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LAND SCOTLAND

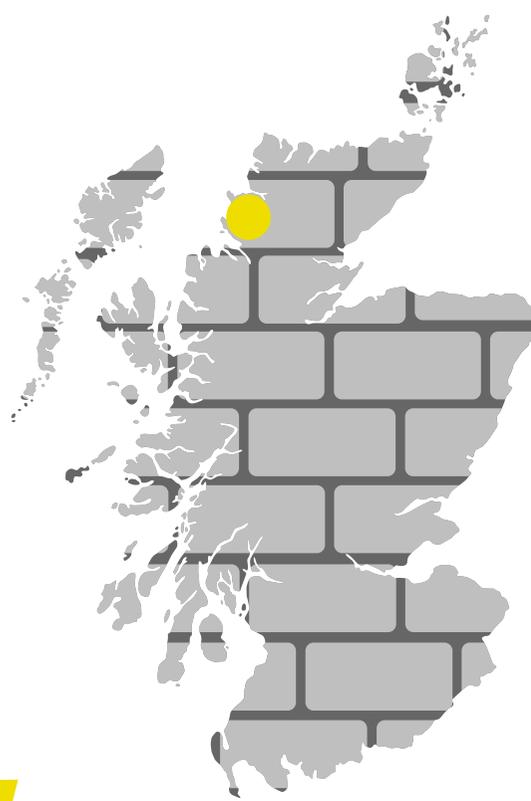


Achiltibuie Schoolhouse

2 refurbished units for Coigach Community Development Company

Location

Achiltibuie Schoolhouse



Priorities

- **Meeting local housing need**
- **Reversing population decline**
- **Economic regeneration**

Background

Coigach Community Development Company (CCDC) was set up in 2010 to address local concerns of population decline and associated social and economic issues. As is common across the Highlands & Islands, there was a lack of suitable housing, with 50% of housing stock in non-permanent occupation, and a lack of access to land due to crofting legislation and land ownership issues. The last social housing built in Achiltibuie was in 1975 and local housing associations had no plans for investment in the area.

After lying empty for over 5 years, CCDC identified the opportunity to purchase the Achiltibuie Schoolhouse to ensure the property did not fall into the second/holiday home market. The community put forward a compelling case to Highland Council, and purchased the property via an asset transfer for £1 in 2015.

Housing needs research indicated a need for small housing units, and with the Schoolhouse lending itself to conversion, the house was separated into two flats. The first new affordable houses in Achiltibuie in 40 years were completed in early 2017, with tenants selected via an allocation policy which prioritised those with a local connection and those working in the community.

Funding

Grants from the Nationwide Foundation, Highland Council and HIE, along with a loan were secured towards the refurbishment costs, however at the start of 2016 there was still a substantial shortfall. The launch of the Rural Housing Fund in early 2016 was very timely, and a grant from the Fund completed the funding required. The Schoolhouse was the first project to be completed via the Fund.

Support

Communities Housing Trust (CHT), formerly Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust, have worked with CDCC since the outset of this project, providing support with community consultations, the asset transfer process and funding applications; they also managed the refurbishment process. As community members requested a very 'hands off' approach to the allocations, and CDCC felt they did not have the experience or expertise, a 21 year lease was agreed, and CHT have taken on all aspects of management of the properties. CDCC could not have taken on this project without the support of CHT and felt the working relationship between the two organisations was a very positive one.



Image credit:
Coigach Community
Development Company

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**“It was
invaluable
having the
HSCHT there
supporting
us”**

**Julia Campbell,
Local Development Officer,
Coigach Community
Development Company**

Outcomes

The community purchase of the Schoolhouse ensured a substantial property remained in permanent occupation and provided much needed housing for young working adults, who otherwise would inevitably moved outwith the community, and thus supports the very local economy. The houses have served their purpose to act as a stepping stone for those who eventually are able to move on to a larger property.

Future Plans

A lack of affordable housing remains an issue in Achiltibuie, particularly for families where the school roll has fallen to 13, just a third of the numbers 10 years ago. CDCC are very keen to address this by developing land they own to deliver family housing to complement the existing housing stock. Given the costs of development in remote places like Achiltibuie, funding support will be critical to delivering further housing.

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