



In it for the Long Run...

We believe that business should be a force for good. That is our reason for being and why we want to work hard and with passion for our guests, our shareholders, our suppliers/ partners, and our team. Our vision is for Comrie Croft to become a model for rural regeneration with a rich natural environment *that includes* people, homes, recreation and businesses as an integral part. Specifically we are pursuing 'permaculture-crofting': conservation, low impact housing, sustainable enterprises, recreation, eco-tourism and other productive land uses wrapped up in a plan and land use design that ensures they are complimentary to each other.

We have recently been accepted as a member of the Long Run Alliance, through which we are committed to planning for and achieving sustainability through the 4Cs – Conservation, Community, Culture, and Commerce.

Until we have a fully developed 4Cs plan in place, our objectives can be summarised as:

- Good for people
- Land & environmental stewardship
- Localise
- Zero waste
- Energy self-sufficiency
- Influencing suppliers, partners and visitors to be more sustainable

Achievements and plans feeding into these objectives are listed below.

Good for People

Working with local organisations

- Partnership being developed with “Building Bridges” – a local community organisation comprising people with learning difficulties and their parents and carers;
- Partnership with “Re:make” – a local social enterprise keeping stuff out of landfill by organising craft and construction workshops finding new uses for reclaimed, scrounged and found objects. Workshops held at Comrie Croft and Andrew is on Re:make’s Board of Directors;
- Partnership with two local businesses: “Do It Outdoors” and “Auchingarrich Wildlife Park” to create a team-building and corporate social responsibility programme called Comrie Eco Adventures;
- Founding director of the Breadalbane Tourism Cooperative, comprising local tourism businesses with a desire to cooperate for the benefit of each business and the Breadalbane area. Projects in the pipeline include a visitor and community bus service with bike carrying capacity.
- Partnership with Strathearn Adult Learning Group: space for them to meet, help feed the hens, farmhouse gardening.
- Estate used by local schools for fieldwork, Duke of Edinburgh expedition practice, John Muir Award conservation volunteering, cadets, etc;
- Reciprocal advertising of events, open days, etc;
- Sharing of useful information, equipment, etc;
- Active partnership with Comrie Development Trust:
 - Venue for community climate change conference
 - Part of paths working group

Countryside access

- Have purchased a 2nd hand mini-bus/van to enable cyclists to leave their cars at home by offering a bike and people transport service;
- Lobbying for better access to the countryside, including an organised campaign for a local ‘rail trail’ and participation on Executive Board of Perth and Kinross Countryside Trust. In January 2012 Perth and Kinross Core Paths Plan was published including new path links from Comrie Croft to Comrie and the mountains, and a new railway path that will link Crieff and Comrie.
- Encourage free public access for walking and mountain biking on Comrie Croft
- Built 250m of high grade footpath and 6km of mountain bike singletrack with the help of local volunteers
- Have planned the creation of an additional 5300 metres of mountain bike trails, 2000 metres of footpaths and 1600 metres of combined use trails. Funding has now been secured for this project – path construction is due to start February 2012;

Risk management & compliance

- Regular inspections by the local authority environmental health officer and insurance risk advisor
- Risk assessments undertaken, including environmental risks;
- Keep abreast of new legislation and compliance;
- Fire Brigade use our premises for training exercises.

Good workplace

- Winter Light weekend event run entirely for two charities: Action on Depression and the Children’s Hospice Association;

- Consistent financial turnover and profitability;
- Ratio of highest: lowest pay rate is two: one;
- Creating full-time, non-seasonal jobs: From 2005 to 2012 we have 8 full-time and 6 part-time permanent staff, up from 2 full-time and 2 part-time staff;
- Dedicated staff training budget;
- Consensus driven decision-making;
- Staff encouraged to be entrepreneurial and take on responsibility;
- Flat rate (equitable) profit related bonus scheme.

Cooperation and best practice

- Members of:
 - The Long Run Alliance
 - Breadalbane Tourism Cooperative
 - Green Tourism Business Scheme
 - Visit Scotland Quality Assurance
 - Scottish Independent Hostels association (currently Chair)
 - Local tourism association
- Winners of:
 - Special Commendation, Vision in Business for the Environment of Scotland (VIBES) Awards 2008
 - Big Tree Country Award 2007
- Cooperative, open attitude to other similar businesses/people looking for advice
- Key business in local Drover's Tryst Outdoor Festival and Hairy Coo! Mountain bike event
- Promotion of *responsible* access to the countryside

Regenerating the countryside

- New car park is designed to reduce the visual and safety impact of cars onsite
- Create Eco Business Hub – Wildlife viewing attraction and tea Garden being added in 2012
- Plan to create Craft Workshops for local artisans
- Plan to create Eco housing & small-holdings linked to the businesses – planning consultant engaged and draft proposal to planners prepared

