

# CALEDONIAN CANAL CORPACH TO GAIRLOCHY

## FOCAL's update on Community Consultation within BWS's overall Masterplanning Project

July 2011



### **1 Background to the need for community consultation**

The need for community consultation on issues affecting the development and management of the canal emerged in late 2010 following local objections to BWS's proposals for new housing development at Telford House, Banavie.

BWS's subsequent meeting (Nov 2010) with the local community was very useful and constructive. BWS gave us insight into their objectives and the constraints they have to operate under. The community expressed lots of ideas and concerns, including the request for a strategic look at the whole stretch of canal from Corpach to Gairloch, and for more structured participative community consultation along the lines of Planning for Real. This consultation is now required to bring these ideas, objectives, constraints and concerns together into a realistic blueprint for collaborative action.

The economic climate presents considerable challenges for the future management of the canal. There is likely to be increased pressure for development and change. This in turn increases the pressure for good consultation to ensure an outcome that is positive both for BWS and the community. We look forward to:

- BWS engaging the community more fully in decisions affecting the canal;
- BWS explaining more fully the context of their management decisions and proposals for change;
- exploring less controversial locations for development sites on the canal;
- hearing the community's own ideas for positive change on the canal;
- exploring opportunities for community enterprise.

### **2 Who are FOCAL?**

FOCAL are Friends of Caledonian Canal Lochaber. We have grown out of the small neighbourhood group who objected to BWS's proposal for new development at Telford House. However, since that time we have developed into a much larger group with much wider community representation.

We are formally constituted within the local community enterprise company, the Kilmallie Community Company (KCCo). We are empowered to act in the community interest across the whole Corpach to Gairloch area.

#### **4 Who would commission the community consultation?**

BWS told us in February that they did not have adequate funds for the full Corpach to Gairloch masterplanning exercise. In response we suggested FOCAL could commission the community consultation part ourselves as we would be able to access funds that are not available to BWS, which would have enabled forward progress in difficult financial times.

BWS welcomed our approach but subsequently told us that they do have limited funds after all. We were delighted to hear this and look forward to hearing further details of what they have in mind for the community consultation process. BWS have also informed us that they have now appointed an architect (Michael Laird, Edinburgh) and a community engagement specialist (John Duff, Linlithgow) for the masterplanning process.

We are happy for BWS rather than FOCAL to commission the consultation provided that our participatory community interest is genuinely safeguarded and promoted.

#### **3 How would the community consultation fit in with BWS's overall masterplanning project?**

We are looking forward to hearing what BWS and their team have in mind for community consultation. Two approaches might be:

- a) BWS's team prepare a draft masterplan proposal and then consult the community for comment.
- b) BWS and their team consult the community prior to the preparation of any draft masterplan proposals. The consensual outcome of the consultation would then form part of the brief for any masterplan proposals. Further consultation would take place to consider and comment on the proposals.

FOCAL would like to see something more on the lines of b), that is a process that represents best practice in community engagement and participative consultation.

#### **5 Who would organise the consultation?**

There would seem to be three options for organising the community consultation process:

FOCAL alone:

We are willing and able to do so. We have the skills and experience within our group to do so, with considerable experience working in the natural and built environments, and within the community arena. We would ensure close ongoing consultation with BWS and would secure BWS agreement at all stages.

BWS (and/or their consultants) and FOCAL together:

We are willing and able to organise the process jointly. We have the skills and experience within our group to work with professional teams working in the built and natural environments. It would require close collaboration and consultation and joint agreement at all stages.

BWS (and/or their consultants) alone:

We are happy for BWS to do so provided that our participatory community interest is genuinely safeguarded – this would require close on-going consultation and securing community agreement at all stages.

We hope to discuss this with BWS and John Duff shortly. A happy engaged community is one that has had a say in what the process will be, not just the outcome.

#### **6 What format for the consultation?**

There are huge advantages to a recognised structured format to the consultation:

- to facilitate the fullest community participation;
- to give the best likelihood of a realistic practical consensual outcome.

A 'Planning for Real' event (PFR) is an excellent model and is recognised by Highland Council as an exemplary means of achieving constructive community participation. It is probably our preferred option, either as a stand alone event or in the context of a wider 'charrette' exercise.

