

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Ratagan and Saraig Affordable Housing and Woodland Crofts Consultation Response
Date: 22 November 2024 16:43:29

Hello,

[REDACTED]

I'm supportive of a community buyout, but the current plans are based on consultations with communities quite far away (Kyle: 20 miles and Inverinate: 5 miles). No-one in or near Saraig has been consulted about plans that surround their houses. I am much closer to Saraig than Ratagan, so am more aware of the issues with the Saraig proposals.

My comments are:

1. The Saraig proposals are very extensive right next to some small rural cottages. It seems like a massive growth to a small site in one step
2. The proposals have a campsite, but there are commercial campsites in the area. I don't see in the proposals any analysis of the impact on local businesses
3. The proposals have some self-build sites, but there's no indication if this will go to interesting local self-builds that will add to the community or sold to property developers commercially
4. The proposals have quite extensive social housing proposals, but Saraig is quite far from the services that social housing might need. I can see why Kyle or Inverinate might want more social housing for their communities, but the social housing at Ratagan has consistently been under low demand. Saraig is even further from services that young families or people with special needs may expect. Anyone living there will be very dependent on car journeys to get to services, with very few local jobs in the area
5. The proposals have workshops that may be inappropriate for what is currently a mix of residential, woodland and wildlife.
6. The proposals include a site for campervans, but this is along a very narrow difficult road for campervans when there is already commercial campervan sites in the area. I know there is desire to keep campervans out of parking bays, but these campervans have presumably already rejected the local commercial campervan sites

As a result of these comments, I believe the proposals today fail to match the main tests for a community buyout: local consultation, distorting local markets, lack of market research.

I think some further thought on these proposals, in consultation with relevant local communities, could create a much more suitable scheme.

Thank you,

[REDACTED]

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Letter Forestry and Land Scotland



19th of November 2024

Community Asset Transfer Manager
Forestry and Land Scotland
Apex 1, 99 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh, EH12 5HD

Subject: Opposition to Development Plan at Saraig due to Lack of Consultation and Potential Environmental, Historical, and Community Impacts

Dear Forestry and Land Scotland,

I am writing [REDACTED] to formally express my opposition to the proposed development plan in the Saraig area. I am deeply concerned that neither I nor other directly affected residents were consulted about this project, despite the profound impact it will have on our community, cultural heritage, and natural surroundings. Below are the primary reasons why I believe this development poses a serious threat to Saraig and Loch Duich.

1. Protection of Historical and Spiritual Treasures

Saraig is a site of great historical and spiritual significance, with relics of early Scottish Christianity lying just beneath the surface. Between *Ard Dearg* burial ground and *Ard na Eoin*, there are believed to be the remains of an ancient graveyard and chapel dedicated to St. Kentigerna, a revered saint who helped spread Christianity in the Highlands. This site connects us to over 1200 years of history, representing the early Christian heritage that shaped our region's culture and identity.

An archaeological survey conducted in 2000 (for the waterpipe installation) emphasized the importance of preserving this area, warning of the irreversible damage that could occur from excavation. The act of digging or building here risks destroying priceless artifacts, burial sites, and historical remnants that tell the story of our past. I've walked through much of Saraig and seen some of the footprints of ancient buildings, [REDACTED], which I have left undisturbed and protected. To proceed with development without careful protection of this area could erase a vital part of Scotland's cultural heritage forever.

More details are available in the

Highland Heritage Environment Record: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Source/SHG21065>
the Canmore archaeological assessment <https://canmore.org.uk/site/12021/cill-a-chaoin-tearn>

and in this article on Graveyards of Scotland:

<https://graveyardsofscotland.com/2024/11/09/rediscovering-st-kentigerna-hidden-history-of-loch-duich/>

2. Severe Environmental Impact on Local Wildlife

Saraig's unique natural environment serves as a sanctuary for various species, including red squirrels, otters, herons, badgers, and pine martens. It is part of the *Trees for Life* re-wilding initiative, which has successfully reintroduced red squirrels to the northwest Highlands. Each of these species relies on an undisturbed environment, and construction activities and the plans of KLCT to turn most of Saraig into an industrial site would disrupt this delicate ecosystem, resulting in habitat loss and potential declines in wildlife populations.

