



2020

## Site Options Appraisal for Former Lochmaddy Primary School Development 'Àrainneachd Àlainn'



**North Uist Development  
Company**

6/11/2020

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## I. COMMUNITY BUSINESS MODEL

Following numerous years of gap analysis of community need which lead to the preparation of a Feasibility Study; involving extensive consultation with key stakeholders and the wider community; and subsequent numerous consultations following architectural plans; the North Uist Development Company has created a viable business model for a community development in the main population centre of North Uist. The business case is driven by community need and the requirement to create a viable and sustainable business, free from grant dependency in the long-term. A building is key to the community-based development with a need to be:

- Within close walking distance of Taigh Chearsabhair and the primary Uist ferry port
- Within close proximity to the Lochmaddy Bay Marine Area of Conservation
- Of adequate size and ability to provide suitable space to fit all business needs
- Useable in the short term prior to acquisition of funds for full development.

The proposed business 'Àrainneachd Àlainn' Community Hub and School Bunkhouse aims to be a treasured facility providing services and facilities across the community, whilst offering visitors the opportunity to learn why the local environment is precious, of global significance and should be protected for future generations. The overall project will provide multiple social, economic and cultural benefits to the residents of Lochmaddy and the North Uist community as a whole. Àrainneachd Àlainn means beautiful environment in Gaelic and highlights the aims of the business: to showcase the Uists' natural environment and engage on environmental issues, whilst providing an inviting multi-purpose community environment for all. This business will incorporate elements which will enable it to deliver financial viability, benefitting tourism by providing an all-weather attraction, while also providing significant community benefit:

1. Environmental Centre – a new innovative facility showcasing the unique natural environment of the Uists and Barra, providing tourism information, a new visitor attraction and, acting as an educational engagement point highlighting the importance of conservation practices for future generations including as a base for #voluntourism and, incorporating a bouldering rock wall to encourage active outdoor lifestyles in the comfort of an indoor setting.
2. Community Environment – a multi-purpose community space is envisaged providing a community hub for all age groups, including shared space with other users to encourage full participation. This community space is anticipated to be embedded across the development, but with space on the ground floor incorporating a gathering place, mini-library, tool library and, outdoor facilities.
3. Multi-Purpose Environment including a:
  1. Creative Environment - providing a relaxing welcoming space with the opportunity for crafters and artists to rent space for creative community initiatives, as well as for therapeutic services.
  2. Learning Environment – a North Uist community learning environment with rental space for education providers as well as cross-generational community-based learning.
  3. Incubator Hub – A mixed co-working space with rentable business space; alongside the learning environment; to spark ideas and encourage innovation for economic growth and entrepreneurial activities.
4. The Living Environment – The School Bunkhouse will be developed in the final phase to provide low cost accommodation near the primary ferry port. It is envisaged this will be used by tourists, the local community catching the early ferries or arriving late (as bus transport is limited), people travelling for business, art students, relatives of the local community, and visitors to North Uist events. It will include small self-contained rooms for longer stays for business/student use.

The four core components have been developed following ongoing community consultation with support across stakeholders and the wider community. Each of these defined components will require the appropriate space for development. Various buildings in Lochmaddy have been explored for community ownership, and the following appraisal includes conclusions representing the most suitable building for the proposed business model.

## 2. SPACE REQUIREMENTS

Following significant consultation with the local community over several years, initially throughout the An Torc project proposed in Lochmaddy and, since then, in direct relation to the Lochmaddy School Development, various needs have been analysed, and the following represents various spaces required in the development according to the current proposal. The Community Environment is embedded throughout the Development; and it is envisaged there will be space for the community within each dedicated space, including a ground floor gathering space. The Living Environment will require enough space for a minimum of 14 beds, with bathroom facilities and a living area with kitchen facilities available. There will need to be some kitchen facilities available for the wider building, and this could potentially be combined with that of the Living Environment. General public toilets, office space (minimum of 2), general storage for equipment and maintenance, an information point for visitors and an entrance.



Figure 1. Diagram to represent the space requirements of the individual components of the business model.

The Environment Centre needs to be large enough to hold visitors and education groups whilst providing the flexibility for events; providing interactive displays, fixed displays and educational displays for all ages. The Multi-Purpose Environment needs to hold groups as large as 10 whilst providing necessary space for equipment, ideally enabling more than one learning event at one time and providing some interactive space. The space needs to be designed for community groups who may wish to use this space at any time, and rentable business space for start-ups, alongside quiet zones and co-working desks. Easy access to a strong internet connection will also be important to the development, as will outside space. Light will be an important aspect of the development for therapeutic and creative purposes, as will visual access to the natural environment. A reasonable size car park will be necessary.

### 3. LOCATION

The map shows Lochmaddy, classified as the capital of North Uist, home to the primary Uist ferry service to Uig on the Isle of Skye.



Figure 2. Map to show the sites assessed for suitability for the specified business requirements.

There is no land currently available for sale in Lochmaddy, and Lochmaddy is primarily a residential setting with small businesses. There are 4 sites which have been considered for this development, which have been empty at some point.

1. The former Outdoor Centre
2. The former Lochmaddy Primary School
3. The former Tourist Information Office
4. The former Lochmaddy Hospital

The only other sites available are outwith Lochmaddy and it is this location which is critical to the development due to being near the primary ferry terminal, within the Lochmaddy Bay unique marine environment, on the Hebridean Way and close to Taigh Chearsabhagh.



