

P32 Isle Martin Croft House



Project Overview:

Isle Martin is a community owned island looked after by the Isle Martin Trust. The Croft House is one of the oldest existing buildings on the island and was recorded in the 1875 Ordnance Survey. It is a traditional drystone lime mortar building that can offer sleeping accommodation for 6-8 people, but it had become damp and uninviting over the years. This project, delivered by the Isle Martin Trust, aims to make the Croft House a more hospitable space to stay and encourage access to the island. The project will also allow for a variety of training and volunteering opportunities.

The aims of the projects are:

- When finished the building will be suitable for overnight stays, by groups of up to eight people.
- The project will allow a variety of new training and volunteering opportunities to be run on the island.
- The building will demonstrate traditional building techniques and preserve a sympathetic addition to the island's landscape and infrastructure.

Project lead organisation and other organisations involved: Isle Martin Trust

Project Location: Isle Martin

Project dates: April 2019 - April 30 2021

Project Outputs

Measure	Target	Delivered	Notes
Volunteer Days	25	50	Many days of donated professional expertise and ongoing hands-on assistance with renovation (e.g. digging drains).
Bed spaces maintained in use	6	6	This will rise to 8 when other works are completed.
Increased from 50 to 200 visitor/ bed nights over first 12 months	200	12	Due to Covid and lack of staff the island was not open for accommodation after the roof was completed. A decision was taken to carry out more of the renovation work, particularly fixing the drains and chimney, before opening the property for letting.
Building preserved and suitable for overnight stays, by groups of up to 6 persons	1	0	Partially - it can be used now but with the drains and chimney fixed this will ensure it is in a much better state for the longer term.
Roof Labour: Volunteering opportunities for 10 volunteers	10	2	It was inappropriate to utilise volunteers on the roof work, however volunteers contributed to the drainage improvements and the support of the contractors whilst staying on the island - providing meals, housekeeping and transport.

Scheme Outputs

How has the project contributed to the CALLP Scheme Outcomes:

Y	1. The key features of the Coigach and Assynt Landscape will better understood and restored with a fit for purpose system in place to ensure the benefits are sustained. <i>The Croft House was made watertight ensuring that the building remained a community owned, income generating asset that can be enjoyed by the local community and the wider public.</i>
	2. Where appropriate the connectivity and diversity of selected habitats will be mapped.
	3. Increased awareness and understanding amongst all individuals and groups of what makes Coigach and Assynt special and the threats to the unique heritage.
Y	4. Important elements of the built, cultural and natural heritage will be recorded, improved, made publicly accessible and celebrated by the local community. <i>The 1860s Croft House was improved and is publicly accessible by the local community and the wider public.</i>
	5. People will have gained new skills in researching, restoring and understanding their heritage.
	6. Collected data, information and interpretation will be more accessible in the public domain including posting on appropriate websites.
Y	7. Local groups and individuals understand, enjoy, value and take action in the Coigach and Assynt area in ways they did not at the outset. <i>Members of the Isle Martin Trust volunteered to assist the project.</i>
Y	8. Increased access infrastructure at key strategic locations enabling people to enjoy the natural and cultural heritage of the area. <i>The project ensured that the building that the Trust had previously rented as holiday accommodation, could continue to provide accommodation to visitors and locals.</i>
Y	9. Increased opportunities for informal recreation that promotes health and well-being benefits. <i>Visitors to the island that rent the accommodation will do so to interact with the island environment and enjoy the landscape.</i>

Reflecting on the last 5 years, what's the one thing that you're most proud of that has come from your project being part of CALLP?

Croft House Roof Refurbishment

Our island has a number of properties which had not been occupied or cared for in thirty years. We wished to improve these as a resource and community asset. The Croft House was the best candidate. Although there is still refurbishment work to be done, the CALLP funding of the replacement roof and associated work has made an enormous difference to this property and is the biggest project Isle Martin Trust has carried out to date. We are delighted to have the property looking so good thanks to expert local builders and the funding.

What difference has this project made to the built, cultural and natural heritage of Coigach and Assynt?

