



Applecross Community Company

With only 225 or so permanent residents, Applecross is punching well above its weight in community achievements and ambition.

In 2008 the community company was established and it now has 114 members with two trading subsidiaries: Applecross Community Trading Company, which manages the [community filling station](#) and broadband (AppleNet), and Apple Juice, a Community Benefit Society which operates the community hydro scheme. www.applecrosshydro.scot.

Vision and aims

For 'the small (but amazing) community of Applecross to be sustainable, resilient and prosperous'. For the community company to 'enable a viable population to live and work in a vibrant community' and to be 'inclusive, accountable and approachable'.

Staffing

6-7 posts - 2 part-time community development officers funded by HIE; 1 x part-time administrator; a part-time cleaner of the community toilets and someone doing broadband maintenance part-time. In addition, there is a new 2-year full-time manager for the allotments and more administrator time.

Apple Juice, the hydro scheme is legally held at arm's length from the community company and has a separate board, volunteers and administrator.

Avenues for communication

Email: a generic email address to contact the company ldo@applecrosscommunitycompany.org

Community notice boards

Web site: <https://www.applecrosscommunitycompany.org> with a donate link and membership forms.

Membership: full and junior residential memberships as well as associate memberships, and members can join through the website.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ApplecrossACC/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ApplecrossACC>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/applecrossacc/>

Newsletter: sent by email to those signed up for it and available on the web site.

As well as consultations, conversations, surveys and events

Contacts: Ros (Roslyn) Clarke - one of three development officers
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(a Land Commissioner)

Since its inception in 2008, the community company has been consulting with their community, including 3 Housing Needs Surveys and a Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust Community Survey. In 2017 they worked on a community vision 2030, and on a further community survey the following year. In 2019 they took things to the next level with a Community Land Use Plan, which identified specific parcels of land for different activities, including housing (both affordable and accessible), workshops or business units and woodland crofts.

These surveys identified the following issues:

Homes: With 35% of local housing used as holiday homes, a lack of affordable housing is affecting the long-term viability of the community, as younger folk and families are often unable to stay in the area.

Getting About: Problems include deteriorating roads and limited alternatives to the car.

Community facilities, health and wellbeing: Improving health and leisure facilities and celebrating local culture and heritage, including Gaelic language and song.

Local Economy: Limited and often seasonal employment opportunities, often without appropriate accommodation being available.

Tourism: With ever increasing numbers of tourists arriving to inadequate infrastructure, transport, car parking and other facilities should be developed to encourage people to stay in the area. With a community emphasis on 'slow tourism', encouraging those passing through, for example on the NC500, to stay longer and spend more within the community.

- **An ageing demographic**
- **Fuel poverty**

The Community Land Use Plan

This was a detailed, proactive and expensive process looking at community land use, needs and aspirations. It focused on 4 main priorities: getting out and about; homes; the local economy and community and wellbeing. I have included a fair amount of detail about this plan, as it represents a huge amount of work and is a brilliant example of what community conversations can lead to.

The plan was developed through meetings and workshops with amongst others... pupils from the primary and high schools; the Over 60s; Crofters; the Historical Society; the Allotments and Archaeological Groups; the Church of Scotland; Crofting Commission; the Community Council; The Applecross Trust (landowner), Applecross Forum; Applecross Healthcare Association; Applecross Walks & Traditional Crafts; local businesses; the Hall Committee; Highland Council; Highlands and Islands Enterprise; Highlands Small Community Housing Trust, and various statutory bodies: [Scottish Natural Heritage](#), [Scottish Environmental Protection Agency](#) and [Historic Environment Scotland](#) as well as Rhoda Grant MSP.

The Plan is expected to be used as Highland Council statutory planning guidance over the short, medium and long term.

It cost £32k, with funding coming from the Scottish Government (the now finished Making Places fund - to encourage communities to contribute to the development of their area) £16k, Applecross Community Company (£5k), Highland Council (£1k) and HIE (£5k) and the Applecross Trust (£5k).