As *Trees for Life* notes, "The Scottish Highlands is the largest remaining stronghold for red squirrels in the UK... Reds remain absent from much of their former range in the northwest Highlands – until now." Disturbing this area risks undoing years of conservation efforts, impacting both local biodiversity and Scotland's natural heritage. Conservation information can be found on the *Saraig Wildlife Haven* Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61567299787174>

Friends of Loch Duich Facebook page

[Friends of Loch Duich | Letterfearn | Facebook](#)

and the *Trees for Life* red squirrel project page <https://treesforlife.org.uk/about-us/red-squirrel-reintroduction-project/>

3. Geohazard Risks

Saraig and its surrounding areas have a history of landslides and washouts with a significant one occurring in 2013 and another nearby in Totaig this year. Construction and industrial activities would destabilize the slopes further, increasing the likelihood of landslides in an already vulnerable area. Since all the forest above was taken down the risk of soil erosion has risen considerably. A couple of years ago, a dumpster came tumbling down the steep hill severely injuring a worker.

In one of the washout incidents the water was streaming through [REDACTED], narrowly missing the heating oil tank, other exit points and debris blocked the road in two places. The Forestry and Land teams dealt with these incidents swiftly to reduce the damage and worked for months to reinstate the burns, paths and roadways. Does KLCT have the experienced staff, machinery or even the ability to respond to such a major land and water incident such as this? Or if the land is in the hands of a new inexperienced Crofter, then the folk living at the bottom of the hills are in serious trouble. These types of incidents present a clear safety risk to the community and should be taken as a critical consideration against the development.

4. Traffic and Accessibility Issues During Construction

Access to Saraig is restricted to a single-track, dead-end road, which would not handle the volume of construction traffic without causing significant disruption. Just last year, a lorry became stuck on the road at Saraig, highlighting the logistical challenges of transporting large vehicles. A massive breakdown truck had to slowly reverse all the way along the road, because there is no turning area, and the road was blocked again for all that day. Many

elderly residents depend on daily visits from district nurses and food deliveries, services that would be heavily impacted by road blockages. Additionally, the noise, pollution, and safety hazards from construction would severely disrupt daily life for residents.

5. Strain on Local Resources and Infrastructure

Expanding Saraig's population would place an unsustainable strain on local infrastructure. Utilities, water management, and public services would be stretched beyond their limits. The water pressure in the public water system copes ok at Saraig and there are only a few times a week when the water pressure is poor. The arrival of tourists degrades the pressure even more and then add half a dozen houses and all the proposed industrial buildings and activities, and it won't cope.

The telecommunications system is ancient and is due for retirement under the present scheme to remove and upgrade from the old copper lines. The Broadband is horrendously bad, during the tourist season it's even worse. However, the planned fibre lines were stopped at Ratagan and soon all that will be here is, the at times, unstable mobile tower signal or satellite.

There is no public waste system on the Saraig side of Loch Duich, all the properties have sewage treatment plants or old septic tanks. This will mean more heavy trucks on the road to regularly empty sewage tanks.

The Saraig to Totaig road is and has been a lifeline for the folk living on the west side of Loch Duich. There is no alternative if there is any kind of blockage on this road. Walking along the beach allows you to see what's left of the sea defenses and the edge of the road is clearly visible in places, which is also exposed to the full blast of the sea and wind. There are many openings and rock slips along the side of the road and the observer can see the holes which are running under the road at the sea edge. There have only been small repairs needed so far recently, but only a matter of time before there is a collapse.

6. Disruption to Daily Life During Building

The construction phase would bring extensive noise, dust, and vibration, disturbing the peace valued by both residents and tourists. Visitors come to Saraig to enjoy its natural tranquility, and construction would diminish this appeal, potentially impacting local tourism and causing stress within the community.

7. Long-Term Community Impact

An increased population would fundamentally alter the character of Saraig, disrupting its rural charm and close-knit community. The way of life that residents cherish would be jeopardized, leading to a loss of the distinct identity that makes this area so special.

For many years we were hearing rumours of the Saraig campsite being used for social housing and the hills of Saraig to be returned to nature and be included in the rewilding scheme, which would have tied in with Saraigs natural scenic area status from Glenaffic to loch Duich. But that is clearly not what is proposed, it's a complete takeover of Saraig into an industrial site [REDACTED].

The late inclusion (not on the original plans) to sell plots on the open market is a disgrace, public land bought from FLS at the community price and sold to the highest bidder. Loch Duich and the highlands don't need more second-homes or holiday homes by those well-heeled enough to afford it. That certainly will not put pupils into the local primary school.