It has stopped the deterioration of a very important vernacular building and preserved it for the future and as a community asset. The Isle Martin Trust will allow members of the public to experience the island while generating an income from the sustainable maintenance of the asset.

What difference has this project made to People?

People can see that their community island is being cared for and that plans are progressing to preserve the buildings. People are pleased and proud to see the new roof and we are receiving plenty of enquiries to stay in it.

“Many of the people who have seen the work commented that they wish their roof was just as good. I was delighted to see the completion of the work and through CALLP been able to contribute to this project. The new roof will give the building a new lease of life for decades to come and provides an opportunity for the wider community to experience the tranquillity of the island.” IMT director John McIntyre

Useful Links

<https://coigach-assynt.org/2021/04/builders-overcome-tough-challenges-to-upgrade-isle-martin-croft/>
[Isle Martin Trust | Community Owned, Community Run](#)

Future Plans and Legacy

This project was Phase 1 of a list of works drawn up by the architect. Immediate matters such as chimney lining and sewage will now be addressed by a combination of volunteer work and donations. We will then address sourcing finance for the next phase of work. Meanwhile we have made the property suitable for letting in its current state and the accommodation will be made available as soon as possible.

Lessons Learned

What are the three positive lessons gained from the scheme:

1. We learnt how connected Isle Martin is to Coigach and Assynt (compared to Ullapool) and resolved to be more engaged with the Coigach and Assynt area activities.
2. We found a local builder prepared to tackle and overcome the logistics of working on the island.
3. We learned that a lot of local people are pleased to see solid practical improvements being carried out.

What are the three negative lessons gained from the scheme:

1. We agreed to provide a budget which did not include administration of the project because we were told the SDC would not accept that.

We should not have proceeded without that budget line as it tied volunteers into an impossible situation where they did not want to let the project down but did not have the time (or expertise) to carry out requirements, many of which only came to light as the project got underway. It was confusing to find that we could retrospectively apply for funding that covered planning and project management and although this helped, it never replaced the lack of one dedicated professional managing the project from start to finish.

2. A professional should have been engaged, and suitable budget allowed, to carry out the Public Contracts Scotland tendering process. This procedure needs expertise and special skills we could never be expected to have and it brought us to our knees. Should a scheme of this type happen again, the board should be aware in advance and an expert engaged, or perhaps the scheme administrators should provide someone to carry out the process. The scheme system and requirements did not seem to take this matter into account and it very nearly jeopardised the whole project.
3. Whilst the provision of the funding was marvellous for the island, those of us attempting to deliver the project consistently felt a lack of real understanding about the capacity and capabilities of a tiny volunteer board of trustees for a charity with a turnover of around £25K per annum.

We could only afford one part-time administrator to whom we could not assign the additional work of the Croft House Project. The required work, whether it be quarterly reports, contracts, the designing of a plaque, reporting in the media or completing this form are all jobs which are a massive burden to people who have very full working lives and are only in a position to donate maybe 2 - 10 hours per month to the organisation.

In retrospect, for CALLP to truly help IMT it might have been best to have had a paid staff member in place to administer these project requirements, someone who is working in this every day. It is a big ask to expect a volunteer to be available for a day time phone call or to read contracts etc. Also some of the requests came at very short notice which again is difficult for volunteers who work in demanding full time jobs (e.g. the head of the High School).

So although we are pleased to see the Croft House improved, we are just elected members of a tiny board and we are very typical of how many rural organisations are run. We would like funders and project administrators to listen and understand our circumstances rather than treating us like larger organisations with paid and knowledgeable staff able to deal with the administrative burdens.

It would have been good to provide assistance right from the start of the funding application process - our board was so careful it only applied for £10,000 initially where in fact it should have been an application for around £150,000. This could have been identified with suitable guidance at the beginning.

Funding Partners



with support of:



Photographic Evidence



Original state of the building © Isle Martin Trust



Repair of the roof © Isle Martin Trust



Repair of the roof © Isle Martin Trust



Roof following repair © Isle Martin Trust