

COUL TIMES

SPRING 2023

CREATING PROSPECTS - PROTECTING PLACES

LET'S MAKE COUL LINKS HAPPEN!



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WELCOME TO ISSUE 2 OF COUL TIMES

It has been two years since "Communities for Coul" was formed, with the aim of achieving planning permission for a world-class golf course at Coul Links for the benefit of the communities of the Dornoch Firth - sometimes it seems much longer!

Our new planning application is finally submitted and we are now reliant on others to decide on a proposal which would fund a sustainable environmental management plan for Coul, and bring huge socio-economic benefits.

We have learned a great deal in this time - most importantly, that the people who live in this area, are hugely supportive of our aim, as the table on the right shows. (Thank you!)

We have also had multiple confirmations that our principal golf course developer (Mike Keiser) and architect (Bill Coore) are both regarded as being at the top of their game, virtually guaranteeing a world top-ranking for Coul. We understand how damaging it would be to a threatened environment to allow the "status quo" to continue at Coul - and conversely, how creating a golf course will restore and protect this environment.

And we know the development would bring investments of **private capital** into our region of about £50 million, dwarfing the **public monies** being spent on other major projects, such as the Sutherland Spaceport and the Green Freeport, bringing hundreds of good jobs and much-needed housing here.

Finally, we know that local support counts most with the people who will decide on our planning application.

Please don't rely on others to give Coul Links the support we need. This opportunity will never come again.

YOUR SUPPORT IS VITAL (SEE BACK PAGE)

NOW'S THE DAY - AND NOW'S THE HOUR!

www.communities4coul.scot

COMMUNITY BALLOT SHOWED APPROVAL AT NEAR 70%

Q: "Do you support a community application for an environmentally sensitive, world-class golf course to be built at Coul Links near Embo?"

	BRORA	GOLSPIE	EMBO	DORNOCH	TOTAL
Turnout%	38.3%	39.1%	66.5%	49.0%	44.4%
Yes %	68.6%	72.6%	64.9%	68.6%	69.2%
No %	31.4%	27.4%	35.1%	31.4%	30.8%

- Very high turnout – ballot conducted June 2021, during pandemic
- 4,812 voters (all on electoral roll). Ballot independently run by CIVICA



**Communities
for Coul**

Creating prospects. Protecting places.

THE VISION: RESTORE & PROTECT COUL LINKS - FOREVER

"DO NOTHING" IS GREATEST RISK

The environment at Coul Links is in real trouble, as a result of climate change and increasing nitrogen deposition in a delicate ecosystem. This has favoured a small number of "aggressive" or invasive plants that are stabilising the dunes and displacing smaller, rarer species. As the invasive species extend their range, they produce more seeds and accelerate their

spread. In the words of our consultant botanist:

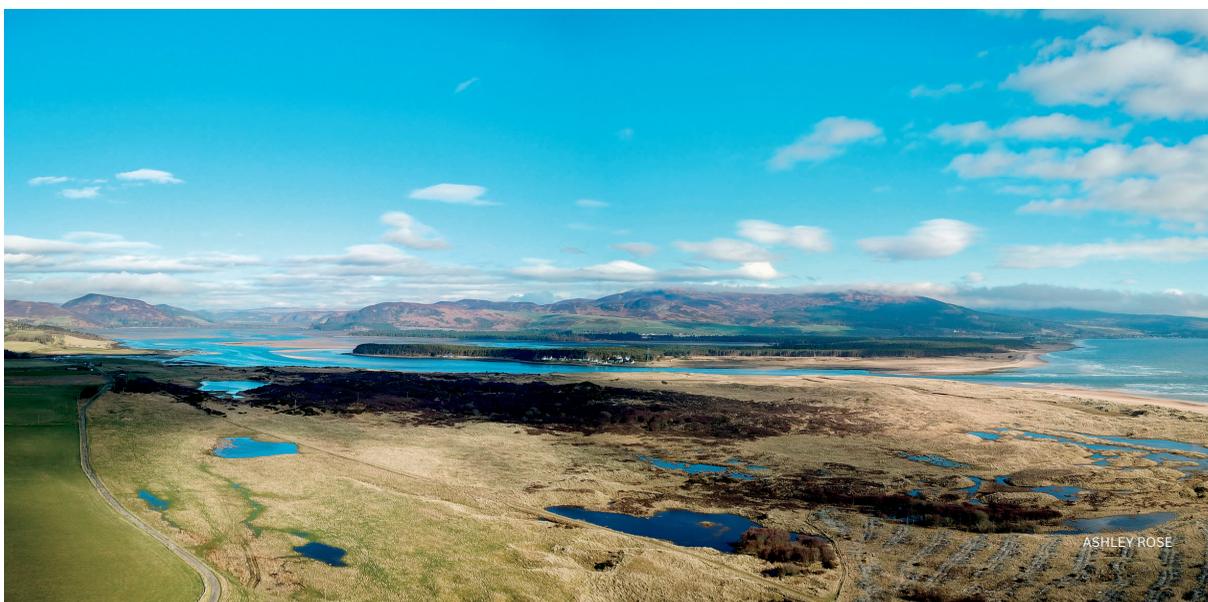
"The vegetation of the dune slacks is now mostly indistinct from roadside ditches and the dune heath is turning into nondescript scrub. Soon there will be nothing much left worth preserving".

This situation is caused by humans and unfortunately, correcting it is very costly. Yet the current NatureScot management plan for Coul is massively underfunded, so they have had to contract out the work,

making things worse, as debris from gorse and birch is left strewn around, fertilising the soil and encouraging in yet more invasives.

Experts estimate the site requires expenditure close to £1/2 million over 5 years, to properly restore it. And this is what the golf course developers are committed to providing - with no call whatsoever on the public purse.

A world-class golf course here would provide funding, machinery, personnel, expertise and the motivation required for the management and enhancement of biodiversity within the dunes into the future.



2019 PUBLIC INQUIRY INFORMED NEW COURSE DESIGN

The concerns and issues raised at the Public Inquiry into the previous Coul Links golf course Application in 2019, have enabled and guided C4C's revised proposal. The objective became simplified: To design a world-class golf course around the constraints imposed by the Inquiry.

MAIN CHANGES TO THE 2019 COURSE

- **Re-routing.** Some holes have been moved to avoid the most important habitats.
- **Fairways created the traditional way.** Natural vegetation just mowed, rather than being stripped and replanted. This is how old courses like Royal Dornoch were originally created. It means there is no need for fairway irrigation or fertilisation. IT ALSO MEANS THAT JUST 1.5 ha. OF THE SSSI WILL BE INTRUSIVELY DEVELOPED. This is 90% less than the previous plan.
- **Taking care of small organisms.** The new plan is to break up most of the fairways into two or more pieces so that wee plants and beasts can travel around easily.