In conclusion, this plan demands thorough consultations with local residents, conservation experts, Historians and Archaeologists and geologists to fully assess the impact on our environment, wildlife, heritage, and community. It is unacceptable that those directly affected by the plans were not consulted. Never at any point were the folk in Saraig contacted, invited to any meetings or received a leaflet drop in letter boxes. Loch Duich community council members know who the folk are in Saraig. According to Highland Council, "Community councils are voluntary organisations that act as a voice for their local area. They represent and express the views of the whole community they serve". Both the community council and KLCT have ignored the local folk who are most affected by these proposals. Holding a wider consultation and not inviting directly the present community was clearly an exercise in ticking boxes and gathering support from outside the area of Saraig and Ratagan. I believe there would have been much local agreement to the proposal of social housing at the campsite and rewilding the hills within the local area of Ratagan and Saraig, but KLCT have went for industrialization and business rather than social housing and the environment. The politicians who have backed the buy-out proposal pointed to the need to increase the pupil numbers in the primary school and the need for social housing. Social housing development has proved in the past to bring young families in, but in these proposals only a tiny part of the vast area proposed is for that purpose. I strongly urge Forestry and Land Scotland to consider this proposal, respecting the profound and irreversible effects it would have on Saraig and Loch Duich.

Thank you for considering these concerns.

Yours sincerely,



From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Response to consultation on community buyout of land at Saraig and Ratagan
Date: 22 November 2024 22:53:12

I want to extend my feedback to proposals for a community buy-out of two sites at Ratagan and Saraig [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

I believe that this proposal needs to be slowed down, the organizations involved need to properly involve those most directly impacted, and the bid should go back to the drawing board with the backing of the actual community effected at Saraig, Leachachan and beyond.

- The proposals constitute an overdevelopment and swamping of the current settlement at Saraig.
- I very strongly object to the proposal for a campervan site at Saraig in the business plan, which brings no benefit to the local community, and large disbenefits in terms of extra congestion. It also constitutes subsidized competition with the existing sites at Glensheil and Morvich, which is not allowed under the terms of the legislation.
- I am surprised and dismayed at the lack of direct and proper consultation with the residents of Saraig and their closest neighbouring properties, who will be particularly affected by some of the inappropriate uses outlined in the business plan.
- I object to the lack of a transparent and open steering committee, as outlined in the process documents.
- The proposals and groups involved need to properly consult those living at the sites, and include those living around the proposed sites on any steering group.
- I do not object to the principle of a modest amount of sensitive affordable homes/ social homes delivered at Ratagan and/or the “old Forestry campsite” at Saraig, as long as in keeping with the exceptional surroundings and the existing stone walls and mature trees are retained.

Saraig

Saraig is a very beautiful, unspoilt place with a small settlement, where people live all year round. I walk through Saraig nearly every day and know everyone along this stretch.

The sites talked about here include the Old Forestry Campsite – which, despite it’s identification in this proposal has long returned to nature and is now a beautiful site of mature trees and wildlife. The proposal also encompasses large wild areas on all sides of Saraig itself, a pretty and historic settlement on the shores of Loch Duich. This area, again, is regenerating beautifully, full of a diversity of wildlife and is part of an area of special scenic beauty.

Lack of Consultation with Residents of Saraig and Their Neighbours

I understand that none of the residents of Saraig have been directly spoken to, or sent letters outlining these proposals either by the Kyle and Lochalsh Community Trust, the Loch Duich Community Council, or the organizations or consultants listed as being involved. This is a massive oversight.

I would like to make clear that I am a general supporter of the Kyle and Lochalsh Community Trust and their works on the Plock and in Kyle. However, the proposals for Saraig and also Ratagan are far bigger than anything they have attempted so far, and seems to be expanding rather alarmingly from the original proposal of some accommodation on the “old Forestry campsite”.

The questionnaire (mainly circulated in Kyle over 40 minutes drive away) did not invite discussion or objection. The questionnaire invited ticks for but not against certain suggested uses. To say therefore a certain percentage is in support of each suggestion is erroneous, as those against were not counted or given an opportunity to express this. I note all the percentages quoted as “for” particular uses are all under 50%. 50 percent of what? Not even a majority of something that is not defined. How can this even be interpreted as support?

I believe there was a meeting miles away in Inverinate, but no letters were put around the people of Saraig or their closest neighbours. Any consultation about developing on all three sides of Saraig should clearly have consulted Saraig residents, kept them informed and got their views. This did not happen.

“Local community” really needs to be considered more carefully in this context when many responses may be from people from miles away who are not familiar with Saraig or affected by the potential disbenefits.

