

A Vision for South Loch Ness side

Farigaig Community Steering Group

Our Vision

Our vision is simply stated:

To create a more vibrant, resilient and dynamic community, through unlocking the potential of the land asset currently managed by the Forestry Commission as part of the National Forest Estate.

A vision is needed to help address key questions:

1. What will occur in the next 10 years if we do nothing?
2. What could happen if the community could act on a shared vision?

Change will happen, but the community could have the opportunity to influence change for the positive benefit of the community.

Objectives

The key objectives are to:

1. Create a more vibrant, resilient and sustainable community whilst retaining the essential character of the area.
2. Increase local economic activity by unlocking the area's opportunities.
3. Stem the gradual decline in the area's economically active and family population.

The area under assessment is centered on but not exclusive to Farigaig and Foyers, on South Loch Ness side. It is the most populous area on the Loch. It is not a remote community, but in many ways there is limited external awareness of it.

Challenges include how to balance the areas essentially quiet character on the south side of Loch Ness with changing dynamics such as increasing tourist visitor numbers, and the West Link road, which will bring additional traffic to the area. The key is to see this as an opportunity rather than a threat.

Motivations

The Steering Group's discussions began with an interest in securing the future for the Forestry Commission managed assets and facilities at Farigaig, which were under threat of disposal. One year into regular monthly meetings, with a consistent group of people, this interest has evolved into a wider concern for the long-term health of the South Loch Ness side community.

The community is distinct occupying the slow side of the loch in contrast to the relatively fast north side better known to tourists. There is quality and authenticity in the hidden gems of cultural and natural heritage and slower pace. At the same time there has been over decades, a gradual erosion of services adding challenges to those living and working on the south side of the loch.

It occurred to the group that significant opportunities could be unlocked with the benefit of a land asset under the influence and control of the community.

Assets and Opportunities

The area has considerable natural resources and other assets. A key part of any investigation of opportunities is to carry out an audit of the existing features and characteristics of the area, including:

- Businesses – such as Foyers Campsite
- Interest Groups
- Economic Activity of various types
- Social Enterprises
- Natural and Other Resources
- Wildlife

Key opportunities to stimulate the development of a more resilient community include:

- Housing - particularly affordable options
- Employment – e.g. tourism and crafts
- Land – forestry, horticulture, agriculture and aquiculture
- Live/Work – a range of home working opportunities

Specific revenue earning opportunities linked to the Forestry Commission assets include:

- Events opportunities
- Hutting & Glamping
- Woodland burials
- New Business start-ups linked to passing trade
- House sites – regular, affordable and woodland crofts

- Making the most of particular assets – iconic Loch Ness, water, road and foot traffic
- Non motorized user trails
- Timber based activity including, crafts, timber supply and firewood

One particular challenge is to unlock the latent potential of the place:

- Cultural Heritage – both distant past in place names, and more recent infrastructure – roads, bridges and pier
- Industrial Heritage – Aluminum and Hydro Power
- Natural Heritage – SSSI's
- Aquiculture – the story of Highland fish farming
- Iconic Loch Ness – myth & legend, from Columba to 20th century Nessie sightings
- Forest Resource – story of the Forestry Commission since 1919
- A place for outdoor activities – canoeing, walking, cycling, climbing, pony trekking, etc
- Falls of Foyers – Famous visitors including Burns, Wordsworth & McGonagall
- Opening up the Highlands - General Wade (links to Jacobite rebellions), Telford (Scotland's greatest engineer)
- Boleskin Graveyard

Development creates momentum. Effectively, one thing leads to another, a snowball effect; young families, creche, micro business, services to visitors (enhanced experience), increased spend by visitors (regional, national and international), increased investment, stronger community networks, more people, better served visitors, etc. In turn creates a virtuous circle of opportunity, development and community centered activity.

Delivery Opportunities

There is a range of financial and other resources currently available to support general economic activity and community development, including:

- National Forest Estate
- Scottish Land Fund
- Windfarm community benefit funds
- A diverse and committed group of directors
- Supportive Highland Council Planning Policies in relation to all types of development due to fragile status – area is outwith restrictive 'Hinterland' policies
- The opening, in 2018, of the West link road providing easier access to South Loch Ness side