### 3.1 The former Outdoor Centre

The Outdoor Centre closed in 2017 due to personal reasons by the owners. It catered for outdoor sports enthusiasts and provided cheap basic accommodation.



Figure 3. Photograph of former Lochmaddy Outdoor Centre

As the Outdoor Centre operated a bunkhouse it would be ideal for the Living Environment; however it would not have suitable space for the other aspects of the proposed development. The site has also received planning permission for conversion to a dwelling and therefore is no longer a possibility.

**PROS:** Existing structure for accommodation.

Located in attractive environment in Lochmaddy.

Ability to expand to meet business needs

**CONS:** Planning permission sought for conversion to dwelling; therefore, no longer available.

Away from the main road for passers-by

Internal fittings dated so would need full refurbishment whilst developing to increase space

Planning – Application Summary [Help with this page](#)

17/00361/PPD | Change of use from hostel and activity centre to a dwellinghouse | Uist Outdoor Centre Cearn Dugaidh Lochmaddy Isle Of North Uist H56 5AE

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|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Reference             | 17/00361/PPD   |
| Alternative Reference | 100060129-001  |
| Application Received  | Wed 19 Jul 2017  |
| Application Validated | Wed 19 Jul 2017  |
| Address               | Uist Outdoor Centre Cearn Dugaidh Lochmaddy Isle Of North Uist H56 5AE |
| Proposal              | Change of use from hostel and activity centre to a dwellinghouse       |
| Status                | Decided  |
| Decision              | Application Permitted  |
| Decision Issued Date  | Fri 18 Aug 2017  |
| Appeal Status         | Unknown  |
| Appeal Decision       | Not Available  |

Figure 4. Photograph of planning website showing change of use.

### 3.2 The former Lochmaddy Primary School



Figure 5, Photograph of former Lochmaddy Primary School

The former Lochmaddy Primary School closed in 2016 along with Carinish and Paible, with all pupils moved to a new single school site at Sgoil Uibhist a' Tuath. Since then the School has been vacant, consisting of 2 large bright rooms upstairs, 3 offices, 1 staff room, 1 large sports hall, a kitchen, toilets and storage areas. The School also has outdoor space including a reasonable size car park and raised tennis court.

**PROS:** Good size light rooms with ideal space for development

Heated for maintenance by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Overall reasonable condition ripe for development

Views of the neighbouring Lochmaddy Bay, local and natural environment

Located near the centre of Lochmaddy off the main road

Of historical significance to the local community as originally constructed in 19<sup>th</sup> Century

Available for purchase through the Asset Transfer process through Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Large proportion of the building suitable for use in the short-term prior to further development

**CONS:** Flat roof leaking with some internal damage and would need replacement

Close to a few neighbouring residential properties

A relatively small car park

### 3.3 The former Tourist Information Office



Figure 6. The former Visit Scotland Tourist Information Office.

The Visit Scotland Tourist Information Office in Lochmaddy is now closed. This is a very small unit near the ferry terminal. Taigh Chearsabhagh have been renting the space for an art exhibition.

PROS: Close to the ferry terminal and other amenities

In good state of repair

CONS: Far too small for a significant development

Already in use by a local community organisation

### 3.4 The former Lochmaddy Hospital

The North Uist Development Company were involved in the consultation and analysis of prospects for the former Lochmaddy Hospital until 2017. The site is considerable in size, comprising 8.6 acres with a loch covering 1.9 acres.



Figure 7. The former Lochmaddy hospital.

The following potential uses were identified during consultations: accommodation for students; care beds/sheltered housing; affordable housing; private housing sites; community leisure facilities/play area; community garden/allotments; campsite/mobile home site and or associated facilities; renewable



energy generation; nursery/childcare; business units. The building condition in surveys was found to be very poor and therefore would require considerable financing to redevelop the site. Feasibility studies are available online.

PROS: Located in considerable grounds in Lochmaddy

Iconic and original stone building

Already carried out feasibility studies, surveys and valuation.

CONS: Already sold to local building company so no longer available

Poor condition and expensive to redevelop

Would require many other elements to the development to make it financially viable

Potentially too large a site for a community development and already identified as unviable by the community group, An Torc Ltd, assisted by North Uist Development Company.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Development opportunities are restricted in Lochmaddy, and there are very few buildings vacant. Out of the four sites investigated for community development for the proposed business model, only one has proven a viable prospect: the former Lochmaddy Primary School.

The former Outdoor Centre which may have been an ideal prospect has sought planning permission for conversion into a dwelling and this has been accepted; therefore, is no longer a possibility. The former Tourist Information Centre is far too small for the space requirements and there is little possibility of being able to increase the space available at this site. Additionally, the building is now in use by a local organisation. The largest site, the former Lochmaddy hospital, has already been investigated thoroughly by the community and North Uist Development Company and was proven unviable for development by the community company due to the poor condition of the building and the necessary elements that would be required to make the project financially viable. The Lochmaddy hospital site has also now been purchased by a local building company and hence no longer available.

The former Lochmaddy Primary School is in reasonable condition except for one distinct area, the flat roof area. The demolition of the flat roof area will coincide with the expansion of the site to accommodate the Living Environment in Phase 3. There is outside space to aid any expansion, for example the development of a dedicated entrance area; and it has the light required for any creative aspects of the development. It therefore has the space requirements needed to fulfil the community needs and is available to purchase from the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. The former Lochmaddy Primary School is recommended for consideration for the community business model proposed by the North Uist Development Company, as the most viable site in Lochmaddy at present.