BWS have indicated they think other formats might be appropriate. This is still to be explored, and FOCAL would welcome any format that had demonstrable advantages over a Planning for Real event in terms of the following:

- providing an accessible forum for people of all ages and abilities;
- not being inhibiting or intimidating for anyone, however reticent and inexperienced they may be;
- being informative and stimulating;
- encouraging widespread active participation and engagement;
- being fun and informal;
- being carefully structured:
  - to give everyone the opportunity:
    - to contribute their own ideas and concerns;
    - to see/hear other people's ideas and concerns;
    - to discuss ideas and concerns in a constructive non-confrontational way;
  - to achieve maximum consensus on priorities;
  - to manage disagreement and dissent in a positive way;
  - to explore realistic ways of implementing ideas and addressing concerns;
- providing a positive practical outcome that achieves the support of both BWS and the community.

The choice of format will need to be acceptable to all concerned, including the community, BWS, and Highland Council. FOCAL looks forward to discussing the options with BWS and John Duff.

The following notes have been written with a 'Planning for Real' format in mind but could be adapted for other formats.

## 7 Who do we want to participate?

As many people as possible who care about the canal, who enjoy it and use it, who live nearby, and who are involved in decisions about it. This would comprise all ages, and all abilities and include:

- neighbours of the canal;
- residents within the three/four Community Council areas;
- other residents in wider Lochaber who care about the canal;
- businesses related to the canal;
- visitors to the canal;
- mariners using the canal for transit, on vessels from the UK and abroad;
- leisure users of the canal, such as walkers, cyclists, equestrians, kayakers and fishermen;
- special interest groups related to the canal;

As well as of course BWS themselves (various departments).

Other interested groups who should be involved including:

- local Community Councils;
- local community companies and groups;
- Highland Council;
- Historic Scotland;
- Scottish Natural Heritage;
- The Vivat Trust;
- special interest groups representing canal users (recreational or commercial users);
- groups with an interest in the cultural or natural heritage of the canal.

Plus other people with pertinent enlightening sources of information, opinion or perspective.

The event format should be able to differentiate between the views of different stakeholder categories, such as BWS ideas, or visitors' ideas or local residents' ideas.

## 8 Need for a facilitator

It is hugely advantageous to have an impartial facilitator to run the event. This will ensure:

- participation is maximum quality, maximum quantity;
- we achieve the **best possible consensus**;
- we manage diversity of ideas and dissent in a constructive way;
- we arrive at realistic options for implementing ideas;
- the event is managed in a demonstrably impartial way.

A facilitator should also prepare the objective record of the event – an agreed blueprint for action and the way forward.

We would like the facilitator to:

- have a proven track record of facilitating community participation events;
- be an authorised Planning for Real facilitator, or similar;

We would seek positive feedback from other communities who have been assisted by them in other projects.

It is crucial for the robustness of any outcome that both BWS and the community have complete trust in the facilitator. BWS has a great deal to gain from publicly demonstrating how an exemplary community consultation can be run, and FOCAL would be very supportive in assisting BWS in achieving this.

We look forward to discussing this process with John Duff and BWS.

## **9 Timetable for the consultation**

The timetable is dependent on, amongst other things:

- agreement between BWS and community on:
  - who is to commission and organise the event;
  - what format the event is to take;
  - who is to facilitate the event;
- whether any additional funding needs to be raised;
- plenty of time for good advance publicity;
- adequate consultation between BWS and the community at all stages of process.

BWS will have numerous other strategic constraints on timetabling too.

FOCAL considers that speed is less important than taking time to plan a really good event with a really constructive outcome that all stakeholders have confidence in.

As well as the time needed to organise the event, the date of the event is also strategically important to ensure

- no conflict with other events, school holidays etc;
- a good time of year for achieving maximum attendance from the community;
- a good time of year for achieving maximum attendance of other canal users.

