



# Huts: The landscape is shifting

*Change is afoot. In 2014 we saw huts become part of Scottish Planning Policy for the first time. In 2015 we need to make sure we rise to the challenge of turning words into action.*

**R**ight. So the door's ajar - are we going to push it open? Reforesting Scotland's Thousand Huts campaign has been working hard to find sensible solutions to the remaining obstacles to sustainable, affordable new hutting in Scotland.

These challenges come in five main categories:

- Planning
- Building Regulations
- Rights and responsibilities of hutters and hut landlords
- Affordability
- Access to land

We are working on all of these - but some things will change more quickly than others.

## Planning

Planning is currently a high priority for the campaign. We are in the final stages of producing a publication called

*New Hut Developments: Guidance for Planners.* We are in consultation with architects, builders, planners and government officials as well as legal advisors in order to draw up a fairly comprehensive guide to the issues which may play a part in making good planning decisions in relation to huts. Within the next six months we aim to have a seminar for planners where we will launch the document. In April an event in Fife will explore issues around designing new hut sites.

## Building regulations

We are in the process of commissioning a technical guide to *Good Practice in Hut Building*. This will give all prospective hut builders the chance to benefit from the experience of architects, builders and structural engineers, to ensure their build is safe and of good quality. At the same time, we are in dialogue with officials at Scottish Government Building Standards about what would constitute appropriate building regulations for small, low-impact huts.

## The rights and responsibilities of hutters and hut landlords

We hosted an event last autumn with invited experts and stakeholders on land and tenancy rights. We have been working with tenancy experts to draw up a Voluntary Code of Good Practice which will initially form the basis of fair and balanced agreements between hutters and hut landlords. This is to tackle the historical problem of many hutters having only informal agreements with landlords over a period of decades. This leaves them very vulnerable when, for example, the land succeeds to an heir, or is sold. We are recommending that all new hutters have a clear formal agreement with the landlord so that each knows where they stand. We are exploring the question of whether in the longer term this would be best embodied in legislation. In addition to this, we are working with the Forestry Commission to draw up a template for a contract between the Forestry Commission and a hutters' co-op at the pilot site in West Fife.

Left to right: Hut at Eddlestone; Tree at Carnock Wood; BBC's David Miller filming in the woods. Photos: Chris Cunningham and Donald McPhillimy.

### Affordability

This is one of the really big challenges for the future. Scotland has changed since the first wave of hutting swept across the central belt between the wars. Nowadays, it seems that the value of anything desirable quickly inflates beyond the means of the average person. How do we prevent a situation like the one where a beach hut in Dorset sold for £180,000. To do that, we need to prioritise affordability in everything we do. Opportunities for affordable hutting can surely be found, particularly among huts on public land or community-

owned land. We can also learn from hut sites like Carbeth, where a cap is placed on the value of any hut offered for sale.

### Access to land

The other serious challenge is access to land. That is not one we can solve overnight, but again there are opportunities we can make the most of. The Scottish Government has a target of one million acres in community ownership by 2020. There is a lot of scope there. At the same time we each need to look for opportunities locally. If hutting becomes an appealing land

use, more landowners will be willing to release land for huts. We need to be working on all levels to find the way forward. A Hutter's Federation will be needed as new hutter's emerge. Together we can make something beautiful happen. Join the campaign and be part of the change.

*Karen Grant*

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## The View from Carnock Wood



**W**hen you stand on the proposed pilot study hutting site in Carnock Wood, in west Fife, looking south-west you have a scraggy birch wood behind you and a sea of bracken in front of you. In the distance lies the Firth of Forth and often there are spectacular sunsets. Behind the birch wood is a larger pine plantation of around 40 hectares, a fair size to explore. It is a lovely woodland and will be a fantastic place to have a hut.

Reforesting Scotland's Thousand Huts campaign has taken a few giant steps towards achieving that over the past 12 months and it now looks like Spring 2016 is going to be the time we spread the word that 12 hut sites are becoming

available. There will be a period of allocation and scrutinising of leases, then hut building can commence.

We have come a long way in the last year, since selecting the site from Forestry Commission Scotland's (FCS) short list. First, we made contact with neighbours and the local communities. There would be nothing worse than Reforesting Scotland, an organisation which has always promoted community initiatives, getting off on the wrong foot and pissing off the neighbours. The meeting with the Community Council and the Drop In in Saline Community Centre went really well and grew our support locally.

In the lead up to the Hutter's Rally in Glasgow in July 2014, the BBC got interested and recorded items for both TV and radio. There was good press coverage around this time too. We also met planners from Fife Council and contributed to the new Development Plan.

Since then, we have mapped the likely site and produced design guidance for planners, FCS and hutter's. This draws on the survey we did of existing hutter's who kindly shared details of their energy and water sources, and toilet arrangements. Most people rely on log stoves and candles for warmth and lighting, with cooking done over bottled gas, although an unexpected number have some form of

renewable energy. Toilets are usually of the compost variety. A model constitution has been drawn up for the group of hutter's. We see this as a co-operative, using club rules, with audited accounts and office-bearers, dissolution clauses, and so on. We would like to keep it simple. We have also thought about how to offer the 12 places to would-be hutter's. Two sites would be reserved for local people plus a possible community hut/school classroom. The opportunity for the remaining ten sites will be promoted widely, followed by a ballot and interviews. All hutter's will have to belong to the co-op and be bound by the majority.

The next step is to draw up a lease between the co-op and FCS which covers everything which could possibly go wrong and is legally watertight. Then there is the planning application, with the way hopefully smoothed by the discussions we are having with local planners and those in the Scottish Government, which continues to be supportive.

It is all on track and I look forward to hearing the sounds of children playing and sausages sizzling in that beautiful little birch wood in west Fife.

[www.thousandhuts.org](http://www.thousandhuts.org)

*Donald McPhillimy  
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