Lack of Transparency and Community Representation on Steering Group

The process states clearly that a steering group must be set up for the project that is open to local residents and all in the local community.

Is there a steering group? I can't find any information at all on this anywhere.

If I can't find any information, how is it open to the community to join? Is it open to join?

Clearly the residents of Saraig and others nearby should be represented on such a steering group and should be given a proper chance to join it.

INFORMATION NOT PROPERLY AVAILABLE

I have visited the KLCT website to find out more about the Saraig and Ratagan proposals and there is only a very old, general write-up there with scant detail.

I cannot find the Forestry commission's consultation and deadline dates on the KLCT website. Their submission to the Forestry commission is not available or advertised on their own website for members or the community to read.

Most people I speak to have not been made aware of the proposals and it's not clear from the KLCT website where to find the proposals and consultations. This may be an oversight, but it is clearly a hindrance to proper transparency and consultation.

In addition, one tiny notice at Saraig is all there is to inform local residents at Saraig and beyond of the Forestry Commission's consultation. This is easily missed and will not be seen by anyone in a car. This notice gives little detail of what is proposed, no mention of the proposed campervan site and has a different deadline date on it to that on the Forestry Commission site.

At the very least, better consultation is needed and deadlines need to be extended due to this.

Social Housing and Affordable Housing

There is a shortage of social and affordable housing.

I don't oppose a modest amount of housing at the old Forest campsite, as long it doesn't overwhelm Saraig as it is now and it retains the old walls and mature trees.

However, this does seem to be a very indirect way of achieving this objective and surely takes more land and contains more risks than a more direct approach.

A complication seems to be that the rules of the community buyouts do not allow for it to be used for affordable housing or social housing, hence the inclusion of a highly risky and lengthy business plan. However the plan itself, based on razor-thin profit margins, adds considerable disbenefits, risk and uncertainty about the deliverability of social housing, proposed years down the line.

Does this go against the spirit (and even the letter) of the legislation?

Would a housing association directly bought the old Forestry campsite for social and affordable housing for rent, would this not take less land and provide more direct benefit?

Would this not guarantee to deliver the part of the plan where there is actual proven demand, without taking lots of extra land for risky purposes, with no guarantee of delivering the social or affordable housing for years, if at all?

I would also like to question how the affordable housing is proposed to remain affordable? What stops the self-builds being bought and sold as yet more holiday lets?

A note on transport. The Saraig site is quite remote, with zero public transport. It is miles from any bus-link. Young families and people without private transport could become pretty isolated.

Nearly 50% of those in social housing have no private transport (although this figure may be lower in the Highlands). Ratagan is walking distance from a bus-stop and has other facilities such as a playpark and is closer to the shop at Shiel Bridge. There are a number of families with children already at Ratagan which would provide easier access to friends and playing out. Would the site here not be a more practical choice for families and those reliant on public transport?

STRONG OBJECTION TO CAMPERVAN SITE PROPOSAL, SUBSIDY FOR MARKET ADVANTAGE/ DISTORTION

My biggest objection to the proposals is putting campervan site here.

This proposal is not transparent but is buried in the business plan in a way that does not match the site plans. This leads to confusion and a lack of transparency and does not enable people to comment properly on the proposals.

There is already substantial campervan provision in the area, with a site at Glensheil campsite, Morvich and yet another proposal for one at Balmacara.

The legislation is clear that community buyouts can't be used to subsidise or distort the market and compete with neighbouring businesses. To put yet another campervan site at Saraig is doing just that – it would be competing with the existing businesses above, without providing any actual benefits for the local community. Only disbenefits.

This is just plain wrong.

The local communities at Saraig, Leachachan and Letterfearn do not need more campervans to be sent down the small windy deadend road at Loch Duich. Campervans would bring no benefits to people living here and, indeed, is a large disbenefit in terms of bringing in a lot of extra traffic to a quiet area that cannot sustain it.

My understanding is that it is already hard to fill jobs in many local businesses including hospitality, even when accommodation is provided. Any jobs created by yet another campervan park will simply make it harder for the existing one to operate and encourage more congestion and transient tourism with no real economic interaction with communities.

Some tourism is helpful to the economy overall, but campervan tourism brings few benefits and huge disbenefits in terms of road congestion, increased accidents and making most single Highland track roads unsafe for children to bike along and pedestrians to walk along.

Currently the road at Loch Duich, unlike many other roads locally, is somewhere locals, visitors and children walk, bicycle and enjoy. This is an enormous community benefit and a unique wonder of a place that would be ruined by an increase of traffic of large vehicles like campervans, along this stretch.

