

BERNERAY

DEVELOPMENT GROUP

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News from Berneray Development Group

Derelict and Unused Houses

As part of its remit to encourage economic development, the BDG is embarking on an exciting new project, designed to tackle longterm depopulation of our island. The increasing number of derelict and empty houses, accompanied by a decrease in the number of permanently occupied homes is, as we all know, a growing problem. Although the trend of the last year or so is for the Berneray population to increase slightly, the underlying demographic trend is for continuing decline.

At a recent meeting, we therefore resolved:

'To look at Berneray's derelict, unused and empty houses situation, and discuss how the Group could help revitalise the island by possibly buying and renovating properties. These houses would then be made available as affordable properties to people who wish to stay or settle on the island.'

Currently, out of a total number of 116 houses on the island, 59 houses fall into the derelict, empty or not permanently occupied category (ie 68%). BDG is currently considering how this proposal can be carried forward, helping to stabilise the population level and maintain the viability of important services which benefit all residents.

Berneray Tourist Leaflet

We are in the process of developing a general tourist leaflet for Berneray. Funding of £2,300 has been secured, principally from SNH and Forward Scotland, and we expect this brochure to be completed by Easter. High quality digital photographs of Berneray are still required for this project. If anybody has anything suitable, please contact a Board member (listed overleaf).

Historical Society Update

Report on activity for the 2005 season

The visitor centre in the Nurses' Cottage was opened to the public on the 1st June, and contained new 'frames' and exhibits. These included topics such as crofting, the Morgan car, fishing, ancient monuments, nursing on the island, and entertainment venues over the years.

The 2005 season, although quiet on many days, was quite a success with a recorded 590 visitors through the door, and much interest expressed in the exhibits. This year for the first time the cottage was open for five days per week (Monday - Friday), and on behalf of the committee I would like to offer thanks to the volunteers who manned the visitor centre - DA Mackillop, JA Maccuish, E Parkin, F Macleod, and M Macinnes.

An event featuring the Accordion and Fiddle Club, which was planned twice in the Hall, unfortunately had to be cancelled on both occasions due to bereavements, but hopefully this will be re-scheduled for some time this year.

The Loch Bhrusda fishery is managed by the Historical Society, and the first season of fishing was successful, returning an income of £220, despite the fact that all fishing was on a 'catch and release only' basis - and despite the fact that we suffered an incident of poaching at the start of the season. Hopefully this will turn out to be an isolated incident. We are hoping to have the loch restocked early in the year.

Those who wish to join the Historical Society and those who wish to renew their membership, please contact Fred MacLeod. The annual fee is just £5.00, and runs from November to November.

The next meeting of the Society will be at 7.30pm on Monday 23rd January in the Nurses' Cottage. All welcome to attend.

John Forshaw (secretary)