengths gives a better outcome for the people of our community.

It will also see

- the completion of the pontoons that I mentioned earlier,
- the completion of the facilities building which will offer shower and laundry facilities at Kirkibost.
- Asset Transfer of land at Kirkibost Pier from CnES
- We will continue to work with HHP and Callanish Free Church to try to ensure the provision of affordable housing.
- There will be ongoing work to purchase the Hatchery in Kirkibost and develop multi-purpose business units.

By this time next year, I anticipate a significant breakthrough on the Buyout. We have had a great deal of assistance from the Civil Servants in the Scottish Government to ensure that we are ready to ballot the community in order to gather your views on a Part 3 buyout. As I said before, nothing happens without community approval. Its my hope that the community view will be as positive as the result for our previous ballot.

The Trust will continue to develop over the coming year with a programme of training being planned to ensure the highest levels of Governance are maintained.

The Trust must acknowledge the funding it has secured from HIE, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, NHS Western Isles, Development Trust Association Scotland and Scottish Land Fund in the past year and to Donna Mackenzie at CIB Services for support to submit accounts in 2021. Thanks are also due to our former Trustee and Chair, John Porteous, for his ongoing support to ensure the successful delivery of the Pontoons project.

I will now step down as Chair following 2 years in the role but will continue as trustee for a short while to ensure a smooth handover to the new Chair and finalise this years accounts information.

Thank you.

Anne Ryan

Pontoons & Pier Development

The Kirkibost Pontoons project includes a pontoon layout with berths for 14 to 16 vessels (depending on size), bridge access to the shore, a facilities building with toilets, showers, laundry and a small manager's office, electric hookups for 4 campervans, and 2 charging points for electric vehicles. The pontoons are equipped with electric power bollards and water hose reels. The pontoons are secured in place by anchors and heavy duty chain, and the mooring system has been unaffected by the high winds experienced in late summer and autumn.

The pontoons and all services infrastructure were completed last year. However, it has not been possible to secure an electric meter and supply agreement, as all the suppliers have been refusing to connect to commercial clients. Only now are we beginning to see chinks of light, with the possibility of a supplier

in the coming months.

The pontoons will offer berths for local boats and, over the summer months, for visiting yachts. Although it has not been possible to set up the chosen means of charging customers, several small boats have been making use of the pontoons, which currently can only supply water. Dues can be for a single overnight stay, or for longer periods (one month, six months, all year), and once it is possible to arrange payment by card, we can advertise and attract visitors to the harbour. The level of dues is proportional to length of vessel, including raised outboard motor.

There is a list of rules which users of the pontoons must observe, mostly to do with consideration for others; avoiding pollution and unsafe practices; keeping the decks clear of any obstructions; and preventing unnecessary damage or wear and tear. All vessel owners or operators must be able to demonstrate up-to-date insurance before being offered a berth. Those wishing to be allocated a berth should contact Callum Macaulay. Those wishing to be allocated a berth should contact Callum Macaulay.

The pontoons are in Kirkibost Harbour, which is owned and operated by CnES (Western Isles Council), and the pontoons require to be managed responsibly. A set of operating procedures and duties have been prepared and approved by the CnES Harbour Master.

The facilities building is part-complete, with the external shell in place. Once the floor slab is

finished (there is a delay in sourcing the correct materials), the joiners, plumbers and electricians will be able to return and complete the internal partitions, fittings and furnishings, and electrical equipment.

Next season, we hope to welcome a number of visiting yachts and provide them with berths and supporting facilities in one of the safest harbours in the Hebrides.



The Hatchery

The Salmon hatchery building which has been disused for a number of years has been identified as being available for purchase on behalf of the community by the Trust. After some detailed work to establish the ownership and upon agreement with the current owners, the trust began the work of seeking funding to buy it.

An initial consultation was launched to establish the basic need, and ideas for the building. Due to the commercial and light-industrial nature of the pier and its surrounds, it was felt that it was important to begin a dialogue with the potential users, the business owners, the Comhairle and the wider community about what would be possible, and most useful for everyone, in purchasing this building. This led to an understanding that there was indeed appetite for its repurposing in line with the existing type of activities that the zone includes already.

Following on from the appointment of 2 new development officers, one of whom was tasked with this project, the Trust were able to successfully secure Stage 1 Scottish Land Fund funding to continue the consultation, to scope out a valid business plan as well as to gain a market valuation



and structural survey.

We continue to consult with the community through the ongoing independent survey and planned community meeting on the 2nd December, at the Community hall.

This survey has additionally been shared in the Café, with paper copies, through the Trust Facebook page and in the community newsletter.

The independent company, Community Enterprise CIC, is approaching an extensive list of people identified by the Trust and the BCA, as well as any respondents that have given their details for further in depth interviewing.

If you would like to be included in updates of future consultation events, please get in touch with the trustees, the development officers, or let us know through the Trust Facebook page.

Berneria Bikes

The trust were successful in a funding bid from the NHS Western Isles Capital Grant fund for an e-bikes and trikes scheme.

The funding also covered a storage container and accessories to support the initiative.

The container has arrived at the Kirkibost Pier ready for fitting out and the scheme will be formally launched with an online booking form.

The funding of the scheme supports low cost fees for locals with tourists being able to hire them at the full rate from March 2023.