Work-shops and Units – OBJECT TO ANY INDUSTRIAL USE

I do not support the siting of anything noisy, industrial, or that involves heavy traffic use and HGVs here. It is against the nature of the site, it is against the aspiration to renature and rewild this area and it is not fair on the residents who live here permanently.

This is not an industrial site and there are many sites in the area more suitable for this purpose. For example the Forestry Commission has been advertising a plot at Inverinate, which does not look suitable for housing due to its position, but could be a viable workshop or storage facility.

The plan is unclear on what is proposed in terms of workshops and small businesses, and needs to be a lot clearer as there has been no consultation on these plans. To me this sounds a bit confused currently.

Woodland Crofts

These take up a huge amount of space and surround the entirety of Saraig. Whilst the Forestry Commission is a public body that is accountable, what keeps accountability if large areas of Saraig are handed over to private owners for potential commercial uses? Whilst the word "croft" is a romantic one, there is nothing to explain what a woodland croft is or how it would be sustainable. Most importantly, how would the private owners of these large plots be accountable to the public and residents who already live there?

This is an area of considerable land slippage risk and flooding. This also could potentially make any buildings here uninsurable. Any working of the land would need to take this into account and will largely affect their neighbours.

To surround Saraig in this manner, with no consultation with Saraig themselves is pretty unforgivable.

What would prevent noise, smell and other nuisance being created by those working this land?

Where are the models and guarantees for the community to look at?

I would not object to something that protects native woodland and provides viable livelihoods here, but sustainability would need to be considered and how they match up to other aspirations like the rewilding of the area, the native species introduction programmes and the work by Trees for Life, for example, all of which provide livelihoods, ecological protection with consideration to Saraig's protection as a special scenic area.

Again, it is important any organizations involved actually come and consult with the local residents, particularly the residents of Saraig, and those living nearby.

I believe all decisions on this bid should be delayed until a steering group is set up including those most directly

affected to reconsider these proposals and more consultation and plans are drawn up to put in a revised bid.

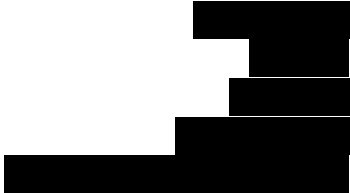
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21st November 2024

Community Asset Transfer Manager
Forestry and Land Scotland
Apex 1
99 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh EH12 5HD
fls.communities@forestryandland.gov.scot

Re Ratagan and Saraig Affordable Housing and Woodland Crofts

I would like to respond to the proposed developments sent to Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) by the Kyle and Lochalsh Community Trust (KLCT). My primary concern is with the developments at Saraig, but some of the comments taken may also apply at Ratagan. I am pleased that we can respond to the plans as I have several concerns about their scope, their impact on wildlife and the environment, and the lack of direct consultation with local residents.

- The scope of the proposals is ever changing, seemingly to meet new demands which are never clearly stated and based on limited data. I object to the scale of the current proposal because of its large and likely extremely damaging impact on Saraig.
- The provision of affordable housing is open to interpretation and must be clarified, but I have no objection in principle. Any sale onto the open market should be stopped as it doesn't align with KLCT objectives. The precise mechanisms or schemes to provide low-cost rent or purchase should be clearly stated, and the asset transfer request vetted to ensure that it does not run afoul of them.
- Woodland crofts should not be considered as part of the scheme. They transfer the management of a large amount of land (disproportionately at Saraig) into private hands, do not confer community benefits, only benefits to the crofters themselves. The crofting proposal should be considered against the hugely significant Rewilding Britain Affric Highlands scheme which will provide long-term employment and volunteering opportunities open to all members of the communities which it covers.
- The release of information about the proposals has been uncoordinated and haphazard at best. There has been no direct engagement with the residents of Saraig. There are problems disseminating information in spread-out rural communities, I fully accept that. Responses from surveys came back from at best one fifth of the residents and so any figures derived from them are partial and misleading at worst – fractions of fractions.

Though it is outwith this representation, this issue highlights a need for community bodies to best work out how to disseminate information into their communities and to actively engage with the communities. We now have an alphabet soup of “service providers” acting for us, about whom we know little or nothing and who are not visible in our communities.

