

Coul Times

Creating prospects, protecting places

Vote for Coul Links golf course & help transform our futures

Welcome to the Coul Times, brought to you by Communities for Coul (C4C), a group of people from the communities around the Dornoch Firth, united in the belief that our towns and villages were done a grave disservice when the Scottish Government refused a planning application for an environmentally sensitive, world-class golf course at Coul Links. We hope you have seen some of our publicity over the last few months.

We have decided to try again for planning permission as we believe this golf course represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform our local economy (at a time when it is so sorely needed) AND to provide a viable, funded way to protect the special environment at Coul Links.

It is time to find out how LOCAL people really feel on this issue.

You will soon receive a voting pack giving you the opportunity to say whether or not you are in favour of a world-class golf course being created at Coul Links. The vote will be run by a wholly independent company (which also runs the council elections).

If you believe that giving up 1% of the protected area at Coul Links is a fair compromise to create at least 180 jobs locally, provide a huge financial boost to our economies (when we most need it), help reverse the depopulation of our area and provide the funding to pay for the environmental management of Coul Links - **please vote YES.**



C4C was formed in the belief that we are representing the views of the majority of the people who live around the Dornoch Firth. However, this support has never been properly measured. The 2018, 92,000+ signature petition against the previous application for a Coul Links golf course looks superficially impressive, but not so much when you discover less than 200 of those signatures come from the IV25, KW10 & KW9!

A clear vote in support of the development will give C4C the mandate to submit a new planning application for a golf course at Coul Links.

We are very lucky to have a second chance. We will not get another. For the sake of our young people and future generations, please don't regret letting this opportunity disappear forever. It's up to you.

The golf course will sit naturally in the landscape - can you spot the difference?

Additional Local Support

C4C has been working on securing a raft of benefits for local people from the Coul Links development:

- Local people to be given preference for jobs
- Local suppliers given preference through development of a "Coul Collective" of favoured local businesses.

- Training and placement opportunities for students studying at UHI Dornoch
- Large apprenticeship scheme built with Skills Development Scotland
- Affordable housing will be built
- A share of golf course profits distributed to local good causes
- Support given to other local golf courses
- Locals can play Coul Links at a discounted rate
- Dornoch Firth marketed globally as a world-class golfing destination

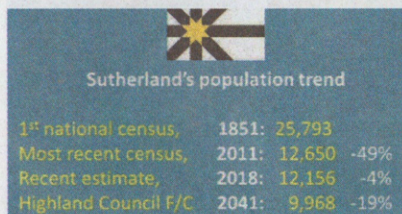
Details at: www.communities4coul.scot



Coul for the Economy

Sutherland's population crisis

When the first National Census was held in 1851, in the wake of the Highland Clearances, the population of Sutherland was nearly 26,000. Since then, the UK population has quadrupled and that of Scotland has almost doubled, yet Sutherland's population has halved! It was just 12,650 in 2011 and is continuing to fall. Highland Council estimate that in 20 years' time it will be **below 10,000**. On top of this, our age profile is now one of the most elderly in the country. Is Sutherland witnessing its second Highland Clearance?



The Highland Council were already wondering what to do about "fragile communities" and talking about a "structured funds" but then 2020 sent us COVID-19 as well as Brexit. Until 2020 the Highlands received £90M of "structured funds" from the EU. That funding has now disappeared.

COVID & BREXIT made things worse

A 2020 report for Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) concluded that the Highlands was "disproportionately impacted" by the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the nature of employment in the area. The region's unemployment has more than doubled since 2019 and is forecast to reach 7.7% by June (12.6% for young people who have been hardest hit). The Highland Council are so concerned they are setting up and staffing a "Highland Employability Service" and working on delivering the "Young Person's Guarantee". Yet the HIE report predicts a greater level of "economic scarring" and a slower recovery for the area than elsewhere, with a return to pre-crisis levels of employment "unlikely until 2023 at the earliest".

"We need repeopleing, not rewilding!"



