

LAND REFORM POLICY GROUP

Auchencairn

Approx three years ago our village Community Council was approached by the Forestry Commission to enquire if the community wished on a first refusal basis to purchase our local forest (Rascarrel) at an agreed District Valuation price under their NFLS scheme.

Massive support (standing room only in the village hall) was demonstrated for this. A small enthusiastic volunteer team was formed and the project pursued over about 18 months

A feasibility study was commissioned via the S.A.C.(College) and showed a positive view. The main areas of interest were

- Establish a sustainable economically viable overall project with "stand - alone" capability
- Provide local employment esp. for young people.
- Increase tourism (eco type) in the area/region
- Revert some poor quality areas back to peat bog.
- Build a visitor centre/workshop to be run on energy sustainable lines with potential out-reach centre for college/university etc.
- Provide a platform for "forest schools" on a local level.

To cut a very long story short we were not able to raise the necessary funding for purchase. No Scottish Land Fund existed at the time and all other sources were exhausted. The Climate Challenge Fund were unable to help.

The judgement of the Big Lottery Fund was particularly unhelpful -"negotiation with the Forestry Commission for a lower price is indicated" - The Forestry Commission refused. "This was not a bottom-up approach by the village as a need" (not exact words).

Discussions directly with Richard Lohead regarding SRDP funds - not available. This was a very vexacious exercise which has led to extreme disallusionment in our small rural village as to the true worth of their efforts in the present political climate.

You may find it interesting.

George Brockbank
ex Project Director