

Kinghorn Loch User's Group
Notes from Consultation Meeting with Dualchas Group
carrying out an independent Feasibility Study for land around Kinghorn
registered under Right to Buy

Present

Ronny Duncan (Kinghorn Sailing Club), Alan Henderson, Margaret Kinninmonth, Elinor Chalmers (Kirkcaldy Canoe Club), Marilyn Edwards (Secretary), Fraser Ballantyne (Kinghorn Community Council), Richard Neil (Craigencalt Farm), Ron Edwards (technical advisor – Chairperson), and Steve Westbrook (Representative Dualchas)

Apologies – Alastair Morrison (SEPA)

Introductions

The meeting began with everyone introducing themselves and saying which group they represented. No representatives were present from The Ecology Centre, The Scottish Carp Group, Scouts, Alcan or Sustainable Communities Initiative. Some member organisations only come when needed, SEPA, FC Community Services and were not represented on this occasion.

Steve said that Dualchas were a group of design specialists with Duncan Bryden the environmental specialist and Steve a financial specialist. They had experience having been involved in other Right to Buy projects. Their remit was to complete a scoping report in Phase 1 with a fuller scale feasibility study in Phase 2. More consultation had been needed to complete the scoping report as it was a complex issue.

A brief history of KLUG was given; firstly the Loch Action Group was formed as a sub group of the Community Council in 2000. The task was to solve Algae bloom problems on the loch, this was successfully tackled by making rafts and spreading barley straw on them twice yearly. This evolved into Kinghorn Loch User's Group representing all users of the loch which is now an effective management group of the loch. The Group worked with other organisations to resolve problems as they occurred but the biggest achievement to date was the construction of a new wall and jetty with four slipways and the running of Come-and-Try days.

In 2004, the community council had assisted the Ecology Centre to hold a public meeting to try to secure a future for the Ecology Centre. This led to a land association being formed which ultimately failed and was replaced by KCLA 2005, the present land association. Most people felt that the function of the land association was to secure this future for the centre and not the aspirations now being proposed by the directors.

Questions asked by members:

1. How could a present feasibility study remain relevant to any acquisitions in the near or distant future when needs are always changing?

Response: Steve agreed it was difficult to project into the future; different scenarios could be investigated depending on land availability. The aim was to look at development and income that may come from particular projects. Also they would look at how KCLA could work with local landowners and others.

2. If land came on to the market why does KCLA feel they would run things better than the local farmers at present? Willow biomass option was certainly not desirable as the land is good quality farmland for growing crops and growing willow is intrusive and prevents access.

Response: Steve said that the vision was long term, the whole project being for future generations to come. Any land that came on to the market KCLA would have to make a good case to the funders.

3. Further opinion of the members was that acquisition and use seemed dependent only on KCLA's ability to obtain funds and had nothing to do with the wishes of the community. There seems to be no provision for people to have their say.

Response: Steve indicated that the community could contact the funders if they were unhappy.

4. How would members of the community know if a funding application was being made. The community seemed to be the last to know. We were now faced with the likelihood of no ballot and no communication.
5. Would a ballot be held to let the community decide whether they wished to proceed with the Right to Buy on land when it came up for sale? Although the petition that people signed stated clearly a ballot would be held it was unclear now whether this was required to take place.

6. How would the community know if negotiations with funders were taking place if there was no ballot and no communication?

Response: Steve indicated that a ballot was not required if a willing seller is willing to sell land to KCLA. This appeared to be the case for the east shore. He would look at whatever promises were made on the petition.

7. It was unanimously considered that there is a lack of communication, no openness nor transparency in the activities of KCLA. The only people who did not seem to get properly consulted was the community.

Response: Steve indicated that the need for improved communication was picked up in the first Dualchas report.

8. How would the loch and its surroundings be made financially sustainable? Members considered that the need for financial return for KCLA could lead to development of a large facility on the east shore, which is specifically against the aim of KCLA to stop development and contrary to the opinion of the group. Some considered that a small Ecology Centre was acceptable but not a more comprehensive building. Both the Canoe Club and the Sailing Club considered that they were unlikely to want to use a facility on the east shore as launching facilities were good in the present location.
9. Members considered the aspiration of the Ecology Centre for a new centre. Ownership of that land by KCLA was not considered desirable and the Ecology centre should own it. It was however considered preferable and desirable for the centre to remain where it is and relations with the farm needed to be improved. There was much discussion on how this might be achieved.

Response: During questioning, Steve said that Dualchas had not been given the remit to engage for public consultation, rather that they were asked to work up the feasibility and business plan and the viability of KCLA. He admitted that the only polling was carried out in the street by directors of KCLA.

10. Members considered that this was not independent nor transparent and said that there were differing views in the community. KCLA did not appear to have the trust of the community. Transparency is not present. It was accepted that there were a number of residents that are for the Right to Buy, a number opposed to it, but many in the village had no real connection or view.

Response: Steve said that the Stage 1 report indicated that a great deal of consultation with the public was required and would be undertaken. However, a view was given that the KCLA remit for Stage 2 did not require any public consultation. Steve said he would check this, but was of the opinion that the Dualchas report defined the remit for Stage 2 and this does require consultation.

11. Concern was expressed about what the community would get out of it. Also concerns about the possible re-selling of land and what happens if KCKLA failed.

Response: Steve indicated that it was not for Dualchas to comment on KCLA's or the community's ideas in the long term, or how a trading company would operate. Steve indicated that some new forms of social enterprise companies can operate with directors who are paid for the work they do, rather than it needing to be voluntary. He indicated that KCLA could sell land to fund other projects.

Conclusions

- a) There was no provision in the Dualchas Stage 1 initial report for Kinghorn people to have their say, independently of KCLA.
- b) Dualchas remit seemed weighted towards the viability for KCLA, feasibility and a business plan only and not the desires of the community.
- c) There was no investigation of any views within the community that contrasted or differed from that of KCLA.
- d) KCLA do not have the trust of the community because transparency is not present.
- e) The whole project is too large and not desired by the community or users of the loch.
- f) It would be better to focus on smaller projects closer within Kinghorn.
- g) Concerns were expressed if land acquired by KCLA was sold on.
- h) There are presently no access problems on the loch and its surrounds. It has free public access and is criss-crossed with right of way and public pathways. Access to the loch is enshrined in documents. It was unnecessary to do anything to enshrine these rights.
- i) The feasibility study would only be valid for a limited time and further studies will be needed if and when land becomes available. It is questionable that this is good use of public money.