Protecting our most "Endangered Species" (homo sapiens, 16 - 34)

It has long been the case that many of our young people have had to move south to find work and affordable homes. And recently it has become fashionable for landowners with carbon offsetting requirements generated elsewhere to call to "rewild" Sutherland. Yet right here, our most urgent requirement is "repeopleing", which requires sustainable jobs and affordable housing to be available within the county, to support young families. Coul Links could provide these.

At the Highlands had the same age structure as the rest of Scotland there would be almost 16,000 more young people (16-24) living here.

Above are five of our amazing younger supporters. Tina 24, Grant 20, Corin 23, Jake 25, and Victoria 32. Three of them so far, have been lucky enough to have found work in East Sutherland, but it has been far from easy and has required great resourcefulness and creativity, occasionally accompanied by unemployment and frightening poverty. Many of their friends have had to leave. They do not want the same for their children.

Jake Chambers said "The difficulties we face in finding the right job (or any job), finding appropriate, affordable housing and the prospects for our children's future if we decide to remain here, are all attracting people to Inverness and even further south".

Tina Wilson, who has a masters degree in Environmental Management commented "I support the proposed Coul Links development because it has the environment and sustainability at its core."

And Grant Ross said "this opportunity may not be given again so it is crucial that this development is not passed up."

180 Dornoch Firth Jobs - all privately funded

Constructing a second world-class golf course right next-door to Royal Dornoch (widely recognised to be one of the world's "Top 10" courses) would create such a globally attractive golfing destination there is no shortage of private businesses willing to invest in the project. This means the Highland Council and the Scottish Government can allocate precious funding elsewhere.

Should the golf course be approved, there will be almost £50 million of private capital invested into building the course, clubhouse and associated tourism businesses. This total includes: £10M on the new course; £2m on the clubhouse and restaurant; £20M on a totally new, Coul Links Eco Hotel; £4M from Bespoke Hotels to upgrade the Dornoch Hotel to 4*; investment into affordable housing and other, currently confidential developments in the wider Dornoch Firth area. **If the golf course is not approved, none of this will happen.**

News of other potential golf developments at Nigg and Castle Stuart will not create the employment opportunities and economic prosperity for our area that Coul Links would. Simply put, this would further shift the centre of economic gravity towards Inverness and exacerbate the decline in jobs and economic prospects for communities north of the Dornoch Bridge.

The heart of C4C's ambition is to create much-needed jobs for young people in our area.

We have calculated the jobs created in two ways.

BOTTOM-UP calculations show 180 jobs. Each of the large potential investors in Coul Links has estimated the jobs required. These businesses say they need 180 new employees when fully operational. 108 of these jobs are full-time roles and the remainder are seasonal (for example caddies, who can earn £16,000+ per season). Of course, if the golf course IS built, there will be many more people who open restaurants, shops, B&B's and hotel rooms, to cope with the demand - so **this estimate is only the start.**

We have confidence in our numbers because they are so similar to the answer reached through top-down economic modelling, (below).

TOP DOWN: 175 FTE jobs in 5 years, 250 in 10 years. BiGGAR Economics' in-depth economic impact assessment in 2019 said that Coul Links golf course should create 175 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs in the Dornoch Firth area and 311 within the Highlands within 5 years of opening. These numbers rise to 250 and 450 respectively in 10 years.

Creating good jobs

Keeping Coul Jobs Local. C4C will sign commitments with all major investors to prioritise local people for employment. C4C are also working with:

1. **Skills Development Scotland** to run a large apprenticeship scheme across 11 disciplines. Businesses will be targeted to employ a certain number of apprentices per year.
2. **University of Highlands & Islands** are looking at jobs which could be appropriate for employment for students from 4 major courses. Suitable UHI students will have first refusal (c. 55 jobs will be eligible).
3. **Department of Work & Pensions (Job Centre)** to publicise opportunities

New "North Highland Hospitality Charter". Coul Links' Golf Course, Hotel and partners will sign up to this. It aims to transform the reputation of hospitality employment locally, by creating good, sustainable jobs, maximizing the number of full-time contracts, ensuring fair and decent pay (including distribution of tips), and ensuring employees receive good training and development. Edward Abel Smith, Coul Links landowner & potential hotel developer said: "Our ambition is to find, grow and nurture local talent in partnership with training providers".