THIS IS NOW A MAJOR DUNE RESTORATION PROJECT - FUNDED BY A GOLF COURSE

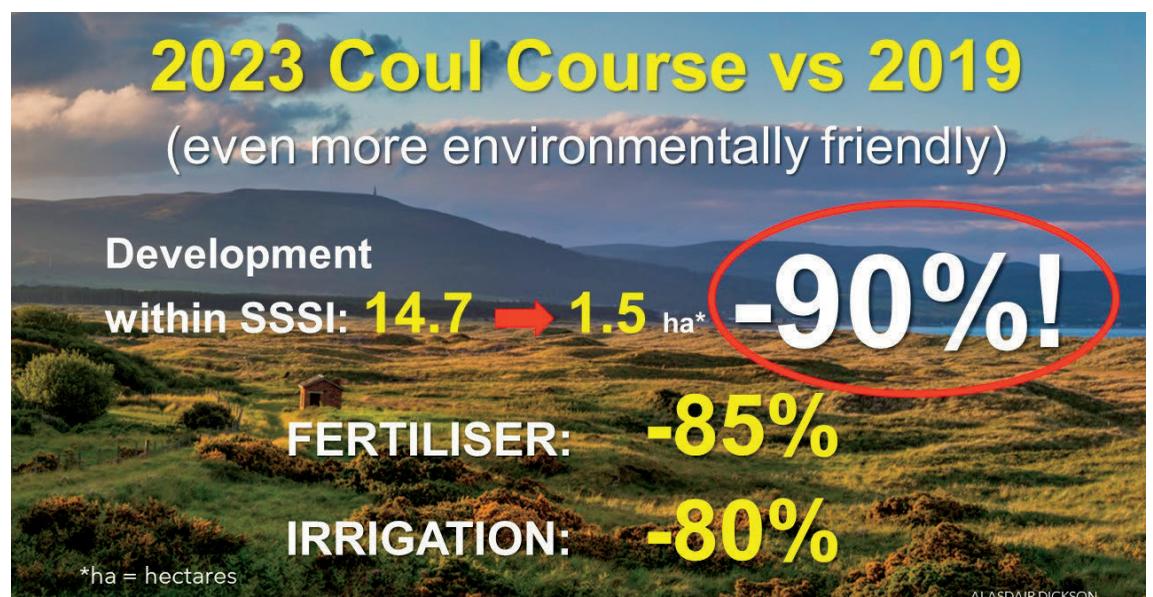
With NatureScot's agreement, Coul Links' developers are prepared to undertake the following major projects to restore its best, most valuable features (the ones which got it protected in the first place) and hugely INCREASE the biodiversity of the area.

- Removal of invasive species, including gorse, birch, meadowsweet, burnet rose, bracken, etc.
- Expansion of valuable Dune Heath area by 11-13ha. (+50%)
- Rare Dune Slacks to be restored and new slacks may be created.
- Protected land to be increased by 14.7ha. as adjacent land is brought under SSSI management.

"I consider the golf course to be the only means by which the dune slacks at Coul will be improved and sustained into the future."

C4C's consultant hydrologist

If the golf course goes ahead, Coul Links will be fully restored as the internationally important site it should be. And critically, the framework for its sustainable future protection will be established.



THE VISION: GOOD JOBS & HOUSING

KEEPING YOUNGSTERS IN THE HIGHLANDS

HUNDREDS MORE JOBS

& HIGHER INCOMES

A new socio-economic report on Coull Links has calculated that from the beginning, the new course would generate around 270 new jobs (FTE), mostly in East Sutherland and the Northern Highlands. This number would increase to almost 400 as it became fully established. These numbers are higher than those produced for the previous Coull Links application, partly because of increasing popularity of (and demand for) golf following the pandemic.

The report, written by Professor David Bell, Dornoch native, Captain of Royal Dornoch and one of Scotland's leading economists, also says that local incomes would increase by around £3.8m when the course opens, rising to about £5.6 m as it reaches capacity.

OUR "DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGE" NEEDS

COULL LINKS' JOBS

In Sutherland, working age population has declined by over 8% from 2011 to 2018. This is mainly caused by young people emigrating south to find jobs. A 2022 survey by HIE showed that 69% of Sutherland youngsters expect to leave the Highlands to find work. In fact, the population of Sutherland is ageing so rapidly that in 2020, there were just 60 births in the whole county. The Council predict that in 5 years time, the average reception class will number less than 6! Soon there will not be enough working people left to operate essential services.

East Sutherland has virtually no manufacturing and little agricultural land. Tourism and hospitality are the main employers, and the local golf courses are major tourism assets. The creation of Coull Links will complement Royal Dornoch and will, with other local courses, create a world-class golfing cluster, attracting golf tourists from the UK and around the world, to **stay** here. This will provide jobs for our young people, increase incomes and reduce the negative effects of an ageing population. As Professor Bell says: **"The 400 jobs associated with Coull Links will have a sufficiently large employment effect to make a real impact on Sutherland's demographic challenge"**.



The New Coull Links eco-hotel has now gained planning permission.

COULL LINKS ECO-HOTEL

If the golf course gains planning permission, the Coull landowner, Edward Abel Smith, now has permission to build an eco-hotel on nearby farmland at Coull. This will be built as a series of turf-roofed crofts, in a "clachan" style. The beautiful design is by Embo architect, Iain Levens. Eventually, the hotel will be able to accommodate up to 80 guests and will employ 40 people.

