

Cultybraggan Camp case study

Cultybraggan is an ex-POW camp that was bought out from the MOD by the community of Comrie in Perthshire in 2007. The site has some unusual features including: 80 Nissen huts, a firing range, the remnants of an assault course and even a nuclear bunker. Cultybraggan was originally built in 1941 as a 'black camp' holding the Nazi POWs who were considered to be the most fanatical. Following the end of World War II, the site was transformed into a training centre and then a Cold War monitoring station before being closed down in 2004.

Comrie Development Trust

Cultybraggan Camp is run by Comrie Development Trust, which has a total of 700 members from Comrie's population of just over 2000 people. There are a further 150 associate members and around 30 people actively volunteer for the Trust. Comrie Development Trust is constituted as Company Ltd by Guarantee with Charitable Status and the Board has ten members, a couple of whom have been involved since the original buyout. It recently set up a Trading Company to take forward its self-catering development.



The village itself is thriving, with a rapidly growing population and its biggest ever primary school roll.



The buyout

In 2004, the MOD decommissioned the site and the community buyout went through three years later in 2007. The Development Trust acquired 90 acres of land, 45 of which are in the Camp itself and 45 are on a hillside on the other side of a road. Because the buyout took place between the first and second rounds of the Scottish Land Fund, the community had to use loan finance to buy the land and this has had an influence on the way that the site has developed.

As with all MOD sites, Cultybraggan came with some challenges. Due to its security status, there was no plan of the Camp, making it difficult to establish the layout of the sewage pipes and electricity supply, much of which was in poor condition, and even minor developments required planning permission for change of use. Many of the buildings on the site are listed and the Nissen huts were designed to have a short lifespan so, 70 years later, many of them are in poor condition.

Creating business space

To partially cover the costs of loan repayment, some of the assets were sold to local businesses. This had the additional benefit of creating space in the community for local people to work. There was previously

no industrial and only limited business space in the village and many local businesses had to base themselves in Crieff, seven miles away.

21 businesses now operate on the site, employing 45 full-time equivalent staff. One active area of development is the food quadrant which contains businesses that grow or manufacture food.

Recently, the nuclear bunker - the last one to be built in the UK - was bought out by technology firm Bogons for use as a data storage centre.

Growing space

In 2009, 30 large allotments were developed at the Camp and these are now managed by an Allotments Association. Next to the allotments, a community orchard has been established with more than 250 apple, pear, plum and damson trees. Edible hedges have been planted around the site. The orchard is managed by volunteers and one of the main events in the year is the annual Apple Day, where apples are collected from the orchard and local houses and pressed to make apple juice.



Even the soakaway site is being used –as a home for chickens.

Tourism

Due to its incredible history, the Camp is a popular destination for school visits and those with an interest in history and is even the site of annual PoW Camp re-enactments. Guided tours of the site run throughout the summer and 500 people dropped in at the last Doors Open Day.

In 2012, the Trust set up Comrie Heritage Group to oversee the historic work and it now plans to develop the site to provide more facilities to tourists. Ten of the Nissen huts will be converted into self-catering accommodation, the heating for which will be provided by the biomass boiler on the site. A heritage centre and café and shop will also be opened and these developments are expected to create 20 jobs. The Trust has raised some of the money for the work through a Community Shares offer. The offer raised over £27,000 with 64% coming from local people and 36% from non-locals.