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**Comrie Development Trust
Media Statement
13 December 2016**

Cultybraggan Heritage Self Catering

Funding has now been secured, which will allow Comrie Development Trust (CDT) and the recently formed Cultybraggan Heritage Self-Catering Society (CHSC) to open the door on self catering accommodation for individuals, couples, families and groups at the historic community owned Cultybraggan Camp. The CDT Members from Comrie and Associate Members from elsewhere, who invested in community shares to give financial support to the project, have now had their faith in the development rewarded through the decisions of several funding partners. The local community buy out and these national funders have now given Comrie a great opportunity for local people to get involved in a completely new and unique style of community enterprise as volunteers or businesses.

Historic Environment Scotland have already pledged support through a Historic Buildings Repair Grant, dependent on final costs, but anticipated to be in excess of £100,000, which will fund 40% of the repair work necessary to overhaul, repair and preserve the eleven Nissen Huts involved. This work will see the structure and external fabric of the buildings restored into good order and will include the selective repair and restoration of the windows and doors which are characteristic of the building type.

Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE) have awarded the project a grant of £36,350 from the Sustainable Development Fund toward the cost of connecting the Nissen huts to the existing camp Biomass boiler supplied district heating system. This funding will also contribute towards the installation of the heat distribution systems internal to each building and to the provision of mains electric supply connections into the huts.

Completing the total finance required, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) in Scotland have just decided to grant £638,900 to enable the restoration and conversion programme to go ahead next year. HLF wants to help secure the future of Cultybraggan Camp as an important heritage site, and has also recognised how the self catering development can bring economic benefits to Comrie and the West Strathearn area.

In using the new Community Right to Buy legislation by purchasing a 40 acre Cultybraggan Camp and 50 acre hill ground nearby in 2007, Comrie Development Trust acquired 98 buildings, including 28 B listed and 4 A listed buildings. The Nissen huts were built in 1941 and designed for 15 years of use, but are now 75 years old. They had been maintained by the army over the intervening years, but now require considerable investment and productive use if they are to be preserved over the long-term. Comrie Development Trust is planning major development over the next 10 years, and the self catering development will be the first of those projects.

As the area is already popular with visitors, the potential for using some of the huts for self-catering purposes emerged as a possible option to be examined. An initial study in 2011, funded by a Big Lottery Investing in Ideas grant, concluded that the business case for self-catering huts was compelling. Comrie Development Trust has been working over the last five years with Historic Scotland, the Heritage Lottery Fund and more recently with JFS Architects and Visit Scotland on design, marketing and cost issues. Planning Consent and Listed Building Consent were both granted by Perth and Kinross Council in May 2016.

In parallel with this, local people have been consulted, with an initiative to give the community the opportunity to invest in the self-catering business, through the purchase of community shares. Shares were sold from September to November 2015 and £27,525 was raised with 213 shareholders now members of the Cultybraggan Heritage Self Catering Society, the majority from the Comrie area to retain local control. This registered Society will manage the self-catering business, with the planned surplus income coming to CDT to be used in ways, which benefit the local community.

Cultybraggan Camp site already accommodates a wide range of interests, including community allotments, children's/youth activities, a community orchard, heritage and education services, business and commercial resources, event facilities, and environmental and woodland spaces. All of these interests involve local people coming to the camp very regularly, some on a daily basis. In addition, many of the activities and business organisations involve people from elsewhere coming to join a heritage tour, for a heritage or other educational session or event, or for commercial reasons.

This new development, in line with a market study, will provide high quality (Visit Scotland 4-star standard) self catering accommodation for individuals, couples, families and friends looking for holiday accommodation in Perthshire, and groups of school and older students, and others coming to attend educational sessions and other events at Cultybraggan Camp. In addition, it is anticipated that there will be groups of people with an interest in heritage, including modern history and World War II, and other groups coming to enjoy all of the area's recreational and outdoor activity opportunities.

The project is not aiming to provide "luxurious" accommodation, but simply allows for the creation of lounge, bedroom and well-equipped kitchen areas furnished and fitted out to provide a very good standard of comfortable accommodation, and with an ensuite bathroom/toilet in each of the accommodation units. In detail, the plans are for: 6 four bedded units; 2.5 two bedded units; 1 accessible unit; plus 1 unit divided between heritage and common room use; and half a unit used for linen storage and other utility purposes.

