



*Poolewe, Wester Ross*

# Wester Ross Community Invite

Poolewe Village Hall

8<sup>th</sup> March 2014

## Event Report



# A Biosphere for Wester Ross?

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### Background

In 1976, UNESCO recognised **Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve as one of the world's first Biosphere Reserves** (BRs). At that time the main focus of BRs was on conservation and research.

In 1995, UNESCO widened the remit of BRs to be open and responsive to the needs of their local communities, in order to explore, demonstrate and promote sustainable development at a regional scale. To keep the UNESCO accolade, BRs have to show how they are making progress on these aims. In the case of Wester Ross, this would mean expanding the BR to a much larger area. In 2012, a scoping study (see link below) was commissioned by Wester Ross Alliance, on the possibility of enhancing the existing Biosphere Reserve in Wester Ross to fulfill current UNESCO designation procedures.

The 8<sup>th</sup> of March event was held for the community of Wester Ross to decide collectively if they wanted to remain part of the global network of BRs. Everyone in the community age 16 and over was invited to have a say. This event was facilitated by Assist Social Capital CIC with support from the Scottish Government at Poolewe Community Hall.



The event was promoted in local press, radio and online via Eventbrite. In total 49 people attended. There was a broad cross-section of the communities of Wester Ross present, including 3 of the 4 local councilors. The 4<sup>th</sup> sent his apologies and would have been there but for unavoidable circumstances.

The following organisations were represented at the event;

- Applecross Community
- Badrallach community
- Celtic Fringe
- Croft 16
- Gairloch and Loch Ewe Community Centre
- Hambrey Consulting
- Highland Council
- Highland & Islands Enterprise
- Kinloch Woodlands Charitable Trust
- National Trust of Scotland Inverewe
- Pool - House Poolewe
- Royal Society for Protection of Birds
- Scottish Crofters Federation
- Scottish Government
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- Scottish Youth Hostel Association
- Seaside Crofting
- Shieldaig Community Council
- Strengthening Communities
- Torridon Kinlochewe Comm Council
- Ullapool Community Trust
- Wester Loch Ewe Community Council
- Wester Ross Alliance
- Wester Ross Environment Network
- Wester Ross Fisheries Trust

## On the Day

Colin Campbell of ASC introduced the event and explained the background to the proposal for a 12-month project to explore the potential of a Biosphere for Wester Ross.

**From Beinn Eighe to Wester Ross**, Professor Martin Price of the University of the Highlands and Islands went over the reasons for the need to make changes to the UNESCO accolade and the results of his scoping study from 2012.

**The Scottish Government's Perspective**, Alistair Prior, head of rural communities & rural policy team, SG, talked about the importance of a collaborative approach to rural development and the opportunities that might arise from a Wester Ross Biosphere through various funding streams including Leader, Interreg, Northern Periphery Programme.

**The Benefits of Having a Biosphere**, Pip Tabor, Project Manager at Southern Upland Partnership gave a presentation the development of the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere, Scotland's only new style Biosphere.

**Conversation workshops** were held to explore the opinion of the communities of Wester Ross as to the possible benefits of having a new style Biosphere in Wester Ross.

The outcomes of these conversations were captured and are highlighted in the next page. In general those attending hoped that a Wester Ross Biosphere could be used as a positive regional mechanism for managing change at local level.

**Delegates** voted 39 to 1 in favour of a proposal to carry out a 12-month engagement project to explore the idea of an extended Biosphere for the Wester Ross area.

## How could Wester Ross benefit from having a Biosphere?

### Conversations outcomes

'Sense of place'. Creating/reinforcing an identity – a destination, a brand/label that brings visibility. Might bring WR together and resist the Inverness pull. Energise people: sense of pride; collective positive identity. Diversified. Regional identity – vision, spin off actions, opportunities to collaborate. Help strengthen links between communities. It would be good to have a term out in national press/national psyche that would refer to the region. It would help to put WR on the map.

Explore bottom up approach. Help empower communities. A positive mechanism for managing change at local level. Recognition of existing good practice. Getting young blood to take responsibility for the area. New structure that coordinates and doesn't bring baggage

Opportunities for business - facilities. Focus for business growth (economic activity rate) – activities as well as capital. Marketing/branding for services. Focal point for entrepreneurs. Networking structure. Provide opportunities for small local business. Bring in more full time work. Allow people to work from home or closer to home.

Revival of human ecosystems. Crofting - contribution to /benefit from. Landscape – scale conservation. Could help identify crofting as important part of environmental & social conservation. Better coordination of inshore fishing along coast. Could tie in with MPA – links, working together. Could tie all the NNRs in WR together.

High quality tourism. Spin off benefits for visitors. Could make more of environmental assets and integrate with tourism, business, etc. Growing wildlife tourism market.

More opportunities for young people, young people involved in planning the future of the area & staying here. Young people thriving. Interesting new learning/training opportunities

Strengthen the wellbeing of all communities. Need more infrastructure &

transport (roads, bridges). Better public transport funding provided for communities to develop & deliver their own services. Housing to meet local needs. Social/council housing.

Funding for a project officer / regional coordinator. Level in funding – e.g. LEADER; interreg/NPP. Lottery – landscape scale funding? (Heritage). Long term investment (pump primed) – leading to a sustainable model. Specific topic based investment. Attract inward investment. Recognition from funders – assists access to funding. Could it help to unlock funds indirectly? Could attract and focus funding.