<https://www.applecrosscommunitycompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Applecross-CLUP-Final-July-2019-Low-Res.pdf>

Key aspects of the plan are below:

Affordable housing

Responding to a local housing crisis the plan identified potential sites and outline plans for:

- New affordable homes for ownership or rent
- 'All access' accessible housing for the elderly, disabled or otherwise vulnerable
- New crofts (woodland and agricultural)
- Self-build plots; affordable, individual plots for locals
- Cottage flats based on an Applecross model. A cottage split into flats on separate floors and with separate entrances
- Live/work units, and workshops with homes nearby
- Investigating existing derelict sites and buildings to re-use as homes
- Short-term accommodation, such as cabins or pods for seasonal or temporary workers

The Local Economy

Establish community owned woods.

Either owned or held on a long-term lease, managed by the community and with revenues going

back into the community. To be used for: health and wellbeing; recreation; increasing biodiversity

of native species; education; a tree nursery and a source of wood fuel or timber (plus possibly mountain biking trails). The size of the woodland is dependent on resources to buy and manage it.

Creating a tourist hub, visitor and cultural centre

Potential uses include heritage centre/crofting museum with a demonstration croft; workshops; community office space; visitor centre/retail (for local businesses); overflow parking, gallery and studio with visiting exhibitions, music events, and artists in residence. With the aim to retain NC500 visitors. There is potential for on-site power generation.

Develop Toscaig Pier as a multi-use site

Potential uses: retail (café or mobile coffee pod, ice cream or mussel shack, fishing tackle, craft/produce hub with retail outlets, food co-op); fishing / angling spot; sightseeing trips; transport

hub / ferry terminal; bike hire location; incubator business units e.g. craft/trade workshops; marina /

moorings for visiting yachts; covered area (waiting room and toilet); bike storage; car park / park &

ride; and maybe affordable housing. - Exemplars: Isle of Eriskay - community owned passenger ferry terminal.

Develop community boat shed or marina, suitable for yachting.

Identify sites for new business premises

Such as new workshops / workspaces with appropriate infrastructure, such as 3 phase electricity, the internet, and shared office equipment like a printer.

Laundry Facility (for locals and tourists). Meet local commercial/hospitality demand.

Waste Service (for campervans – septic waste) and potentially dedicated campervan parking, with a note that the infrastructure required to do this and the impact to neighbouring communities would need to be considered carefully.

Identify sites for renewables: The community already has micro hydro, but a community wind turbine, more micro-hydro and a wood-chip burner are being considered.

Develop a Tourism Strategy

Building around the concept of "slow tourism" and keeping revenue in the community. A dispersed approach which encourages tourists to stay longer, rather than just driving through on the Route 500. Sharing of experience around the NC500 communities, e.g. on accommodation bookings.

Potentially establish an "Applecross Tourism Authority"

Key Objectives:

- A central letting agency to run holiday lettings.
- Develop a litter and wild-camping strategy, and manage tourist facility sites as infrastructure, e.g. covered picnic area, rubbish bins, coin-operated laundry, toilets, parking.
- Investigate the potential for a "ranger" service to help with visitor-related work and environmental monitoring.
- Better promote indigenous tourism: the heritage, music, storytelling – to tie in with the Gaelic tourism strategy.
- Promote the potential for more adventure-based activities.
- Improve communication: Provide a noticeboard, and interpretive boards, as well as peninsula wide signage e.g. woods; caves, sand dune, archaeological feature etc.
- Create a visitor's mobile app and improve promotion with leaflets and possibly a visitor hub.

Address infrastructure deficiencies.

- **Electricity (3 Phase)** - Crucial to business development and future growth, as well as the visitor hub.
- **Broadband** - Encourage political support to expand existing coverage - Community Council and Applecross Trust could take this forward and gain access to SSE - fibre for broadband. AppleNet is having maintenance issues, so there is a need to train local people to help maintain it.
- **Mobile Network** - Investigate an extension to 4G mobile phone network coverage.

