

Extract From:
LANDING TRUMLAND ESTATE
FEASIBILITY STUDY
INITIAL REPORT
for
ROUSAY, EGILSAY AND WYRE DEVELOPMENT TRUST

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Proactive Environmental and Heritage Management

(1) Peatland Management

Delivering objectives as set out in the SSSI Management Statement could include restoring eroding areas of peat, redundant cutting of banks and ditches, tracks and peat roads and to block grips (drainage ditches that dry out the bog and heath).

Rationale:

- Compliance with SSSI favourable conservation status.
- People on Rousay are dependent on private water supplies, much of which is derived from peatland areas on the Estate.
- Intact peat bogs store and slow water which helps maintain steady flow rates, thereby reducing run off and localised flooding which can damage property, agricultural land and infrastructure like road gullies and culverts.
- Healthy peat bogs on the Estate could provide a natural defence against destructive wild fires, damaging property, habitat and cultural features. Fire is more likely to occur as springs and summers become warmer and dryer.
- Peat accumulates over thousands of years and is, by far, the largest store of carbon in Scotland. Degraded peatlands emit carbon, hence the drive for restoration.
- Peatlands are culturally significant landscapes and valuable living archives of Rousay's past.
- Peatlands on Rousay are a place for recreation, walking, and bird watching, and a part of Orkney's iconic landscapes.
- The combination of topography and maritime influences make Rousay's peatlands uniquely adapted for birds, plants, fungi, invertebrates and micro-organisms, making the Estate important for biodiversity.
- Opportunities to fit with Peatland Action Programme, the £4.5 million North Isles Landscape Partnership Scheme (NILPS) 2018 – 2023, SNH Natural & Cultural Heritage Fund (NCHF) and other initiatives.

(2) Invasive Species Control

Monitoring and checking the spread or arrival of invasive species.

Rationale:

- Salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*) is a native of North America. Introduced in Victorian times to provide dense cover for game, it has spread out to colonise parts of the Estate. Its lush dense growth, up to 2 metres, has a destructive effect on local habitats, and root systems can damage heritage features. Removal by digging up plants or cutting and chemical control.

- Fuchsia (*Magellanica riccartonii*) is a native of South America popular in gardens that has colonised hillsides in Rousay to the detriment of local habitats and heritage features. Removal by digging up plants or cutting and chemical control.
- Stoats (*Mustela erminea*) were first seen in Orkney in 2010 and since then the population has become fully established. They are now widely distributed throughout Mainland Orkney and pose a very serious threat to Orkney's unique wildlife. They are not known on Rousay so far.

(3) Monitoring and Recording Projects

Volunteers could have a greater role through helping professionals and public bodies monitor site conditions.

Historic sites

- Report on site condition – for example by fixed point photography.

Biodiversity

- Utilise site condition monitoring required by SNH to monitor condition of SSSI.

Improved Visitor Facilities and Volunteering Opportunities

Ranger Service Provision

The REWDT could consider employing an Estate Ranger to lead and coordinate management tasks and visitor services. The Sanday Development Trust has been able to employ a resident Ranger since 2005.¹ The Sandy Ranger has its own website and Facebook page with over 2,000 'likes'. See reference below to joint activities with the RSPB.

Creating Viewing Points

Access to the high ground on Rousay is mainly reserved for the 'fit and the few'. However, vantage points do provide spectacular panoramic views. Further investigation is proposed into a short route onto Kerfea Hill (235m), the highest point on the Estate. This would take advantage of the B9064 public road already climbing to almost 150m at the top of Sourin Brae and an existing, but disused, OIC quarry site as a possible small car park.

The Rousay Heritage Trust have already identified this location as "Providing safe car parking, plus a picnic table and an information board, at the viewpoint and sculpture site, at the highest point of the public road between the Leann and the Sourin Brae".

A short engineered path would take visitors from the car park to the top of hill. A timber walkway is not envisaged, but it is worth noting the experience of others:

A wooden walkway at Cuilcagh Mountain in County Fermanagh has become a social media phenomenon. Nicknamed the 'stairway to heaven,' the boardwalk opened in July 2015 with an aim of conserving pristine blanket bog and restoring damaged peatland that had been eroded by people walking through it. Following construction visitor numbers rose from 3,000 to 24,000 per annum².

¹ The website describes the role as - *to help you enjoy the wonderful wildlife and make the most of your time on Sanday. Throughout the year, the Ranger organises free events, guided walks, workshops and activities open to all.*

² <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/news/2017/05/02/fermanaghs-stairway-to-heaven-social-media-star/>

Public Toilets

Savaiskail Bay is a popular place for visitors and one of the few places on Rousay with easy access to the shore. There is an informal car park with benches and a picnic table. Estate land at the adjacent Loch of Wasbister could provide the location for some form of public toilets, perhaps open seasonally – the nearest existing public facilities being at Brinian. In the 2017 REWDT Survey, residents supported installing additional toilet facilities.