If you'd like to get involved in the cycling scheme as a volunteer, please get in touch so that we can plan training and be ready for the spring.





Social Housing (The Glebe)

After the appointment of Development Officers, the Trust, once again looked at purchasing the Glebe as a site to develop much-needed housing for Bernera. We approached CNES Planning Department to see whether it would be likely that the site be granted planning permission.

An informal report from planning was positive and we were put in touch with Mary Ann Graham, the CNES Housing Development Officer. The Glebe had already been identified as a potential housing site in CNES's Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP), which included delivery of new affordable homes in rural Lewis between 2021 and 2026. As such a Stage one feasibility study had been completed on the site which looked promising. Mary Ann was keen to take things forward with us, and we were asked to provide evidence to show housing demand on Bernera.

We did this through an online survey, a paper survey in the Bernera News and by gathering responses at the Chat, Cheese, and Wine event at Bernera hall. Ten people/families responded, and this information was forwarded to HHP/CNES. CNES sent the Trust results of the Stage 1 study along with a basic plan illustrating how the site could potentially be used for a small social housing development of up to eight new homes.

Based on the positive outcome of the Stage 1 study, in June Mary Ann/HHP put in a request for a Stage 2 Feasibility Study to be made on the site. Also in June, the Trust met with the Free Church (who own The Glebe) to enquire how they would like to proceed.

They agreed a Stage 2 Feasibility study should first be made and depending on the result of this, they would then work with HHP to see how much of The Glebe land they would require for a housing scheme. On August 23rd, TIG undertook the Stage 2 Feasibility Study.

The Trust has been in touch with CNES to find out the results but are still waiting to hear back from HHP/CNES. (The last communication with CNES was made on October 31st).



Island Buyout

At a Public Meeting more than two years ago residents unanimously asked the Trustees to prepare for a hostile buyout using Part 3 of the Land Reform Act. We are now in a position where we can move forward.

To achieve this we need to:

Hold a Ballot to show how much support there is for a buyout. There are two types of vote, a crofter vote and a resident vote. The Act requires that to vote any individual has to fulfil certain conditions: Registration in the Register of Crofts (Gift Crofts in particular), have a boundary with the land we wish to buy and live within the land we wish to buy. They must also be registered to vote in the local elections for the constituency the land is in.

Identifying who is entitled to vote was not a simple process but with the backing of legal advice we

now have. Any individual who is affected by these restrictions will be informed by letter.

Form a New Organisation to buy the land. As this is a Crofting Community Buyout we need to have new Articles of Association (rules) for the group buying the land. We have decided to set up a completely new group for this. The new Articles are being drafted by officers of the Scottish Government. The Articles have to be approved by Scottish Government Ministers.

Make an Application. As part of the application we need to provide a map of the land we wish to buy. This has to be accurate and can be challenged if we include any land not owned by the landlord. This has been a huge undertaking but the map is being changed and brought up to date by our consultants. We also have to get our Feasibility Study updated to take account of changes like the School, Post Office and Shop closing and the New Developments at Kirkibost Harbour.

Much of the above can be challenged by the owner so it all has to be accurate for our application to succeed.



Website

Additional funding was received in order to increase visibility and transparency of the Trust's work and part of this was used to commission a website.

The scope of the initial site was widened to include information about the Great Bernera community and its facilities, to raise awareness of the Trust, including its activities.

Additionally it is a place for the community to access and download the most up to date version of the welcome information pack, the Trust's annual report, monthly minutes of board meetings, as well as links to ongoing consultations and opportunities on Great Bernera.

As the website is an ongoing live project, if you feel something is missing or would like it to be added please get in touch.



Welcome Information Pack

The Trust received some funding from the Covid Recovery Fund and it was suggested that this be used to produce a Welcome Pack for new residents to the area. The pack evolved as we realized it would also be a good resource for visitors to the area and is now called a 'Welcome Information Pack'.

The 36-page full colour brochure contains useful local information for newcomers (and existing residents), such as bin collection days, doctor's opening hours, local business information and services. There are also sections about the history of Bernera, weather patterns, wildlife, and local activities.

Newcomers will receive the Welcome Pack in a presentation folder with additional community leaflets if applicable at the time, and additional copies will be handed out upon request and left in public spaces for visitors to browse through. It was agreed that 50 copies would be printed, and the file would be added to the new website, available for download and print.

New Service to provide help within community: cost-of-living crisis

In mid-September, the Trust applied for grant funding to help those in need in our community with the cost-of-living crisis. In mid-October we were awarded a total of £18,300 over two years to set up a new fortnightly drop-in service that will be run from the community centre by a team of volunteers.

Our aim through this service is to help ease financial burdens and to be a regular, visible, and active presence, so people will know they have support in the community. It will also offer signposting to help those in need to find additional help - we don't want people to feel that they must go through the crisis alone.

The £9,100 of funding in year 1 will be used to provide:

A warm, friendly space to meet and talk about concerns.

Free products and vouchers to help people with the rising cost of heating their homes/staying warm.

Free beverages and soup at the drop ins, food and necessity boxes.

Practical help and support on matters such as debt, grants, applications etc.

Quarterly specialist advice sessions provided by local organizations and charities.



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