

## **Steering Group report on creating a Development Organization in Assynt**

The issue of there being no development organisation in Assynt was raised at the Assynt Community Council (ACC) meeting in March 2016. Following this it was decided that ACC should hold a public meeting in Lochinver to assess community support for the formation of a development organisation. This meeting was held on 31/5/16 during which a presentation was given by Helen Houston, development manager Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust, and a discussion was held on the pros and cons of having a development organization. At the end of the meeting, by show of hands, the majority were in favour of Assynt having a development organization. It was suggested a steering group be formed to seek a mandate from the people of Assynt to set up a development organization.

The steering group formed following the meeting consisted of David Slator (Chair) Madeline MacPhail, Brendan O'Hanrahan, Laura Hamlet, John Venters and Clive Ward. Boyd Alexander as secretary. Subsequently Clive Ward has stepped down.

The steering group held a series of township meetings (Stoer, Elphin, Drumbeg, Kylesku, Lochinver) at which the arguments for and against a development group were put and audience opinion sought. An anonymous questionnaire was also distributed and a face book page set up, again with the questionnaire

The result of this consultation process was that a large majority of those who responded were in favour. The numbers involved in this process was small however and some of those in favour together with the few who said "no" had reservations as follows:

- Assynt does not need another group when it struggles to maintain the ones it has.
- Assynt does not need another group telling us what we need.
- There should not be another group seeking handouts. (On this point immediate reassurance can be given in that no grants are given now unless the proposed venture is sustainable going forward)
- The group needs to be open and democratic, that townships outside Lochinver should have a voice, that there needs to be wide consultation to identify community needs to take forward.

Benefits identified included:

- Development groups role would be looking at the development needs of the whole community.
- Better able to look at strategic issues like housing and ageing population.
- Develop projects that are sustainable and generate income and jobs for the community.
- To be able to support existing community organizations

A full summary of the consultation process can be found at: <http://bit.ly/2a1mejH>

With this information gathered the steering group met again to discuss how to take this forward and meet the concerns expressed. This was and is challenging! At this time a proposal was made by Nigel Goldie, Chair of Assynt Community Association (ACA), initially in a private capacity, then with the support of the ACA board, that we look at the possibility of ACA becoming the development organization. To inform our discussion better about this proposal the Steering Group invited Rory Dutton (Development Officer for Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS)) to attend a meeting. DTAS supports development organizations across Scotland, and Rory has a lot of experience of organizations changing their role.

It was clear from discussions with Rory Dutton that there were no significant barriers to doing this, and that there were clear benefits. We would not be setting up a “new” organization from scratch but evolving the role of an existing organization which has assets and income. This latter point has immense benefits in that in any contact with funders the development organization would be able to demonstrate it was sustainable and could provide some funding of its own. The most successful development organizations are those with some resources of their own.

With these advantages in mind the Steering Group decided that they would recommend that this was the way forward in principal and a meeting with ACA , with Rory Dutton present again, was held 17/10/16. It was agreed by those present to take this forward and key points were identified:

- ACA's role in the community at present is seen by some as limited almost entirely to the mission building. This has tainted the way in which ACA is seen by some in the community because of past difficulties with the setting up of the mission. These difficulties are now resolved.
- ACA has affiliated local organizations and through this there are some perceived benefits. These organizations may be concerned if ACA was seen to be changing into a development organization.
- ACA's current company Articles are written in a very flexible way, and its charitable objectives are very broad, including a development role. Because of this it could become a development organization without any changes being made to these documents.
- ACA has a trading arm Assynt Community Trading (ACT). This organization is responsible for the day to day running of the mission freeing ACA to focus on a wider development role.
- It was acknowledged that the above points need explaining to the membership of ACA and to the wider community as part of the process of undertaking a change of role. The current membership would need to vote in favour of this change. To enable this an open meeting with the current ACA membership invited would be held.
- If approved by the current membership of ACA, and as part of this change, the board of ACA would be enlarged by the current directors appointing new directors, allowable under the current company articles. This new board would stand for a finite time (probably one year) to allow the ACA to make a start expanding its role. After the agreed time the entire board would step down and a new board and officers would be elected by the membership. New members would be sought to widen the democratic base of ACA.

David Slator  
Chair ACC  
18/10/16