

To the Editor
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The CDT bid to buy Cultybraggan Army Camp

The Comrie Development Trust (CDT) Cultybraggan Community Planning Brief was recently published. It is part of the ongoing process in the bid by the CDT to buy the Cultybraggan Army Camp for the Community under the Right to Buy legislation covered by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

The Brief lists the surrounding Cultybraggan Farm as a stakeholder in its search for public funds to achieve this purpose. As owner of Cultybraggan Farm I was initially asked to serve on CDT's Working Party on the subject, but subsequently the Farm was classified as a stakeholder. Since standing down from the Working Party, the Farm has had minimal consultation with the CDT or with the consultants whom they employed, contrary to what was promised.

The land in question occupies some 64 acres in the middle of Cultybraggan Farm. It was compulsorily purchased from the then owners of the Farm during WW2 to create a prisoner of war camp. It was subsequently used as a Cadet Training facility.

At the end of the initial consultation process with the Comrie Community, it was acknowledged by the Consultants that they may have somewhat neglected the Farm in their preliminary discussions. Apart from a single brief meeting held in Edinburgh for the convenience of the Consultants, this neglect has continued.

The result is that some of the proposals included in the published Brief would be very damaging to the Farm. For example, one proposal is to split the farm in two, so that the steading becomes seriously disconnected from its main in-bye fields. Anyone who had an elementary understanding of how farms work could not have seriously made such a proposal, unless they had no regard for the Farm's interests.

Also, the suggestion of placing a sewage works close to the farm steading, instead of going to the expense of linking with the public sewage system, is scarcely in the Farm's interest. Nor indeed are the proposals to create enterprises that are characterised by noise pollution in the middle of a livestock enterprise, where efforts are made to achieve a high standard of animal welfare. Perhaps the Consultants were unaware of the catastrophic effect of the ASBO-like behaviour by some of the more recent occupants of the Camp that lead to a stampede of cattle, with one of the beasts being drowned in the adjacent River Ruchil.

Sadly, the Brief reads as though the business of the Farm was there simply to be exploited for the supposed benefit of others in the local community, at the expense of the public purse - such as taxpayers or participants in the National Lottery. Interestingly, in the Brief there was no identifiable, overriding indication from the Community as to what the Camp should be used for.

Over the past two decades Cultybraggan Farm, under its present management, has made a substantial contribution to the local economy and to the local environment. Moreover, it is part of the local community and its interests need to be given proper consideration - not just lip service. All that is required is for enough people to vote for this substantial freebie, and that a case on paper can be made that the CDT could run the property in an economically sustainable manner. It would appear that they may want to do that to the detriment of the Farm.

Hopefully, any future proposed involvement of the CDT and its Consultants with the Farm, as a stakeholder, will be on a more genuine basis of consultation.

Yours sincerely

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