Jobs for ALL our communities

Because Coul Links is near Dornoch, which has quite high employment, we expect many new jobs will be filled by people from other nearby places. Coul Links golf course will provide electric minibuses to take guests around the area. These buses will also be used as free transport in the Dornoch Firth area to take employees to and from work.



Coul Links Hotel is being designed as a series of luxury eco-lodges by Embo resident Iain Levens of Levens Studio

Coul for the Environment

A practical solution for environmental protection

Everybody involved with C4C is determined we should protect and enhance the environment of the Loch Fleet SSSI. We believe the best way achieve this is to build the golf course. Why?

In the last few months, Coul Links' landowner has agreed to transfer this area into the stewardship of the local community, (C4C). We would make it a condition for the golf course developer to put in place a fully funded Environmental Management Plan for Coul Links. This would mean the 1% of Loch Fleet SSSI affected by the golf course would fund the protection of almost the entire SSSI situated south of Loch Fleet, 25% of the total. The developer will also be obliged to pay for and manage 14 hectares of non-SSSI land by Embo and on Coul Farm which will be fully remediated and brought up to SSSI standard. **This seems like a reasonable compromise.**

Coul Links forms part of the Loch Fleet SSSI, which was established in 1984. However, in the many years since then, an effective, fully funded environmental management plan has never been agreed or implemented. Why? **Because there has been no money to do it.**

Despite being invited on a number of occasions, the many objectors to the development of a golf course have shown **no inclination to help fund or support the protection of the Loch Fleet SSSI.** This is also true of all the environmental bodies who opposed the development, including the RSPB with its 1.15 million members, £147 million income and £48 million in free assets.

And **NatureScot** (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage), the Scottish Government funded nature agency with responsibility for managing the SSSI, **suffers from chronic underfunding.**

This long-term neglect means the site is now in very poor condition. An old tree plantation forms a wasteland at its heart and, invasive species have been slowly over-running the protected dune heath. Gorse, bracken, birch, rosebay willowherb, and meadowsweet are all choking the links, ruining the habitat for the rare flora and fauna the SSSI designation is supposedly designed to protect. **Without a fully funded management plan, the site will continue to degrade and will eventually be ruined forever.**

In another exciting development, Edward Abel Smith (Coul Links' landowner) and C4C have agreed to start working towards the creation of the new "**Loch Fleet Foundation**", to develop a Loch Fleet SSSI-wide environmental management plan.



Could the course be built outside the SSSI?

Unfortunately, it is not possible to build a world-class Coul Links golf course outside the SSSI. Extraordinary landscapes make it possible to create extraordinary golf courses, and this is what Coul Links offers.

Having said this, we will ensure that the course is only partly on SSSI land, the most sensitive areas will be completely avoided, and the course design will be amended from the previous version, to address some of the concerns raised.



Invasive gorse & birch at Coul Links



10% of all UK golf courses sited on SSSI's

Over 200 of the UK's golf courses (almost 10%) are wholly or partly on a SSSI, including some of the best in the country, which have been highly commended for their environmental management. Add to this that like the best contemporary golf courses, Coul Links would have a "light touch" on the environment with no importation of sand or earth from off-site and many fairways connected to greens and tees by boardwalks, it seems a misnomer to call it a "development" as it's natural look shows.



Felled tree plantation forms wasteland at Coul Links

Mike Keiser is back on board with Coul Links

"It is an honor to be chosen by the community to build Coul" - Mike Keiser



After discussions with several leading developers, C4C is delighted to announce that we have persuaded Mike Keiser to agree to create a world-class golf course at Coul Links. But only if C4C can secure planning permission.

A committed environmentalist who made his fortune by founding one of the first greeting card companies to print their products on recycled paper, Mike Keiser is widely thought of as the leading golf course developer in the world today. With his environmental credentials and love for Royal Dornoch (which he considers "probably the best golf course ever built"), he is Communities for Coul's preferred developer. Mike has agreed that the community will have an equity stake in Coul Links golf course, which will be used to fund good causes and initiatives in communities around the Dornoch Firth.