Additionally, CDT will seek funding to deliver a Heritage Activity and Training Plan. The plan includes camp storyboards and a smart-phone tour app to supplement the existing self-guided heritage trail, the involvement of local schoolchildren in developing a 3-D Model of the POW camp, "Hands on History" educational materials and workshops, partnership development with the 2 European communities still having POW heritage sites, and a geophysical exploration and community archaeological dig to uncover the three escape tunnels.

The self catering development and heritage activity project are designed to bring economic and employment benefits both on site and more broadly across the area in providing an additional contribution to local tourism resources. Families staying in the accommodation will visit Auchingarrich Wildlife Park, will use the cycle tracks at Comrie Croft, will go on a tour round Glenturret Distillery, take the Breadalbane Bus and use local shops and cafe/restaurants.

Comrie Development Trust and Comrie Heritage Self Catering Society want to extend the Comrie welcome to people coming to stay in great self catering accommodation in this beautiful area, and through that to secure one part of a historic site and to benefit the local community at the same time.

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Quotes from the organisations involved in the project;

Comrie Development Trust: Andrew Reid, CDT Board Secretary, said, “Comrie Development Trust is grateful to its funders for providing the opportunity to deliver a great new resource at the community owned Cultybraggan Camp, and for the Strathearn area.”

Comrie Heritage Self Catering Society: Roddy Brown, CHSC Management Committee Member, said “The funding support now makes it possible to work positively towards opening our unique Cultybraggan Heritage Self-Catering accommodation for the 2018 summer season. We are sure that people and groups who come to stay with us will have a great time enjoying the magnificent surrounding scenery while taking advantage of the huge range of local activities and places to visit.”

Heritage Lottery Fund: Lucy Casot, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland, said: “Thanks to players of the National Lottery, we are delighted to be able to help bring Cultybraggan back to life in a way that’s relevant to today. This will not only help secure its future but will bring enjoyment and learning to very many people as well as a boost to the local tourist economy.”

Historic Environment Scotland: Thomas Knowles, Head of Grants at Historic Environment Scotland, said: “Cultybraggan has a fascinating, colourful, and sometimes dark history – operating as it did as one of the two maximum security POW camps in World War II. Since that time, large parts of the site have remained relatively unchanged, and are now considered as being of international significance. When the Comrie Development Trust approached us with their proposals, we were happy to confirm our support for the project, in recognition of the appropriate, sensitive, and sustainable reuse being proposed for the buildings. As well as preserving that heritage, we were encouraged by the educational opportunities and economic benefits to the local community that the project provides.”

Historical Notes:

Three key ownership periods are meaningful locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

1941-1948 – as a PoW camp, Cultybraggan housed 4,000 high security German PoWs from 1944 to 1948 when the last prisoners were released. Events of international importance including an infamous murder of a prisoner by other prisoners, escape attempts by German PoWs, and the involvement of Herbert Sulzbach who was an important figure in the establishment of pan-Europeanism. The camp’s relationship with Comrie village is important to local history, but the camp is also one of the last sites of its type in the UK and Europe, with the potential to tell the whole story of PoW camps in Britain during a world war. The themes are timeless - love, faith, fear, hope, hate, conciliation, redemption and survival. Camp tours and storyboarding around the camp, museum spaces in the Guard Block, interactive exhibitions and educational resources will pick up these themes.

1948-2004 – the MOD used the camp for training regular, part-time and volunteer British Army units. Almost every famous regiment in Scotland spent time at Cultybraggan. Every international conflict involving the UK since the WW2 connects with Cultybraggan. Vietnam veterans were brought here and soldiers trained here before embarking for Northern Ireland. One of the huts contains a mural painted around 1980 and referencing the Troubles. The nuclear bunker, remains a symbol of the Cold War.

2005 onwards – Comrie people worked together through Comrie Development Trust to protect the camp from external control and development, and to use the site to benefit the community and area.

“The preservation of this camp is vital as it is part of a diminishing resource of WWII sites that will help future generations to understand the conflict and its impact on British communities.”

Dr Iain Banks, University of Glasgow

