

Findhorn Ecovillage Demonstration Site

A proposal for North Whins off grid site

My vision is a site which serves as: a learning centre through demonstration of small-scale ecovillage technologies and solutions; an entrance point for young people to the community through volunteering/woofing; a safe environment for children and youth to immerse themselves in practical ecovillage life experience; and a space open for community members of all ages to engage with ecovillage ideas and concepts. It would be sponsored by the community, built with local volunteers and woofers, and for the benefit of the community.

Physical design

Building

Small south facing dwelling built in locally available materials (timber frame, stone, cob), equipped with solar panels and PV, woodstove, rainwater tanks.

Design: Large common space/kitchen to be used as a space for learning, produce preparation and preservation, and social hang out. Sleeping loft or similar for 2-3 people. Potentially one or two other tiny homes for more private accommodation.

Compost toilets and constructed wetland for grey water

Vegetable garden and Orchard

Producing enough fruit and vegetables for 3-4 people throughout the year

Animals

Chickens/ducks

Experiments with, and demonstration of, simple sustainable technologies

e.g. off grid living, biochar, biogas, hot composting, permaculture, biodynamics, etc.

Working with the landscape

Small and slow solutions through low impact techniques would mean we stay in tune with natural rhythms and can collaborate with the natural features of the site.

Social design

Run by an onsite manager (myself), together with skilled volunteers/woofers

As well as serving as a smallholding livelihood for the site manager, it would be an entrance point for young people who want to stay in the community short term and share/learn practical sustainability skills. The ethos and values of the project would be aligned with the Common Ground and build on the rich experience of the community.

Group visits and programmes

A place where groups can be taken for education purposes, e.g. the various sustainability and permaculture courses Findhorn College and Findhorn Foundation offer, and give a felt sense for simple sustainability solutions in practice.

A demonstration site for e.g. media who want to report on the ecovillage.

Children

An environment where children and youth of the community are specifically welcome at certain times in the week to be in a natural environment of a functioning smallholding, and experience from an early age the skills and practices of growing food, taking care of animals, cooking and preserving produce, etc.

Learning centre

Open to community members throughout the day to come and peruse the ecovillage library and resources. Site for short practical courses for community members, e.g. compost making, biochar, food preservation.

Exchange with other ecovillages

A base from which exchange and sharing of best practice can happen with other ecovillages, e.g. through hosting visitors and practical workshops.

Financial design

I see several ways this proposal could be financed:

Forming a Community Benefit Society or Community Interest Company
Land would be purchased by this entity with funds invested by shareholders. For the development of the site, community members would contribute financial or other capital, e.g. donation of materials/time/skill, in return for guaranteed use of the space and the benefits listed above.

If offered at a reduced price, I could personally purchase the land, but would still choose to develop it with community members as outlined above.
If required, more funds would be sought through grants from e.g. the Climate Challenge Fund (CCF).

Running costs would be financed as part of the smallholding livelihood of the site manager, exchange and bartering with community members, venue hire from workshops, with potentially a nominal fee charged of volunteers for e.g. off-site food stuffs in case of crop failures/extravagant appetites. This is the way in which the current smallholding I live on is run, and has proved financially viable.

Potential collaboration with other projects in North Whins, for instance a forthcoming proposal for a cooperative café at the community facility site.

About me

I have been living in the Park for three years, and at 27 years old consider myself part of the younger generation in the community. I mostly work with the Findhorn College on their permaculture, sustainability, and youth programmes. I have nine years of experience of small-scale food production and have been 90% self-sufficient in fruit and vegetables here in the Park over the last two years. Whilst at university in St Andrews, I coordinated a CCF-funded Transition group which ran 11 community gardens, a local currency, climate change awareness raising and behaviour change projects, swap and reuse hubs, film festivals, conferences, etc. I continue to be involved in the Transition and permaculture movements nationally and internationally. For the past two years I have been working for a community interest company called Scottish Communities Climate Action Network, which is funded by Scottish Government and facilitates local community led climate action.