Two of Mike Keiser's flagship developments are at Bandon Dunes, Oregon, USA (inspired by Royal Dornoch), and at Cabot Links, near Inverness, Nova Scotia, Canada. The letters to the right are from those communities.

Read what effect Mike Keiser golf courses have had on other small communities



"I grew up in Bandon and have lived here all of my life. While I was growing up, our economy was based on the lumber industry and commercial fishing. Both these industries were in serious decline by the 80's, resulting in this area deciding to try to develop tourism as its main economic base. When Bandon Dunes Golf Resort opened in May 1999, it fitted perfectly into our new economic plan.

Bandon Dunes has played a large part in putting our City on the map and has a great appeal to golfers across the US and worldwide with many tens of thousands of golfers visiting annually.

There are more young people remaining in Bandon now that they can find employment at Bandon Dunes; before the Resort was built, most had to leave to find family-wage jobs. The Resort is now Bandon's largest employer.

The golf courses provide the funding source for the Wild Rivers Coast Alliance, whose mission is to "fund community projects committed to the 'triple bottom line' - conservation, community and economy.

What I can say, without reservation, is any community that has the privilege of being associated with Mike Keiser should jump at the opportunity. Mike Keiser is good for the economy and good for the environment. In summary, I would say that Bandon Dunes is a dream come true for all of us."

Mary Schamehorn, Mayor of Bandon

The Inverness Oran

"Seeing what Mike had achieved at Bandon, we persuaded him to develop a golf course in our locality. The golf course became known across the golf world and a second course, Cabot Cliffs, was built to cement, in Mike's words, our area as a global golfing "destination."

Before Mike Keiser built the golf courses, Inverness was on its death bed and would have shrunk to a small village that visitors would have discovered once and a while. Inverness' businesses were closing monthly, people were moving away, government services were being lost and the community had a defeated outlook on the future. There were few young people. The only thing left was a small fishery and without Mike we would have lost the school, the hospital would have become a clinic, and the seniors and those with summer cottages would be its last hurrah.

Now, the courses draw people from around the world, the town is growing with new homes and businesses and the young people are returning. Cabot Golf Links is the engine that is driving our local economy. Our future looks bright without us losing the heritage and charm that makes this a special place, the thing that drew the development here in the first place.

There have been a couple of trade-offs with the environment pertaining to the land designation but there is never harm done to the beauty and pristine nature of the area."

Rankin MacDonald, founder, owner and editor of "The Inverness Oran"

We need a second world-class golf course on the Dornoch Firth

If a world-class golf course at Coul Links is created to complement the world-renowned Championship Course at Royal Dornoch, the Dornoch Firth will become a global base for golf tourists. This is a model proven by Mike Keiser, who famously said "one course is a curiosity, two is a destination".

Dornoch's very own Emeritus Professor of Economics, David Bell, recently said that "another top-class golf course in the east Sutherland area would be the catalyst for more jobs because overseas golfers would stay longer in local hotels, play more local golf courses and spend more money in local businesses. At the moment Royal Dornoch is seen as the main draw, meaning golfers often travel there from their hotel in Inverness to play but leave again on the same day."

This would also add visitor rounds to the other excellent golf courses in the area. It is therefore no surprise that the people running Royal Dornoch, Brora, Golspie and Tain golf clubs are solidly in favour of this development.

And visiting golfers who stay overnight spend more, on average, than almost any other type of tourist. In 2016, the VisitScotland/Scottish Enterprise Scotland Golf Visitor Survey found that the average spend for a golfer staying overnight, excluding those on a package trip, was £245 per person per night. Visitors from North America spend the most, at £405 with visitors from Europe spending £257.

A new world-class Mike Keiser golf course at Coul Links, in addition to the Championship Course at Royal Dornoch will transform the economy of the Dornoch Firth in a similar way to Bandon and Inverness in North America, keeping high-spending visitors longer and allowing our young people to bring up families securely in the Dornoch Firth area for generations to come.



Communities for Coul

The Directors of C4C are grateful for the support of local people & businesses and for the generous donations we have received.