Land & Environmental Stewardship

Land

- Land design plan based on permaculture principles
- Creating 50 acre 'wilderness preservation zone' with virtually no human disturbance
- Rehabilitation of mill pond completed 2008, stocked with native brown trout 2009
- Major tree planting scheme applied for (approx. 100,000 trees):
 - 7 acres of enrichment planting with native broadleaves in areas of natural birch regeneration
 - 18 acres new native tree planting on lower ground
 - 59 acres respacing of existing birch regeneration
 - 400 metres of new beech hedging along the A85
 - 1700 metres of avenue planting along tracks with trees at 25 metre spacing
 - 25 acres new parkland with planting of widely spaced native specimen trees
- Manual bracken and gorse control to encourage diverse groundcover
- Insect hotel and bird boxes in woodland

Water

- Bricks in cisterns to reduce toilet flush consumption
- Water use audit undertaken July 2009
- Monitoring water consumption

Localise

100-Mile-Store

- Conversion of basic hostel shop to store that exclusively sells locally produced goods, from a maximum of 100 miles (and the closer the better);
- Actively promoting local businesses;
- Actively encouraging local production of goods and services that cannot currently be sourced locally;
- Reducing food and goods miles

Switching to local/alternative resource use

- Invested in small mobile sawmill to produce our own planks reducing the need for treated and transported timber by more than 50%;
- Onsite scrap wood used to produce all of our own key tags, coat hooks and internal (and some external) signage;
- Wood for campfires is sourced onsite from fallen timber;
- Gravel from a small on-farm pit was used to make new car parking and is used to create and maintain paths and biking trails, saving quarrying and transport from elsewhere
- Started switch to homemade cleaning products wherever possible (e.g. vinegar based)

Local suppliers, local economy

- We seek to use local suppliers at every opportunity
- We ask suppliers for the most sustainable options
- We provide over £1.3 million¹ per year value to the local economy
- Local food café/restaurant planned

Zero Waste

Reduce

- Whole business centred on low cost – low input model
- Use of reusable hand towels rather than paper towels or dryers

Reuse

- Most building materials reused in projects (e.g. hen house uses reclaimed timber & metal roofing);
- Give unwanted items and materials away to avoid landfill, through freecycle.org and local connections
- Re-use section for guests to leave reusable items in camping
- Place for guests to leave unused good food for others

¹ Based on VisitScotland statistics showing that hostel visitors spend on average £65.92 per 24 hour period on all accommodation, meals and services.

- Plastic bags reused in shop and as hostel bin liners
- Encourage customers to bring egg boxes for reuse
- Notice boards made from packing wood
- Barn stage made from pallets
- Camping washing up sink is an old animal trough
- Replacing hostel drinking glasses with innovative drinking jam jars

Recycle

- All guests encouraged to recycle as much as possible
- Compost & hen food from food waste
- Drinks cans to social enterprise project (Can-Able)
- Pay for recycling of cardboard, 3 colours of glass, paper
- Also recycle tin cans, plastic bottles, green garden waste
- Waste & pollution reduction
- Sewage mostly returned to the land through septic tank/soakaway
- Car park and driveway designed to avoid run-off to water courses

Eco friendly purchasing

- Recycled office paper (soon to be 100% post-consumer waste)
- Recycled paper cups for coffee machine

Energy Self-Sufficiency

Renewable energy generation

- Planning to invest £50-100k on wood biomass mini-district heating system to supply all heating and hot water requirements
- Planning to invest in micro hydro electricity generation

Reducing energy consumption

- Unique vending machine overnight off motion sensors
- Low energy light bulbs throughout
- Ultra low energy LED lighting in camping facilities
- Heating of occupied parts of buildings only
- Heating system managed for seasonality and weather changes
- Staff awareness to switch off lights & appliances
- Briefing & signs to encourage guests to switch off lights & appliances
- Energy audit completed and acted on
- Gradually replacing old appliances with more energy efficient ones
- At least 200mm loft insulation in all buildings
- Straw bale barn conversion to create low energy conference facilities
- Motion sensors on all outdoor lighting
- Lined curtains now installed on most windows & plan to complete the remainder

Transport

- System to reduce our own vehicle use by combining trips
- Discount for customers who arrive/depart on public transport or under their own steam
- Promotion of public transport, cycling and walking as a means of getting around
- Lobbied for our own bus stop and new service linking to the west
- Bike hire onsite
- Website contains good public transport and route information
- Onsite timetables and route information

- Promotion of top ten days out by public transport
- Signed up to local carbon offset/tree planting project for visitors

Influencing suppliers, partners and visitors to be more sustainable

Awareness & participation

- Promote this policy through website and onsite notice boards;
- **Sharing information through E-newsletter system, facebook and twitter;**
- Hands on approach – we like to talk to visitors and find out what they think;
- Dedicated feedback forms for each part of the business **that incorporate a sustainability question**

Ethical/Sustainable Suppliers

- Insurance – Ecclesiastical
- Banking – Triodos (2009 voted the world's most sustainable bank)