Regards



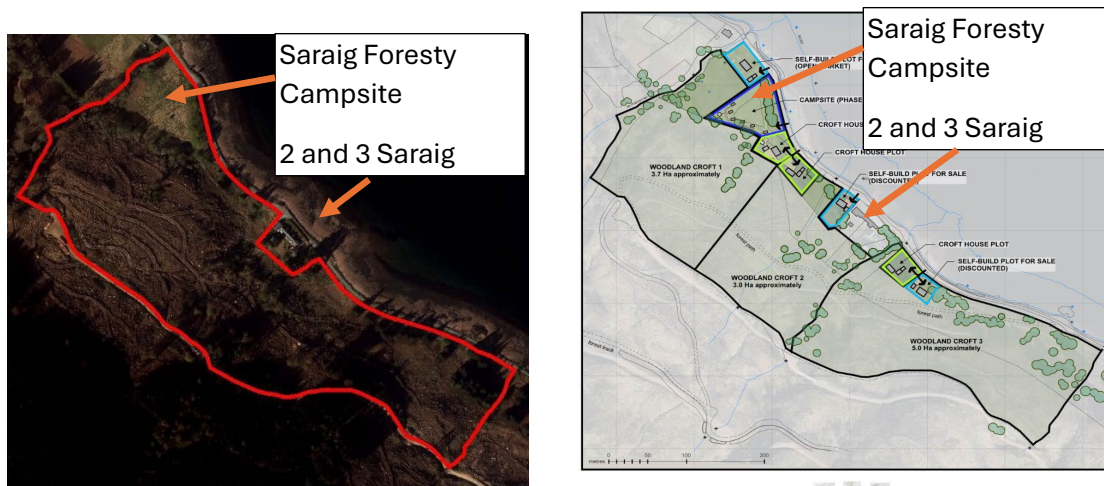
Scope of the Development

The proposed developments of housing and woodland crofts are not situated on the Saraig Foresty Campsite as stated but are next to and completely surrounding numbers 2 and 3 Saraig. In context, two houses which occupy, at a guess 0.5 hectares of land, will be subsumed in a development of which 11.7 hectares is proposed as croft land. To quote KLCT:

“The Saraig site is situated on the old forestry campsite, which is fairly flat land on the roadside, and steep, clear-felled forestry (approx. 11Ha) to the rear of the site.

Housing development is proposed on the flat areas of both sites, and Woodland Crofts are proposed for the steeper land.”

However, the boundary maps submitted by KLCT show that this is not the case.



The campsite is not being included in the initial development and is also not being considered for affordable housing. The maps clearly show the impact on 2 and 3 Saraig, and the property lying on the other side of Allt Riabhachain. I don't know how increasing the land use of a settlement 25x fits in with being part of a micro-eco village. I object to the scope of the development. I object to three croft households being allocated 11.7 hectares of land for their private use.

Provision of Low-Cost Housing

I do not object to the development of low-cost housing in principle as long as it is developed under schemes that protect the low-cost nature into the future, for example *The Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust 'Rent to Buy Scheme'* as described on the *world habitats awards* website (<https://world-habitat.org/world-habitat-awards/winners-and-finalists/rent-to-buy-scheme/#:~:text=Full%20details,whilst%20they%20are%20renting%20it>). Can KLCT guarantee that the land earmarked as *self-build plots for sale (discounted)* will be developed under this or similar schemes? If not, I object to the sale and development of those plots.

I object to any release of housing plots onto the open market. This runs totally counter to a stated KLCT objective of wanting affordable housing for young people in the area who are economically active. Once any plot is on the open market, there is no control on this objective.

Does the way in which KLCT is proposing to buy the land in anyway preclude its release to housing associations? Nothing should prevent the transfer of the land to housing associations given their expertise in providing low-cost housing.

The current plans for Saraig, if we include the croft houses shown in the crofting plots, will increase the number of houses along the shoreline from two to eight. When the campsite was first marked for community interest, that was proposed as the site for low-cost housing. This would have guaranteed a much lower impact on the provision of houses compared to the current plan. It is not clear how KLCT came up with the new plans in their submission to FLS. I'd like to raise that as an issue. If FLS reject the current submission, perhaps KLCT can submit different plans with the low-cost housing being provided in the campsite. See campsite below.

The infrastructure in Saraig isn't great. We are on a single-track road, the water pressure is variable, we have intermittent power outages, and we do not have fibre broadband. The plans need to address the creaky or missing infrastructure, for example how lack of fast internet access will impact anyone working from home or studying.

Woodland Crofts and Wilding Schemes

It is hard to understand how crofting provides community benefits and how land taken up in this way can be used for wilding schemes.

