

Organisational background

Reforesting Scotland is a leading charity involved in environmental, social and sustainable forestry in Scotland. We represent over 700 members and our vision involves the creation of a well-forested and productive landscape, as well as a culture that values the contribution that trees and woods bring to our lives.

Reforesting Scotland aims to:

- Promote a sustainable forest culture and economy in a well-forested land
- Develop the use of locally-produced forest goods and services
- Encourage social and ecological restoration in forests and in wider land use
- Raise awareness of the benefits of low-energy living based on woodland resources
- Place the Scottish forestry situation in an international context

The case for hutting as a simple & significant contributor to Land Reform

Many people who love Scotland's countryside and wish to live, work or visit the land are severely limited in their opportunities to do so because of the high cost of land and accommodation (including houses, self-catering, B&B's and hotels). So we ask the LRRG to consider huts and hutting as a simple and effective way to enable people to reconnect with the land and to promote sustainable tourism. See attached A4.

In most northern European countries and many other countries with mountains and forests throughout the world, a vibrant hutting culture enables a wide range of people to afford regular visits to enjoy Norwegian hyttes, Russian dachas, Swedish Sommerhus, German Schrebergarte, French huttes and Canadian cabins etc. However Scotland's historic land ownership patterns, together with planning constraints that are mainly focused on permanent dwellings, mean that few Scots can afford to head off to spend a few days at a time in the hills or countryside – or enjoy more than an occasional roam.

The desire to head off to the countryside at weekends and holidays (illustrated by the Broons regular visits to their But n' Ben) is something that many Scots would love to do – as evidenced by the huge support for Reforesting Scotland's Thousand huts campaign. Building huts from locally sourced wood, being able to forage for food, gather woodfuel or simply enjoy the stars or the singing of the birds all contributes to people's mental and physical wellbeing as well as for their confidence, competence and sense of self. Yet nowadays there are far less opportunities to learn such skills that many people once learnt from neighbours or by joining the Scouts or Girl Guides.

The Scottish Executive's Central Research Unit's research report on Huts and Hutters in Scotland (2000) drew positive conclusions about the lessons and potential of hut sites – but the lack of action since then has seen a number of hut

sites being lost due to a lack of recognitions of hutters' rights and support for hutting as a beneficial recreational use.

Nonetheless the recent support for this cause from all sections of society, shows that this is an idea whose time is come and one that could contribute to the economic, social and environmental sustainability of rural areas – as well as an effective and low cost way to reconnect many urban Scots to their rural roots.

The SG could enable more people to have a stake in the land and increase the connection and flows of resources between urban and rural Scotland by -

- Investigating and drawing lessons from the culture, extent and impact of hutting in different European countries and North America
- Bringing in a hut class within planning and building regulations (ref. Welsh legislation on low impact sustainable development)
- Increasing support for community-right-to-buy that could be used for huts and hutting
- Supporting pilot schemes and monitoring impact of hutting on private and public land

Other general points

Due to limits in our organisational capacity, we have focused so far on the potential for hutting as a means to promote land reform as defined. Other comments follow -

LRRG Objective 1:

Enable more people in rural and urban Scotland to have a stake in the ownership, governance, management and use of land, which will lead to a greater diversity of land ownership and types, in Scotland.

Why things should be different: In our experience, many Scots feel disconnected from the land whilst having a deep sense of the land being the land of their ancestors and a desire to reconnect with it. Private landownership in the hands of the few or by large corporations puts severe limitations on the extent that most ordinary people can enjoy or contribute to the land – e.g. walking or cycling is at a surface level compared to working the soil and enjoying the fruits of the harvest. It follows that the potential of the land as a resource is seriously curtailed and tends to be dominated by uses that serve the direct needs of the owners or by narrow economic forces.

Vision of how things could be different:

A broader base of ownership, governance, management and use of land in Scotland could see many more people deriving benefits from the land, and the land becoming a catalyst to a happier and healthier nation - as well as giving people more local means of control to create a more sustainable and resilient economy and ecology.

Barriers and how to overcome them:

The barriers to this include: the business-as-usual approach dominated by a narrow landowning class, served by an often more conservative professional chartered surveyors and legal establishment; high land prices; and limited confidence or capacity amongst those who don't have land. More access to advice and financial support would help.

LRRG Objective 2:

Assist with the acquisition and management of land (and land assets) by communities, to make stronger, more resilient and independent communities that have an even greater stake in their development;

Vision of how things could be different:

Giving people not only the sense but also the reality of a stake in the land where they live (through community ownership) has the potential of tapping into a great resource of goodwill and local buying power from farm eggs to woodfuel from their own place.

LLRG Objective 3:

Generate, support, promote and deliver new relations between land, people, economy and environment in Scotland.

Why things should be different:

The enormous disconnect between people and land – and strength of feeling in relation to large landowners – and those who have none.

Vision of how things could be different:

See above re huts.

Finally in general terms we support and endorse the proposals submitted by Community Woodland Association and the Forest Policy Group.

And we believe Scotland has the potential to become a better, healthier and wealthier nation if more people are given a stake in the ownership, stewardship and active use of land – not just for walking and cycling but also to work with the land resource to create and enjoy food, timber products and to have the chance to live on the land, even for a short time in simple shelters such as huts...