The toilet could be ‘packaged’ for funding purposes with a small shelter for use during poor weather, interpretation about the loch and beach, and perhaps some changing and storage facilities to assist with safe water sports on the loch such as kayaking or paddle boarding. In the 2017 REWDT Survey young people identified adventure activities as something they would like provided.

Volunteer Activity Projects

Volunteering in the outdoors is proven to make people feel good both physically and mentally and can give them a new set of friends, interests and skills. This could be particularly relevant to younger people who move to the islands over the next 5-10 years as the impacts from development initiatives build up. The resident population on Rousay is small, but, as other community owned estates have experienced, ownership can generate enthusiasm and get people more involved in practical activities. Also, for some organised tasks, people may travel to the island and stay to offer their services on a voluntary basis – with economic impacts from their spending on accommodation, subsistence and other purchases.

Volunteering as a ranger could require people to commit a few days over the main visitor period:

- Being an ambassador for Rousay and sharing their love and knowledge of the area, inspiring local people and visitors alike;
- Helping to take care of a special place;
- Volunteering alongside the full time Rousay Ranger.

This would suit people who love nature, heritage and the outdoors, enjoy meeting new people, being out and about in the fresh air, and want to learn new skills. It would involve meeting and engaging with visitors, sharing information and answering questions, walking popular routes well-used by visitors, and becoming involved with more practical conservation and monitoring activities.

Induction and training sessions would be likely to involve key features about Rousay, the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, and Emergency First Aid training.

Partnership Arrangements with Sympathetic Stakeholders

The RSPB is an established landowner with a reserve on Rousay. After purchase, some form of lease agreement could be negotiated by REWDT to extend RSPB management onto adjacent parts of the Estate. This could mean ceding control of some aspects of land management for a predetermined period, but could give the Trust a modest income and a good link to RSPB’s expertise and membership base for funding and visitor promotion. It could also provide opportunities to explore joint arrangements for a shared Ranger post.

Interestingly, no resident mentioned the RSPB as a possible partner when asked in the 2017 survey who they might like to see REWDT partner with to improve the life of island residents.

Other Appropriate Projects

Housing

In island locations like Rousay, the OIC Local Development Plan (Policy 5c) is supportive of and sympathetic to housing in the countryside outwith settlements. In such places, subject to compliance with other policies, including design, OIC adopts an open approach to applications and is in favour of encouraging self-build and affordable housing projects that will help to address disadvantage in island communities.

The Estate land is mostly hill ground or is ground above the feelie dyke, which could make housing projects cost prohibitive in terms of access and connection to services. However, there appear to be some potential housing sites on Estate ground, some with ruins of past habitation, that could be considered for redevelopment.

Currently, Rousay has eight council houses and six social rented properties. Open market house prices on the island are considered 'reasonable'. Housing should be considered in terms of the needs of key workers, young people, single people, elderly, and the infirm. A 2017 Highland Small Communities Housing Trust Survey identified:

- 3 households that do not currently meet the needs of household members.
- 4 respondents with a family member who left the islands because they could not find suitable accommodation.

52% of respondents agreed that the islands needed more affordable housing for rent.

56% of respondents agreed that the islands needed more affordable housing to buy.

Were new houses to be regarded as a priority, REWDT could provide project management services for any build or utilise factoring services from a registered social landlord in relation to allocations (REWDT could write its own allocation policy but it would be wise to have this implemented by an external experienced body), with further factoring services required once the houses were occupied. Property could be shared equity or rented.

Connectivity

The 2017 REWDT Survey identified a need for improved mobile phone reception. Almost 90% of young people supported this. Community ownership of land would make siting of a community owned phone mast easier. This could also be the case for microwave links to improve broadband connectivity, which is the largest barrier to employment creation identified by REWDT.

Visitor Accommodation

Rousay has limited accommodation and many visitors arrive for the day and leave having spent very little. Staying overnight allows more income to be captured, and land ownership could facilitate additional accommodation provision. Other community land owners have capitalised on this opportunity. Additional accommodation could be traditional tent camping or the emerging 'glamping' market which utilises 'eco pods'. Overnight hard standing and hook ups for motor homes are also a possibility, as are high end 'bespoke' self-catering units of a unique and eye-catching design. Stone faced, turf roofed deluxe 'hobbit houses' have achieved 90% occupancy in the Outer Hebrides, for example.

