



## Balmacara Community Trust

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23<sup>rd</sup> March 2024

Dear Sir, Madam.

Thank you for making contact with Balmacara Community Trust through Forestry and Land Scotland. We make endeavours to respond to all enquiries and queries and our email address has been in the public domain for some time.

In response to the objections made against the Balmacara Community Trust (BCT) looking at a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) of the former Balmacara Campsite from Forest and Land Scotland (FLS), the following are the Trusts responses to the various concerns raised.

Balmacara Community Trust first became aware that FLS were considering selling the campsite when the Trust were informed that Kyle and Lochalsh Community Trust were looking into a Community Asset Transfer opportunity on the site.

BCT felt it was more beneficial to the area if it were BCT who would look at buying the site so to keep it in local ownership. Following a meeting between BCT and KLCT it was felt by both trusts that it was more beneficial for BCT to investigate the feasibility into the purchase of the site first.

Following this decision BCT went out to tender for companies to do a consultation exercise on the viability of the purchase of the site, this would include business planning. The company chosen for the exercise through the tendering process were SKS Scotland CIC, the fees for the consultation process were paid through grant funding from the Scottish Land Fund. No costs were paid for through any fundraising exercise relating to the development of the Old Mill Hall. All monies raised to date by BCT's fundraising activities have been solely spent on the re-development of the Old Mill Hall. In this process we were also provided with a representative of the SLF to help and advise us.

SKS Scotland CIC performed an extensive consultation exercise in April 2023 and from their comprehensive report and business plan following the consultation these are extracts from the summary.

*A community survey run in April 2023 resulted in 173 people responding. 66% supported the purchase of the site by BCT and a further 20% were unsure at this point in time. Provision of public toilets, ongoing public access to the site and re-instatement of camping and motorhome facilities were highlighted as priorities by the community. The need for clear business planning, balancing visitor use with local infrastructure needs and protecting wildlife were also viewed as very important. Therefore, sympathetic management of the site to manage visitors, maintain local access and protect wildlife is key to any future development.*

A copy of the Business Plan produced by SKS Scotland CIC and associated appendices and other relevant documentation are available to view on the Forestry and Land Scotland website: - [www.forestryandland.gov.scot](http://www.forestryandland.gov.scot)

The business plan states clearly what is outlined for the development of the Balmacara Campsite area. It clearly shows that only approximately 20% of the site is earmarked for camping and motorhomes.

From the community consultation the main areas that were outlined as priority were as per the report:-

*The Priority 1 Options address the top five priorities highlighted in the community survey. Phase 1 of the redevelopment of the site, if purchased, will therefore focus on:*

- *Provision of public toilets.*
- *Inclusion of flexible, low impact community events / forest school space.*
- *Redevelopment of the campsite infrastructure, allowing for some areas to be leased to partners.*
- *Maintaining community and public access to the woodland walks.*
- *Provision of BCT office and storage*

BCT has always had the interests of the community at heart when looking at developing the site, hence the consultation exercise. It can say that its plans and aspirations meet all the above.

Ownership of the land must be future proof and it will require funding / an income to maintain the site once purchased. At one stage BCT were close to not pursuing the acquisition due to the need for the site to produce an income stream. The site must be self-sustaining financially; leaving it as it stands is not an option as it would not generate sufficient income and the Trust could not sustain the expense.

BCT were approached by the proprietors of Reraig campsite which is situated a mile from Balmacara with an interest in leasing an area of the site to run the campsite element. They took the initiative to come to us with a carefully planned business proposal.

The proprietors of Reraig campsite are a locally based couple who already have a proven record on running a very successful and commercially viable business. They are looking at the Balmacara site as an overflow to their existing business with the view that the Balmacara site be seen as a “wilder” camping experience which they know there is a market for. This is beneficial to us as the site will require less development.

The proprietors of Reraig provided a very detailed business plan to the BCT board outlining their vision and financial plan for the site, this includes a 25-year lease plan which will provide BCT with a guaranteed income stream for the 25-year lease period. Their proposal is for 16 campervan parking bays and 25 tent plots. They will bring with them the investment to bring this proposal to the required standards for licensing as well as other community beneficial assets. They plan to use the already existing hard standing area for the campervans.