Linking local produce with a local market

Potentially using a local co-op scheme or supplying other local small businesses. Set up a marketing group to promote seasonal local produce and coordinate with the crofts.

Ensure sustainability of community owned infrastructure - community petrol pump and toilets

Support for local businesses/entrepreneurs:

- Meet regularly to discuss joint needs, aspirations and opportunities to network or work together.
- Promote local apprenticeships
- Create a business hub location

Getting about

Improving footpaths - create a network including long distance paths linking key facilities and items of interest.

Roads

Improve road infrastructure, address structural deficiencies and capacity issues. Consider how to create a traffic-management plan to deal with the increased tourist traffic and other road users such as cyclists. Review existing speed limits and road markings e.g. introduce double yellow lines

Improve road signage:

Must meet local and tourist needs, i.e. promote local attractions and businesses, and the existing signage doesn't work. Visitors don't know to allow overtaking at passing places, so there is a feeling that the signage strategy must be controlled locally. Advisory signage to include: Allow overtaking; Cyclists allow overtaking; No convoys; Livestock grazing; No Parking; If you can't reverse, turn around; wildlife crossing, and a sign board to inform visitors of considerate driving practices.

Promote more considerate driving behaviour

Improve existing NC500 leaflets/promotional material and provide a locally produced one on how to drive in the area. With the material to be provided in rental cars. Need to engage the media/BBC, whole community, Highland Council, Visit Scotland, local MSPs. to show impact on communities.

More parking

Identify sites for carparks and develop infrastructure and visitor facilities around existing car parks. Signage to direct visitors and include the information on Google maps and other Sat Nav platforms.

Developing a ferry service

From Toscaig Pier (Precedents: Isle of Eriskay - community pier/ passenger ferry terminal) - Potential users: High school pupils, passengers from bus, day trips to Kyle.

Develop local public transport

With a preference for electric vehicles to make use of the existing hydro scheme's surplus energy. Potential uses identified include deliveries for locals, tourists, local passengers, school pupils; walking and cycling tourists (buses to have cycle storage) and to connect with existing public transport options for going off the peninsula.

Electric bikes - Rental scheme and a maintenance, repair and service hub.

Develop the existing community car-share scheme which takes people around Applecross and to hospital or school.

Develop a heli-pad site for the emergency services, logistics, private transport and tourism.

Community and wellbeing

Community Hall

Improving and making better use of. Suggestions included a weekly cinema, gallery/cultural space, community café (strupachs), commercial use (weddings, training venue etc), library/book swap play facilities, craft/local producers' market, office space (photocopier, printer, hot desk), new play area, catering service, music, gym, and youth space, etc.

An equipment library and skill shares for residents and crofters

Allotments to be created.

Waste; recycle all waste. Compost, glass, cardboard and up-cycling. Identify sites for community Bins across the area and establish a quarterly bulk waste pick-up.

Local groups: Organising more regular social activities for all ages, e.g. youth club, community choir; Pilates group; Scottish country dancing; summer ceilidh to be open to the tourists and short tennis.

Celebrate Gaelic and weave Gaelic awareness and stories of place into all areas including the tourism strategy– Re-establish events such as the Bardic School, previously held at Hartfield and note that a place names project had worked well.

Improved communication; community noticeboards; and a social media network for local residents

Health and wellbeing for those with specific needs including the elderly. There is currently no

home care service. Consider how to appoint a local care co-ordinator to improve delivery of care in the community.

Protect and preserve culture, history and the environment. Potentially create a Geo-Park to protect a special area of geology and landscape and a marine park to protect that eco-system. Include crofting area protection, archaeological surveys and development consistent with the Wester Ross Biosphere objectives.

Develop a new swimming pool and wider leisure facility to include gym and multi-use pitch.

Revenues

The community filling station and broadband bring in a revenue. For the benefit of local's prices at the filling station are kept low, so it covers costs but is non-profit making. The hydro scheme is run at arm's length, with occasional payments to the parent company (the community trust).