Crofting

I strongly object to the use of the land around Saraig for crofting. Transferring 11.7 hectares of land into the hands of three crofters (people, families or groups) to manage in no way constitutes a benefit to the community – it confers a benefit to the crofters and the crofters alone. To quote KLCT:

“Woodland Crofts:

Create a community owned, sustainable woodland which will be divided into five Woodland Crofts to meet local and wider needs. The initial proposal recommends that the sites can provide five Woodland Crofts – two in Ratagan and three in Saraig. Each croft offers an opportunity for the creation of croft houses and woodland-based enterprises, where crofters can use the land for economic opportunities. This could be through the sale of woodland related goods, products and services. Other communities share tools like wood-mizers, sawmills, planers and table saws for example.”

The statements within this single paragraph are wildly contradictory. Community-owned woodland being used to provide economic opportunities for individual crofters, including the use of shared tools such as sawmills. So, one outcome could be that that community-owned assets at Saraig are developed for the economic needs of three crofting leaseholders, who, in attempting to generate an income, use mechanised machinery, plants and tools to fell, move and process the timber. That generates no community benefits except for the crofters. It is a purely commercial proposition with a potentially devastating impact on the local environment with associated noise, water course and air pollution.

I fully understand that there are different crofting models, but there is no guarantee that the crofters will choose to operate them: fully mechanised, semi-commercial timber extraction is as likely as any other land use, indeed more likely if it is being used to generate income. As crofters do not have to live on their land, though the proposals show a croft house in the crofting plots, this means the crofters could leave their site after a day's work with no consideration for the Saraig residents.

In diagrams from earlier proposals, there was provision for holiday lets such as pods to be built on the crofts at Saraig, along with workshops. I would object to any of these: the pods could be built to overlook 2 and 3 Saraig, and my objection to workshops falls into the objections surrounding commercial operations. These concepts are still visible on the KLCT website (<https://www.lochalsh.uk/affordable-housing/>) though they differ from the plans and boundary maps in the submission to FLS.

Wilding and Land Reclamation

We have a generational opportunity to have land returned to a much more natural condition as part of the Rewilding Britain Affric Highlands scheme (<https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/local-network/affric-highlands>). If more land is released into communities by FLS as plantation forestry is cut down, we can wild a vast area as shown on the web site. This project is of regional and perhaps national importance. To quote KLCT:

“Both the Ratagan and Saraig sites are part of the Kintail National Scenic Area, which are designated to ensure its protection from inappropriate development by Nature Scot. The project team will strive to ensure that a project will be designed to be sympathetic to the landscape and natural beauty of the area and minimise impact as much as possible.”

How better to strive to develop the environment in a national scenic area than to make it available for this wilding scheme? In no way will any commercial crofting operations fit in with it. The wilding scheme will surely provide skilled work for forestry managers and rangers, jobs in ecological surveying and recording, and many more besides. If so, this will provide a pathway for local folk to re-train and provide opportunities for school leavers and local folk to gain valued qualifications.

Is it outwith the scope of this application for KLCT and FLS to liaise with Rewilding Britain to discuss the benefits of the wilding scheme for all residents, and its potential to provide long-term employment benefits across our communities?

Land Management

The land on the south side of the loch is unstable: we've had two major landslides that blocked the road in recent memory, and there was a massive slip at Totaig very recently. The land is also very steep and difficult to work. Someone nearly died while working on the hill. Economic use of the land is risky both to people working it and to the land itself.

Who would be responsible for cleaning up after landslips, floods and road blockages under KLCT's proposal if hill working leads to such issues?

Dissemination and Collation of Information

The submissions by KLCT say that they have been engaging with the community and have support. I have every sympathy with KLCT in trying to get information out given that folk have differing access to the internet and online information, and that there is a woeful lack of community noticeboards. The dissemination of information has been uncoordinated at best, and conclusions drawn for the action plan have been taken from a partial dataset.

