

To the people of the Dornoch Firth

Having bought Coul Farm in 1957, I fully realise that my family are relative newcomers to the area. Nevertheless, I represent the third generation of my family to own the farm and, as such, I feel a strong affinity with the area and I would very much like to see it develop economically, socially and environmentally.

Should the creation of a world-renowned golf course at Coul Links come to fruition, I believe that I and the community can achieve all the above.

Despite unfounded rumours to the contrary, I would remain the owner of Coul Links and therefore the golf course and, as such, I personally pledge to deliver:

- 1. A 5% community equity share in the golf course** – for every £100 of profit the golf course makes, the community will receive £5. A new community group “Coul for Communities” will become responsible for fairly distributing the communities’ share of profits from the golf course. I expect this benefit to be worth six figures each year and I hope a priority will be to secure the future of the Embo Community Centre.
- 2. Representation on the Board** – the community will have a representative as a Board member for the golf course. This will mean that local people’s interests will be considered at all times.
- 3. SSSI Management Plan** – a fully funded management plan for the restoration and sustainable protection of the whole of Coul Links SSSI, will be agreed with NatureScot and implemented using the machinery and manpower available from the golf course.
- 4. A new Coul Ecology Officer** – he/she will be employed to oversee the implementation of the SSSI Management Plan and a wider 21st century environmental restoration programme.
- 5. Coul Links Hotel** – a brand-new eco-hotel will be built at on the farmland adjacent to the golf course; phase one has already been approved. The design is for a traditional “clachan” or collection of crofts, which will blend into the landscape and use low-carbon options (e.g. solar array) throughout. The hotel will have its own wildflower meadow which will be a haven for bees and butterflies. When fully built, the hotel will employ up to 30 people.
- 6. Highland Hospitality Charter** – created in conjunction with C4C, the Charter commits to creating a centre of excellence for hospitality careers in the Northern Highlands. The emphasis is on year-round, well paid hospitality jobs paying at least the ‘real living wage’ and offering proper development potential.
- 7. Prioritise local people** – jobs will be advertised in the first instance to local people wherever possible.
- 8. University of the Highlands & Islands** – Coul Links have been in discussions to partner with UHI to create apprenticeships and long-term opportunities for both golf and catering students.
- 9. Coul Collective** – a group of local businesses will supply the golf course, hotel and associated businesses. This initiative has already commenced with eight local businesses signed up.
- 10. Access** – the current walking paths on Coul Links will be made accessible to all, while a second, brand-new cycle and walking path will be created across the farmland.
- 11. Electric Mini-bus Service** – there will be a privately run electric bus service to take staff and visiting golfers between Coul Links, Dornoch, Embo, Golspie, Brora and Tain. This will reduce unnecessary traffic on our roads and provide transport to Coul Links to staff living, and golfers staying, in all the communities of the Dornoch Firth.
- 12. Housing** – discussions are ongoing with the Highland Council and representatives of the Embo community to construct new housing – including a significant number of affordable homes – on Coul Farm next to Embo. The affordable homes will be sold with Covenants to ensure they remain affordable in the long-term and are not turned into holiday lets.
- 13. Farmland Transformation** – Coul Links golf course will give me the opportunity to transform the farmland that borders it. The current plans include new Crofts (with no rights-to-buy), creating new foraging woodland across much of what are now grazing fields, and a new wildflower meadow. These areas will become havens for wildlife and for recreation.
- 14. Gaelic signage** – Gaelic signage will be used wherever appropriate
- 15. Bridge at Little Ferry** – I am committed to exploring the possibility of a crossing at Little Ferry, linking Golspie with Coul Links and therefore Dornoch and further afield, without requiring cyclists and walkers to use the dangerous A9.

Professor David Bell CBE, a native of Dornoch and one of Scotland’s leading economists, has forecast that the golf course being planned for Coul Links will become a global golfing “destination”, bringing a projected 400 new, full-time jobs to the area, mostly for young people. This will help reverse Sutherland’s ageing demographic and ongoing population decline and bring real economic growth to the towns and villages of the Dornoch Firth.

Clearly I have a vested interest in the proposed golf course at Coul Links but I give my word that I will do my utmost to use its approval as the catalyst to achieve all the pledges I have given above.

Will the communities of the Dornoch Firth ever have such an opportunity again?

Edward Abel Smith
Landowner – Coul Links