Current Projects

Covid response

- Financial support to those in need
- £20 food boxes at the shop (a £20 credit that folk can use for anything except alcohol and cigarettes.
- IT support and technical help.
- Deliveries and collections for shopping and prescriptions
- Telephone support
- Seeds and compost to help folk grow their own
- Expenses paid for those volunteering to help others

Community Woodlands

The Community Woodlands Association has just completed a feasibility study and potential options for the community include:

Clear felling and restocking (48 yr. old spruce). Clear felling is considered to be the best way to produce a profit, with some of the wood being sold to a timber mill and the rest to locals for wood fuel. There is road access but no pier. The re-stock plan includes a significant broadleaf component. If clear felling is not pursued, community ideas include renting out bothies with composting toilets, green burials, recreational access on paths, and interpretive signs for the archaeology (bronze/iron age round house, old township, field boundaries and a broch)

A high valuation by Galbraith Land Agents is causing problems - it is a traditional 'Red Book' valuation, so what the forest would go for on the open market and it appears to have underestimated extraction costs and timber transportation costs from Applecross. In theory the amount a community should pay for an asset is different as the public benefits provided by the community ownership can be given a monetary value and deducted from the purchase price, but this theory works better where the purchase is from a public body, which is not the case here.

Funding: stage 1 of the Scottish Land Fund.

09/2020 Successful at Stage 2 Scottish Land Fund - £137k for land purchase. Land acquisition in process for Torgarve Woods.

Appleseed Community Allotments

Creating individual allotments, as well as communal space, a polytunnel and composting facilities. This project recently received enough funding to employ a project officer and a part-time administrator for two years.

Funding:

Almost £100k from The Scottish Government's Climate Challenge Fund.

Plus £1k from Applecross Community Council SSE fund and £1k from Scottish Sea Farms.

Affordable Housing

Various sites are under consideration. Road access, steep slopes, archaeological remains and practical access for utilities such as water, sewage and electricity have restricted choices, but the plan includes defined plots and outline plans for a number of homes to be built over a couple of phases. The community company is working with the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust to build these homes. The Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust is a charity set up to help rural communities meet their long term need for affordable housing, and it uses a number of approaches to achieve this aim including: rent-to-buy; long leases; woodland crofts, support for self-builds; key worker housing as well as working with multiple partners to build small scale local developments (8-10 houses).

09/2020 – successful funding from Scottish Land Fund Stage 2 - £151k for the "hydro field". Land acquisition in progress.

Camusterrach Housing - accessible homes

Three 'all access' houses for affordable rent to be built near the GP's surgery - aimed at those struggling to cope in their current residences, because of age, disability or vulnerability. The Community Company is trying to buy the land through a Community Asset Transfer from NHS Highlands for approximately £12k, but it is taking a very long time. They were originally expecting to be completed by March 2021.

09/2020 – Land acquisition complete.

Project funds secured - £308k funding from Rural Housing Fund, £56k from SSE Sustainable Development Fund, £120k loan from AppleJuice (community hydro) and £42k ACC funds.

Project underway. Construction to start Jan 21.

Community Filling Station

Unmanned and supplying unleaded and diesel on a not-for-profit basis since 2008

AppleNet - community broadband

A radio-based system with 6 hilltop masts established in 2014, which takes its connection from Mallaig High School. Developed under the Community Broadband Scotland scheme as one of eight pilot projects in Scotland. The exposure on the hilltop means regular servicing and maintenance is required, and this along with other maintenance issues does create problems.

Community Toilets

Taken over from Highland Council in 2012 to ensure they stayed open, but they are proving a drain on community resources, as visitor donations and other funding (Rabies tourist buses and Highland Council Comfort Scheme) don't cover the costs.

10 Electric bicycles

For residents to try or hire on a monthly basis, which are proving popular. Funding to buy the bikes came from the Energy Saving Trust and Cycling Scotland (£14k).