

STAC POLLAIDH VISITOR  
FACILITIES

**BUSINESS PLAN**

## **1. Introduction**

Stac Pollaidh is one of the most iconic mountains in the Northwest Highlands of Scotland. The peak is a rocky crest of Torridonian sandstone, with many pinnacles and steep gullies. In terms of geomorphology the ridge was exposed to weathering as a nunatak above the ice sheet during the last Ice Age, while the ice sheet carved and scoured the smooth sides of the mountain. Due to its relatively low height of just over 2000 feet, fine views and ease of access from the road it has become a very popular peak to visit.

The rapid rise in visitor numbers to the area over the last few years has had significant impacts on the everyday lives of local residents. This impact is not always compensated for by the benefits that tourism brings. The road infrastructure and visitor facilities at Stac Pollaidh have been stretched to breaking point, severely disrupting access to homes and businesses in the area, causing damage to roads and paths, and resulting in a poor visitor experience which reflects badly on Coigach and Assynt in general. The rapid growth in popularity of the Stac Pollaidh means that the number of visitors and vehicles visiting the site has overwhelmed the existing parking provision on an almost daily basis throughout the high tourist season. This has led to visitors parking both on the verges nearby and in any available passing places. Due to a lack of public toilet facilities at the site, there has been a rise in the number of people using the surrounding land as a toilet.

Highland Council has responsibility for the management of the road network (apart from trunk roads), but it does not have a statutory obligation to provide parking at any given site. Highland Council own the current (very small) car park and Polly Estate own the land around it that would be required for a bigger and better tourist facility on location.

After consultation with a range of community groups, Polly Estate and Highland Council the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland has been invited to seek tenancy of the HC owned parking facilities as a community asset, and in parallel agree a similar lease with Polly Estate for the additional adjacent land required for an expansion of the facility and find the funding necessary to improve them.

## 2. Background to Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland

The Outdoors Access Trust is a Company Limited by Guarantee and with Charitable Status. Scotland's path network presents significant public benefits in terms of economy, environment, health and wellbeing and as such delivers on national priorities. OATS is committed to supporting its growth and resilience. We do this in 3 ways:

- ***Outdoor Access for Public Benefit:*** to further develop an effective outdoor access network and associated visitor facilities for public benefit and that fits with national priorities, especially in popular but remote and/or fragile rural areas
- ***Collaboration with others:*** to collaborate with others in building a longer lasting outdoor access network that best suits Scotland's sustainable economy, environment and public health
- ***Promoting skills and experience:*** to help people gain skills, nationally recognised qualifications and experience so that they are better placed to take up outdoor access related employment and volunteering opportunities

The Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland has had good experience working in partnership on a similar scheme at the Fairy Pools on Skye, and this has not only resulted in a marked uplift in car parking availability (30 to 140 spaces), and the construction of a substantial off-grid toilet facility to cope with the 180k plus visitors the site gets per year, but is already generating funds to help refund initial OATS capital investment and will soon be able to help with other access projects. It is also now employing staff.

OATS wishes to secure tenancy of the land necessary to construct a substantially larger car park that satisfies demand and removes the need for roadside and passing place parking: construct an offgrid public toilet capable of dealing with the numbers of visitors to the site and in parallel OATS would like to repair, upgrade and refurbish the now badly degraded mountain path on Stac Pollaidh. The amount of investment required to be raised to tackle all three components of project is likely to be in the region of £1m.

### **3. PROJECT OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES**

The overall aim of the Stac Pollaidh project is to improve the infrastructure at the site by increasing the size of the car park, installing toilets, interpretation signs and picnic facilities. The project is intended to ensure any improvements blend in with the surrounding landscape. Once established the site is intended to be self-sustaining and initial seed corn investment from OATS is repaid this will generate an income to support other projects. It is anticipated that the model can be replicated in other areas, with charities working together to develop sustainable solutions to existing infrastructure problems.

OATS will manage the build phase and then take on the responsibility of the day to day management of the carpark over the long term.

#### ***3a. PROJECT OBJECTIVES***

The prime objective of the Stac Pollaidh Parking project is to tackle the ongoing problems with parking and lack of facilities at this popular tourist destination by:

1. Obtaining long term tenancy agreements for the existing car park and surrounding land to allow for future expansion;
2. Raising capital funding in the region of £1m for a new car park, toilets and major refurbishment of the Stac Pollaidh hill path;
3. Providing safe parking for a minimum of 75 vehicles, reducing fly parking on verges and in passing places, thereby improving access for local residents, local businesses and the emergency services;
4. Installing environmentally friendly toilets for visitors;
5. Installing suitable signage and interpretation boards;
6. Identifying and creating suitable viewing points;
7. Generating an ongoing income for maintenance of the car park, toilets and hill path, and other access related projects.