Mr Abel Smith, like all employers who want to benefit from partnerships with the new golf course, is committed to the terms of the "North Highland Hospitality Charter", giving employees good working conditions, and pay at least at the level of the Living Wage. However, it will not be economically viable to go ahead with this plan to build the hotel, if the golf course is turned down.

SUPPORT FROM ROYAL DORNOCH MEMBERS

It has always been the case that all the local golf courses supported the Coull development, but now we know about the members too. A recent RDGC survey of the club's international members shows:

- **90% support Coull Links**
- **69% say they would likely spend more time here, if Coull were built**

Coull would also relieve the pressure on RDGC, where excess demand forced closure of the course to visitors in 2022, causing cancelled bookings for accommodation providers in the town and indirectly impacting other local businesses through lost visitor spend.

£50 MILLION

PRIVATE INVESTMENT

At a time when public funds are so scarce, it's amazing (but true!) to think that if Coull Links gets the go-ahead, it will bring about £50 m of private investment to the Dornoch Firth. This is more than the Spaceport (£17.3 m) and the Green Freeport (£26 m).

This includes spend on the golf course, clubhouse, infrastructure, Coull Links Hotel, and affordable housing for local people.



The old Steading at Coull Farm will become the Coull Links Clubhouse

MORE AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Plans are already being pulled together to build new, affordable houses near Embo to accommodate Coull Links Golf Course, and associated businesses' employees. The initial plans are to construct up to 20 units, with about 50% being affordable. When/if the golf course proposal is approved, architects' drawings will be commissioned and shared. Furthermore, if the course is approved, the developers will encourage other housing companies to build affordable housing at sites around the Dornoch Firth.

For more information:
www.communities4coull.scot

WE NEED YOUR HELP Every letter counts!

**PLEASE
CONTACT THE
HIGHLAND
COUNCIL
(By 9th April)**

As part of the planning process, The Highland Council takes into account letters and emails sent from local people. Sadly, people who oppose a planning application, tend to send more letters than those who agree with it so, because this application could have such a positive outcome for East Sutherland and Easter Ross, we are making a special appeal to our supporters - **to please send letters of support for Coul Links Golf Course to the Highland Council.**



MAJOR COMMUNITY BENEFITS FROM COUL

C4C and course developer Mike Keiser have reached an agreement that **the community will be given a 5% equity share in the Coul Links project.** This is significantly higher than expectations. Over time, this is likely to bring in hundreds of thousands of pounds to benefit local good causes, should the golf course be approved. The community will also be given a seat on the board of directors for Coul Links Golf Club.

ELECTRIC SHUTTLE-BUSES CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITIES

In addition to everything else, we must remember the extra connectivity we would gain if the course goes ahead. The Coul Links Developers intend to run an electric shuttle-bus system between Brora and Tain, stopping at Golspie, Coul, Embo and Dornoch. Although this would be primarily for the use of Visitors, it would also be open to employees of partner businesses to travel to and from work.



www.communities4coul.scot

How to write a great letter of support to the Highland Council:

- Email eplanning@highland.gov.uk
- OR write a letter to:
THC Eplanning Centre,
Glenurquhart Road, Inverness.
IV3 5NX
- Use reference: Coul Links Golf Development 23/00580/FUL
- The message does not have to be long, but it must be in your own words, and cite some reason/s. You may find it useful to read Coul Times before writing it
- Give your full name, address and postcode
- Encourage everybody else in your house and in your network to do the same.
(Only 1 letter per person)
- Copy Dornoch Community Council on:
dornochareacomcommunitycouncil@hotmail.co.uk
- Also copy our constituency MSP Maree Todd (SNP)
maree.todd.msp@parliament.scot
- Try to send it by 9th April

Thank you!

C4C would like to sincerely thank all the people and businesses from our communities who have donated money, time and/or expertise to our campaign. We could not have got here without you!