Without the partnership between Reraig campsite and BCT the Trust would be unable to progress with the priorities outlined as requirements from the consultation exercise and therefore the project wouldn't be sustainable for the Trust. The potential sale would be passed over to either KLCT or to another community organisation (in first instance) that may not have the same interests of the residents of Balmacara in mind. The prospect also brings significant expertise and experience in running campsites to BCT and all the legal requirements that presents.

Those who have raised their objections to the camp site project have had opportunities to attend events and AGM's where questions would have been answered and clarification on what the projects objectives are and outcomes from the consultation. This included a chance to meet Jamie and Lina and discuss directly with them their ideas and plans.

As part of the progression of the project, there will be extensive surveys to be completed to ensure that the natural environment is protected. Reraig Campsite has already paid for and completed:

- A Flood Risk Analysis
- An Ecological Survey

Should the purchase proceed BCT will add to that an Arboricultural and Topographical survey. We have quotes for these. Work that has already completed is showing that no trees are at any risk of needing felling during the proposed development. Flora and fauna will also be protected and controlled to assure the area is well maintained and can be enjoyed by all. The plan also does not permit vehicles onto the grassed areas or beside tents; they must be parked in dedicated hardstanding areas.

As with any project of this type, the planning authority will receive a full application and they will conduct their own assessments and visibility splay reviews at the junction to the main road. The site was previously a working campsite, and the infrastructure remains, our plan is to revert to a partial campsite as described above, not using all the area previously designated for use.

It is already planned that the only access to the camp site would be the one nearest the main road and so no campsite traffic need come any further down the road to the village. We do note that delivery vehicles and lorries do make journeys all the way into the village for their routine drops and collections. Our plans do not require this.

Going forward, the above surveys will be recorded in a Woodland Management Plan which will also contain action planning to maintain and improve the site. The income generated from the lease paying for this upkeep along with further fundraising efforts and events we can have on the site. There will be increased volunteering opportunities to help with this managed upkeep.

It is important to understand that a 25-year lease, a legally binding document, is being drawn up. This protects the interests of BCT and the woodland area. It also assures that 100% of the site will remain accessible for walking, cycling and recreation. Vehicles will travel on prescribed routes supervised by the wardens. Those not wishing to walk through the campsite area during its seasonal operation, will still have several alternative tracks to use.

BCT will monitor the operation of the leased area against this legal document. The owners of Reraig Campsite will also add to the site a shelter which will support the presentation area / activities we hope to host on the land and a children's adventure play area. They are already talking of regular reviews and further donations to BCT from profits in support of our community ventures. There will also be 2 full time wardens employed to supervise, advise, and monitor the users of the campsite, assuring safety and that the site is protected. This includes BBQs in designated areas only minimising any risk of fire, a far safer option than is currently in place.

We are also aware of interest on the site for a forest school and other educational activity and would want to see these as a part of the management plan.

Our plan is designed to encourage responsible campervan and camping visitors to the area. By offering waste disposal and recycle points we hope that our efforts will also benefit the environment.

Should the acquisition be approved by FLS and then BCT secure the funding to purchase it, the Trust looks to develop the derelict building on the site too. We hope to turn the building into rentable office and meeting space, provide BCT with an office, add public WCs to the outside (additional to the dedicated campsite provision) and a small laundrette to support the local Airbnb's and B&B's. This laundrette was identified in the Old Mill Hall feasibility study as a desirable and we hope to be able to offer that service.

We also see significant benefits to the local businesses in The Square from increased footfall and have already engaged with them over the project and opportunities.

The Trust continues to liaise and engage with consultants and professional agencies, taking advice and guidance to ensure that what is being proposed can be delivered and that the woodland remains a beautiful and desirable place for our community to enjoy as much as for those wishing to visit and stay.

We hope this response goes some way to alleviating any worries and anxieties you may be having. We have worked hard to assure that the plan protects the woodland area, using infrastructure that is already there from its previous use as a much larger campsite, as far as possible. We enjoy using the site for recreation too.

Yours faithfully

Balmacara Community Trust  
[www.balmacara.scot](http://www.balmacara.scot)