FOCAL have already explored a realistic timetable for organising the event, building in time for funding applications if needed and for good consultation between BWS and community at all stages, culminating in an event at a strategically good time of year. This resulted in a date of **May 2012**. FOCAL would be entirely happy with this timetable. We realise that BWS may wish to move things on faster than this, though we have concerns about an event during the dark half of the year. A lot of time can be saved if funding applications are not required. Whether an event can be organised by say August/September 2011 remains to be seen – we do have concerns about whether this provides enough time for consultation and preparation.

The overall timetable and the date of the event should be acceptable to both BWS and the community.

After the event, there will need to be adequate community consultation on all draft output before any final publication - the timetable for this too should be acceptable to both BWS and the community.

The event might identify the need for some further focussed community participation to explore some areas/issues in more detail. This might be needed before publication of draft or final outputs and/or before implementation of any particular projects.

## **10 The shape of the event**

Planning for Real events follow a fairly defined shape, based around a large-scale model of the area. Typically they take place over a number of days to make it easy for everyone to take part.

FOCAL would want to consult the facilitator for advice on the best shape of event for the best outcome, but based on a PFR format, we envisage something like this -

Wednesday evening	Set up
Thursday am and pm	<b>Building the Model together</b> a 1:500 or 1:1250 scale model of the area, based on OS maps, glued to polystyrene built up in layers to show contours. painting and decorating the model a fun day with lots of paint and glue! a great chance to break the ice, capture imaginations, get people talking and thinking
Thursday evening	<b>Drop-in sessions – What would we like to see on the canal?</b> as many people as possible drop in at any time to suit them, for as long or short as you like, as often as you like, to contribute their ideas which are added to the model (Planning for Real provides a gently structured way to do this so no-one feels shy or intimidated) plus the opportunity to speak with councillors, community councillors, planners, community development officers, representatives from BWS, SNH, Historic Scotland etc
Friday am and pm	<b>Drop-in sessions – What would we like to see on the canal</b> continued
Saturday morning	<b>Workshop session - Identifying the priority projects</b>
Saturday afternoon	<b>Workshop session - Creating the Action Plan</b>
Saturday evening	<b>Debrief and party!</b>

This is all subject to much more detailed consideration and discussion, and clearly could change significantly if PfR format is not used at all. However the PfR format could still be used as an event within a larger charrette programme for example.

## 11 Location

We would probably need a space about 24 x 12m to accommodate a PfR model and have space to work around it. A marquee on the area of the canal near Neptune's Staircase car park would be ideal as it:

- is located at the hub of the area for greatest potential change;
- is attention grabbing;
- would focus/stimulate people's thoughts effectively;
- would attract the wider canal community (boat users, cyclists, walkers etc).

## 12 Publicity

We would need lots, to make sure we get the greatest possible turnout, including:

- plenty of advance notice to raise awareness and get people thinking ahead of the event;
- plenty of publicity before and during the event:
  - banners, posters;
  - flyers through all letterboxes in Fort William area (Post Office mail drop);
  - Nevis Radio - interviews and announcements;
  - press releases - Lochaber News, Lochaber Life;
  - websites etc;
- post-event follow-up.

## 13 Sources of funding

After BWS previously said they did not have funds for community consultation, FOCAL drew up a provisional funding strategy should it be necessary for us to raise all the funding ourselves.

BWS now say they have some funding available. It is not yet clear whether they are able to fully fund the sort of consultation process that would be acceptable to the community. If not, FOCAL are prepared to apply for funding in part or in full.

#### 14 A constructive outcome, an agreed blueprint for future action

We will need an impartial, clear record of the consultation process, setting out:

- What we did.
- What all the ideas and concerns were, and the extent of support for each of them.
- Which ideas gained robust consensus for trying to put into action.
- What action is to be taken by whom as the next steps forward.

The outcome is only meaningful if it carries some weight, so we will be asking for:

- Formal adoption by stakeholders (incl BWS) as a **concordat**;
- Highland Council to adopt it as part of the statutory **Local Plan**.

#### **Our goal is:**

- **a robust consensual framework to influence and direct the future use, development and management of the canal;**
- **a constructive symbiotic relationship between BWS and the community, working to the advantage of BWS in their task of caring for the canal.**

#### 15 Next steps

We are looking forward to meeting with John Duff to begin initial discussions.