Potential to work together on initiatives, locally, nationally and also internationally. Opportunities to share & learn from best practices in WR and other BRs. Recognisable brand within Europe – tourism. International links. Increase WR profile on international scale / map. International recognition of the Biosphere 'brand'. It could nurture collaboration.

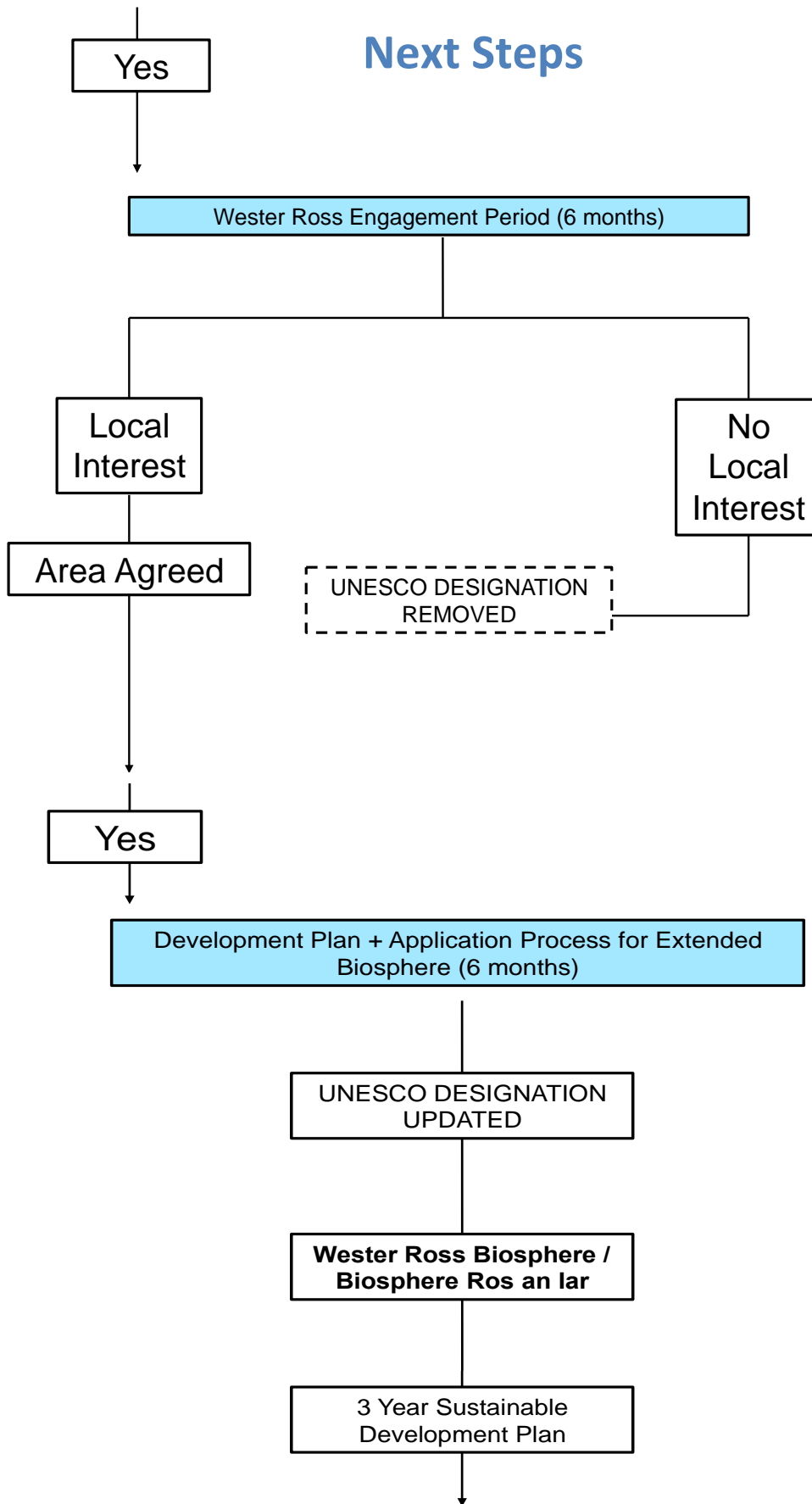
It would need to be underlined by something people understand (no scientific jargon). Need plain language. Car share – list of attendees (next meeting).

Appears there's nothing to lose but potential to gain.

## **Next Steps**

The result of the vote means that we will now move forward with the next steps in the process (see next page). The first step is to employ a development officer, who will be based locally to take forward an engagement process out to a wider audience and to explore the extent of the transition zone.

# Next Steps



## Further Reading

[Establishing a Biosphere Reserve in Wester Ross: A Scoping Study](#)

[A Biosphere for Wester Ross Community Invite](#)

[UNESCO World Network of Biospheres](#)

[Galloway & Southern Ayrshire Biosphere](#)

[North Develop Biosphere](#)

[Difi Biosphere](#)

## Acknowledgements

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Assist Social Capital works with approaches that promote positive, collaborative relationships in communities and organisations, to enhance the flow of resources, which maximises outcomes while minimising costs.

We facilitate processes that weave positive connections amongst communities to develop deeper connectivity and wellbeing. Our approach is based on openness, equality and cooperation, fostering networks of relationships that enable people and their communities to thrive.

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For more information on the benefits of Social Capital please get in touch on: [info@social-capital.net](mailto:info@social-capital.net) or visit our website: [www.social-capital.net](http://www.social-capital.net)