Support Funding for Development Projects

Biodiversity

Peatland Action is a project, led by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), which is designed to restore damage in this habitat. As part of the Scottish Government's Green Stimulus Package, it is directly contributing to the Government's targets on climate change mitigation. In launching the IUCN Peatland Code at the World Forum for Natural Capital in 2015, First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said:

"For Scotland, losing just 1% of our peatland would release the same amount of carbon as an entire year of human activity. So instead of reducing our peatland, we're restoring it. Last year we restored just over 20 square miles. We spent approximately £5m on doing so".

"That spending would make no sense if you used conventional accounting methods. But if you focus on climate change, and use natural capital as a guide, it's one of the best investments we can make as a society."

The Natural & Cultural Heritage Fund (NCHF) will provide support for Scotland's natural and cultural assets. In November 2017 the Scottish Government's current European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Programme was updated to include a new fund which will support projects which create employment, and generate economic and social benefits through promotion of the natural and cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has been asked to lead the development of NCHF Fund.

Projects which can be supported include:

- Investment in infrastructure supporting the sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage assets.
- Digital interpretation projects and interpretive media that promote and protect natural and cultural heritage and provide local economic and social benefits.
- Improving accessibility, interpretation and quality of sustainable development opportunities based on the region's heritage.
- Promoting and developing the unique and distinctive natural and cultural heritage (such as Gaelic and the region's musical heritage) and resources of the region. These activities should not be generic marketing campaigns but focussed clearly on natural and/or cultural heritage to encourage new visitors and expand markets.
- Projects to develop new products or services to groups of enterprises and sectors based on the region's natural resources, particularly for the tourism sector.

SNH, with input from other organisations, will be developing the guidance and application process for the Fund over the summer, before running several promotional events across the region in the autumn. SNH expect to open for applications between January and March 2019. Projects must then be delivered in the period between July 2019 and June 2022.

Community Led Projects

Orkney Islands LEADER Programme 2014 - 2020 can provide funding for small scale, pilot projects led by the local community, or that are in the local community's interest, with the aim to promote economic and community development within Orkney. The Orkney LEADER Programme has five themes:

- Support small businesses and enterprise start-up, growth and diversification (for sectors rather than individual businesses except for farm diversification projects).
- Support for Orkney's tourism, cultural heritage, crafts, and food & drink sectors.
- Support for Orkney's community services and facilities.
- Support for Orkney's natural environment and development of sustainable energy.
- Support the development of Orkney's fisheries sector and communities (through EMFF rather than LEADER funding).

Tourism Infrastructure

The new Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund is administered by VisitScotland, and this fund will support sustainable, well planned, inspiring, and collaborative infrastructure projects that focus on improving the visitor experience and enable more visitors to enjoy Scotland's rural communities.

The types of project that could be supported include parking, camping facilities, disposal points (especially for camper vans) and toilet provision. The fund is a platform which will provide leverage of additional and focused investment, stimulate collaboration and build capacity within communities.

Successful applications must demonstrate the following:

- Enhanced visitor experience
- A sustainable approach
- Community capacity building
- Effective partnerships and collaboration
- Project viability and deliverability

Post Brexit, although arrangements are uncertain, it would seem that additional payments under agricultural support mechanisms may be available for environmental management in upland and island areas, possibly offset by a reduction in production payments for these areas. This scenario could have a major impact on island agriculture.

Culture and Heritage

The North Isles Landscape Partnership Scheme (NILPS) is a programme of projects involving the enhancement, promotion, and protection of the built, natural and cultural heritage of the North Isles of Orkney. NILPS received Round 2 approval from the Heritage Lottery Fund in March 2018. Several projects are already scheduled for the REWDT area, including path work and a pier heritage centre. However, LPS always include scope for back up projects that come forward where scheduled projects are unable to proceed for various reasons; and this could provide the opportunity for additional projects associated with work on Estate land in community ownership to be brought forward for funding support.

Housing

If matching funding can be obtained, Scottish Government funding, through the Rural Housing Fund is available until 2021 to support affordable housing. In the order of £80k - £90k per house might be available, although from 2022 what will be on offer is less certain.

Estate Purchase

The Scottish Land Fund (SLF) would be the principal source of funding for Estate purchase, with a recent overall success rate of applicants of 75%.

Successful applicants should clearly demonstrate that their project will help their local community to:

- Achieve more sustainable economic, environmental and/or social development through ownership of land and buildings.
- Have a stronger role in and control over their own development.
- Own well managed, financially sustainable land and buildings.

HLF prioritises applications that can demonstrate significant positive impact for the community as a whole.

Over the life of the fund, SLF expects its average contribution to eligible project costs to be 80% - although up to 95% can be provided. The minimum of 5% from other sources can include own fundraising efforts, negotiated discounts on the valuation, or other funders.