- There is no information about this submission easily visible on the KLCT website. To find it:
 1. Open the KLCT website at <https://www.lochalsh.uk/>
 2. Click the Projects dropdown.
 3. Click Affordable Housing.
 4. Amongst the blurb about the proposed Ratagan and Saraig developments, find and click on [Lochalsh Housing Survey Report – December 2023](#)
- The submission reports a well-attended meeting. If this is the one at Inverinate Community Hall, this was not widely advertised, and many folk only found out about it on the day by word of mouth. I found out about it after the event. Shortly after some photos appeared on a group WhatsApp chat. It was only at that point that many folk found out that the proposals had expanded beyond the Saraig Forestry Campsite and now included Ratagan too. Some of us held an impromptu meeting which a member of Loch Duich Community Council found out about after the event and wondered why he/she hadn't been invited.
- The residents of Saraig (and Ratagan too?) have never been directly contacted in relation to these plans. Groups and organisations (the trust, community councils etc.) have been discussing the proposals, but no representatives have come into the two affected communities to discuss the impact of the plans. Poorly advertised meetings in Dornie Hall and Inverinate Community Hall do not constitute community engagement.
- The KLCT Affordable Housing website mentions a survey with 600 responses. This is from an estimated population of 2600 and so represents one quarter to one fifth of the population (though I accept some may be grouped responses). However, any conclusions drawn are then based on fractions of a fraction of the population.
- The website also mentions another survey with 135 responses.
 - 28 want workspace in the home, land to build premises or a business unit to rent. So, again, less than one quarter of this small survey want anything from that could be interpreted as ranging from a home office to a business unit for what, a brewery, a tea shop, a manufacturing plant? Grouping these requirements is meaningless. I can't speak for the folk at Ratagan, but it seems this number is being used to justify the provision of business units in Ratagan – luckily none in Saraig, and none wanted.

It is perfectly possible to work from home or to run small businesses in homes with small outbuildings. It is likely that any businesses requiring larger infrastructure would be better off siting their businesses elsewhere, for example on the A87 which provides much better transportation access than a single-track road with passing places.

- 27 people expressed an interest in Woodland Crofts, so again a very small fraction of a small fraction of the population. It is highly likely that skilled jobs in wilding schemes will provide better job opportunities across our communities rather the provision of crofts.

Outwith this representation, we need much better ways of circulating information in and across our communities. We need big, noticeable information boards with all relevant information about Community Trust and Community Council activities, and a much better and coordinated provision of information online (there is a paucity of information on some of the community council websites for example). There are many, many organisations involved in community activities, and it is hard to know who does what for whom, and why. Despite what has been said about community engagement, there will still be many folk who are unaware of the plans.

Camp site

To quote KLCT:

“Camping Area:

As a means of long-term sustainable income and local employment opportunities, dedicate an area of the Saraig land for camping. Situated on the shores of Loch Duich and close to local attractions like Eilean Donan Castle, the site offers a stopping point to explore Lochalsh and further afield. The site was a former worker’s campsite, and this links back to the historic use of the land. Some infrastructure remains on this site, which could be easily upgraded.”

I don’t object to the provision of campsite in principle, but it requires much more investigation. There are existing campsites at Shiel Bridge and Morvich, with van emptying facilities in Auchtertyre, and a proposed community-supported campsite at Balmacara. Is there a business case for a campsite in Saraig with all these sites available or coming on-stream?

KLCT is proposing to use monies raised from a subsidised land purchase to fund the development of the campsite. Is this permitted by the community asset transfer scheme? Does this confer a benefit that was not available to existing businesses?

I believe folk living in houses with a rural burden are entitled to run B&Bs. If so, and subject to license agreements, this might provide folk with the chance of making some money at home, while leaving campers to use the existing and planned sites. Would this provide an alternative to the development of a campsite?

I also find it a bit funny that the proposal mentions Eilean Donan Castle. Many of us will remember re-directing tourists who had come down our road following a misplaced pin on Google maps. Anyone wanting to visit the castle is best off staying on the A87 where they can access campsites, shops, cafes, restaurants, fill up with fuel, and enjoy the castle without having to do a U-turn.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Forestry FLS Communities](#)
Subject: Development at Saraig and Ratagan.
Date: 13 November 2024 23:31:50

Dear Sir,

With reference to the proposed development of land at Saraig and Ratagan, I would like to draw your attention to the recent release of red squirrels at exactly these two locations, during the autumn of 2024 which to date is still going on.

This project is being done by Trees for Life charity in conjunction with volunteers from the Friends of Loch Duich group. The area was chosen for the release of these endangered animals because of the suitable trees and wild shrubs which supply food throughout the year and the wild nature of the site. Such sites with appropriate habitat are rare these days.

It is therefore imperative that this habitat is preserved and whilst we have no objection to local housing, habitat preservation must be at the forefront of any future plans. Red squirrels are protected under the wildlife and countryside act 1981, and I would recommend that you have an environmental survey done in advance of any groundwork, to ensure that dreys or any other rare wildlife in the area will be protected.

Sincerely

[REDACTED]
Friends of Loch Duich
[REDACTED]

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.