#### ***3b. Project Outcomes***

The project will deliver the following outcomes and benefits:

1. Creating local employment opportunities
2. Further access projects funded by car park revenue
3. Protecting the surrounding area as far as possible by providing managed facilities
4. Creating volunteering opportunities
5. Demonstrating an innovative partnership model that can be used elsewhere in the Highlands
6. Reductions in the level of traffic congestion caused by poor parking
7. Improving the lives of local residents by improving access for them
8. Reductions in the amount of damage to both verges and road edges
9. Reducing the environmental damage caused by vehicles and tourists
10. Improving the “Visitor Experience” for tourists
11. Eradication of the human waste left at the site by visitors

### **3c. PROJECT PRIORITIES**

From the very beginning, the priority for the project has been to alleviate road congestion and allow the residents, businesses and visitors in the area go about their lives as normal in the busy tourist season. Once this is achieved, improving the visitor experience at Stac Pollaidh can follow, with the provision of toilets, interpretation, picnic facilities and information.

It is crucial that the project protects the wild and rugged beauty of the site by not over-developing it and thereby damaging that which people come to see. A careful balance is required between the needs of residents, the desire of people to visit and the protection of the natural environment. Any development must be sustainable and ideally will provide a long-term funding source for this and other access related projects.

#### **4. Design**

Detailed design and drawings will be provided in the near future by a qualified team.

However it is envisaged that an unbound car park surface will be provided for 75-90 spaces, including some room for larger vehicles, cycling stands and other associated infrastructure.

The toilet building will need to be adequate for the number s visiting, and the tank will have to be carefully thought out. The demand is too high for composting or septic tank effluent management and the best option will be for a processing tank such as the Klargest system. This manages effluent onsite to the highest of standards and does not risk overflow (as would a septic tank) or inefficiency in natural composting resulting in a very unpleasant accumulation.

The path will be mountainous in style though will need to be heavily built to be sustainable with the numbers of visitors.

## **5. Funding**

There will be substantial funds to develop the facilities, and it may well need to be done in phases.

The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund would be an excellent source of funding should there be further rounds. The need for this type of project is more urgent each tourist season and it seems to be gaining momentum rather than losing it. This could provide up to 70% of cost to build the car park and toilet but will need match funded. The fund itself will be heavily subscribed and HC support for the funding bid will be paramount.

There are funds that can be tapped into for the hill path at Stac Pollaidh, such as the new IPA programme. This does not however provide funding for management costs, VAT or any costs beyond the specified sums for each item within the programme

OATS has a strong track record in fundraising for projects and will pursue these and other funds in partnership with HC and other bodies. It is seen as inevitable however that OATS will need to invest a substantial sum of its own to help provide the match funding for these grants and for other ineligible items of expenditure as they arise.

## 6. INCOME GENERATION AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Based on current levels of visits (estimated 50k per annum) and the observed usage, annual estimates of 20k cars with an average of two occupants has been used.

Assumptions:

- A charge of £5 per car before toilets are constructed
- 90% calculated to allow for non-compliance with parking charges and free/reduced parking costs for locals/annual permit holders

Income	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
<b>80% compliance total</b>	£90,000	£90,000	£90,000	£90,000	£90,000	£450,000.0

The table below shows a 5-year budget for operating costs, based on the following assumptions:

- Nominal rent to HC and Pollaidh Estates
- Seasonal Staff, with Management and Cash Collection
- VAT is paid on all income
- SEPA licensing annually, insurance, IPS systems Annual Maintenance

Operating cost	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
<b>2 x part time staff</b>	£21,504	£21,934	£22,373	£22,820	£23,277	£111,908
<b>Management costs / travel / liaison / insurance costs/Cash Collection</b>	£15,000	£15,375	£15,759	£16,153	£16,557	£78,844
<b>Site running costs (utilities, licensing rates and supplies</b>	£5,000	£5,500	£6,000	£6,500	£7,000	£30,000
<b>Annual inspection, maintenance and repairs</b>	£3,000	£3,500	£4,000	£4,500	£5,000	£20,000
<b>VAT at 20% of income</b>	18000	18000	18000	18000	18000	£18,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	£62,504.0	£64,309.0	£66,132.0	£67,973.0	£69,834.0	£330,752.0
<b>Net</b>	£27,496	£25,691	£23,868	£22,027	£20,166	£119,248