

National Development Plan for Crofting



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the Cross Party Group on Crofting which meets regularly to discuss crofting-related matters. Over the last 18 months, the group has focussed on what the vision is for the future of crofting and welcomed the addition of manifesto commitments to consider both a review of crofting legislation and the publication of a National Development Plan for Crofting in the programme for Scottish Government. The forum initially identified five key priority areas which would deliver this vision. However as a result of the difficulties highlighted during 2016 relating to common grazings, a sixth was added:

- **simplify crofting legislation:** develop the 'bones' of a new act;
- **new entrants:** make crofts available;
- **increase affordable housing:** a meaningful grant and loan scheme;
- **crofting development:** a funded lead body on crofting development;
- **financial incentives:** ensure current and future policies have a positive impact on crofting;
- **common grazings:** ensure that grazings regulations are fit for purpose.

These priorities were presented to the minister and whole-heartedly endorsed.

The forum welcomes the fact that work

FOLLOWING sustained lobbying by SCF, the Scottish National Party included in their manifesto a pledge to publish a National Development Plan for Crofting. This commitment is being honoured by the Scottish

Government and the Scottish Government Crofting Stakeholder Forum is working on a contribution towards informing this plan. The Crofting Stakeholder Forum is a practical action group, formed from the attendees of

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Profound implications for huge areas of crofting land

SCF MEMBERS come to the federation for help with many and varied problems.

An ongoing case causes us deep concern, with worrying implications for croft land, in particular common grazings. Several articles elsewhere in this issue highlight the need for grazings to be managed effectively as a vital resource for crofting communities.

Our members took over a long-abandoned croft about five years ago as new entrants. The land was derelict and three quarters under dense bracken. They have transformed the holding into a good, diversified crofting business that is a shining example of what can be achieved from unpromising beginnings, given a bit of vision, enterprise, determination and hard work.

No only that; they are actively and energetically involved in township affairs, bringing about much-needed

improvements to the common grazings. They have also taken on two neighbouring crofts on sublets and again are bringing neglected land back into productive use.

We would have thought that crofting needs many more such individuals and that they would be given every encouragement, even be used as a case study in a glossy annual report. So it came as quite a shock to hear of the treatment they have received from their local SGRPID office.

It started a year ago when, in all good faith, they questioned the BPS regional allocation of one of their parks as no account had been taken of recent land improvements.

SGRPID responded to this by carrying out an aggressive and nit-picking land inspection, the aim of which appears to have been to undermine and demoralise our members. The methodology of this inspection was suspect as, for

example, a non-existent area of dense bracken and a vertical rock face were deemed ineligible as was an area of 'scrub'. There were a few small trees, but these were not preventing grazing.

Most seriously, the inspecting officers deemed ineligible a Region 3 hill park, on the grounds that no livestock was present and the fencing was not stockproof. In fact the fencing was in process of being renewed at the time. Crucially this hill park formed a large percentage of our members' total claim for 2016, and if ineligible, would invalidate the whole claim.

They were informed verbally of the inspection findings and told that penalties would be invoked. On asking for details in writing they were told that they could expect a letter "hopefully by the end of 2017". They cannot appeal against the

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