

Bodhi Eco-Village

mindful living

Feasibility Study Report Summary

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Prepared by

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combining practice of ethics, care for the earth and creative arts

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1.0 Overview of Project

1.1 The Bodhi Trust

The Bodhi Trust is a constituted not-for-profit organisation made up of 3 committee members, a Feasibility Study Co-ordinator, and approximately 100 members¹ and supporters/friends. Luise Holtbernd, Larry Butler and Andy Marnie form the Management Committee of the Trust and meet monthly in Glasgow, where the Trust is currently based.

1.2 The Eco Village Vision

The Bodhi Trust was formed to develop the idea of an ethically aware village that combined arts and crafts practise with low impact living. The aims of the Trust are simple and embrace ethics, ecology, social diversity and the arts:

The vision is one where a community of people would live according to principles of kindness, generosity, simplicity, honesty, and mindfulness with particular emphasis on ecological awareness and the impact we make on the Earth. The arts are broadly inclusive of writers, painters, performers, musicians and crafts people, and would also strongly identify the community.

The intention is to create a human scale model for low impact development that is aesthetically pleasing and affordable. In terms of infrastructure this means eco-friendly buildings, renewable energy, and land stewardship.

Social diversity would be maintained by including a variety of lifestyles, such as families, solitary hermits or artists, couples, co-housing, small communities and co-operatives.

1.3 The Feasibility Study

The Trust successfully raised nearly £7,000² in 2003 to commission the feasibility study, which forms Phase 1 of the Eco Village Project. The study researched several aspects of developing an eco village, and to produce a strategy of "next steps" for the Trust to discuss with its members and supporters over a residential workshop weekend in April 2004.

The research aspects of the feasibility study focused strongly on clarifying the vision of the Trust and getting a sense of viability of the project through the response of the "membership". More broadly, it investigated infrastructure, land, funding and legalities.

1.4 Summary of Feasibility Study

1.4.1 Clarification of the Vision

Who does the vision include?

Twenty-five potential eco village residents, aged between 36 – 50 years. Respondents are almost all currently associated with ecology and in favour of a village with a shared spiritual practise.

Why and When?

The majority of people want to join the village for firstly, ecological, and secondly, spiritual reasons, in either 2 – 5 years, or 5 – 10 years.

Where and how?

The preferred situation is within 3 miles of public transport with a water body and woodland on the land. The preferred regions of Scotland were Perthshire, Borders, and Ayrshire.

People want to have their own house and garden but value shared infrastructure such as a community hall and gardens. The preferred social structures are cross generational and families, with significant support for sheltered housing and supported accommodation for the elderly and those needing social support.

What?

¹Number of paid members in September 2004 was 43

²The Trust wishes to acknowledge the support of the New Opportunities Fund and Forward Scotland as well as donations from members for Phase 1 funding.

From peoples choices they want an eco village that demonstrates, in order of importance, waste minimisation, ecological housing, autonomous sewage, shared transport, autonomous water supplies and renewable energy. Those with a strong link to the arts want the opportunity to have workshops, performances, and exhibitions.

Concerns and Needs?

People do not want the village to expand too quickly and issues of class homogeneity and exclusivity are also important concerns to people. They want spiritual tolerance, ethical practise, integration of practise with work and daily lives. Security of income, housing and viability reflect peoples' needs to help them move from current lifestyles to one in a community. Shared visions with people they can trust and form friendships with are important aspects of sustaining the vision.

1.4.2 Land and Costs

In the north east of Scotland (Aberdeenshire) 45 acres of land with a farmhouse and buildings costs £135,000. In the central belt/south west 115 acres of land, also with farmhouse and buildings, costs £325,000 (Argyll), whilst land only on Loch Lomond costs £1000/acre. In central Scotland (Perthshire) a 1708 acre plot with derelict buildings costs £375,000. All of the above examples have some level of planning permission attached to them for conventional developments.

1.4.3 Funding

Public funding is available for many aspects of a project such as the eco village. For example, the developmental phases of research, community consultation and site-specific feasibility studies. In the implementation phase community infrastructure, such as community buildings and renewable energy systems, are commonly funded by public bodies, e.g. the Scottish Community Renewables Initiatives. Funding for land purchase is not so commonly available. The Scottish Land Fund for example, only fund land purchases where communities already exist and high levels of support from the local community is demonstrated. It is possible if a project can show clear and significant benefits to the local community some funding may be available. The acquirement of land therefore proves to be the biggest financial hurdle for the realisation of the eco village.

1.4.4 Planning

Although planning permission is considered one of the main barriers to sustainable developments in rural areas the research carried out during this study has shown that it is possible to attain permission for such a development. As part of the research a preliminary meeting was organised with Perth & Kinross Local Authority where a proposal outlining a similar development to that of the eco village was presented to them for an initial planning response. The proposal was received with enthusiasm and encouragement. The requirements to progress the proposal further are considered feasible and manageable by an organisation such as the Bodhi Trust, whilst still in line with their vision.

1.4.5 The Wiston Event

A residential weekend at Wiston Lodge took place on April 23rd-25th 2004 as an integral part of the feasibility study. The aim of the weekend was for members and supporters of the Trust to meet and discuss the development of the eco village and the findings of the research carried out to date.

The topics covered during the course of the weekend included:

- Integration with another project
- Funding
- Vision
- Geographical Location
- Legal Structures
- Management Structures
- Architects Brief

1.4.6 Where We Are Now

A wealth of information was uncovered through the research in the feasibility study, and to a lesser extent, at the Wiston Event. In both avenues of exploration it is clear that there are many questions

still to answer but yes, a clearer and more tangible vision is forming, albeit slowly. For a project of this scale nothing more than slow organic growth would be feasible.

At the time of completion of the feasibility study, defined as Phase 1 of the project, the following information can be considered as "concrete"; as a foundation to base the next phase of the project on:

1. There is enough potential interest within the ecological/ethical movement to continue with the idea of developing an ethical arts eco village;
2. The number of members willing to commit to the village within the next 2 years is 6, and within the next 2-5 years is 8;
3. A small start for the village is best with structures and strategies put in place by the initial core group of residents and members for phased and controlled expansion;
4. The resource of potential village residents needs to be expanded in an effective capacity building programme embracing a wider age range and those interested in eco-living and broadly defined spiritual practises;
5. The village will be located in Scotland, the top 3 locations being Perthshire, the Borders and Ayrshire, the number of houses will be 13-50;
6. The site will be 10- 40 acres in size and within approximately 3 miles of public transport, preferably encompassing woodland and water;
7. Other options to land purchase, such as Housing Association and Local Authority partnerships, and land donor/sponsorship should be investigated;
8. Some funding exists for this type of project and should be explored further;
9. Planning permission is feasible for this type of project but an appropriate strategy needs to be developed;
10. Legal structures are available to suit the projects needs and should be explored further;

Phase 2 of the project clearly needs to be developed from the known factors in Section 1.4.6 above. From that basis Section 1.4.7 outlines objectives recommended for Phase 2.

1.4.7 Phase 2

Phase 2 is a phase of further investigation into many of the issues first looked at in Phase 1. It can also be defined as a capacity building phase where the Trust's resources are increased to expand the current skill base, provide a larger potential membership to populate the eco village, and secure funds to enable the development work to continue.

The following objectives are recommended for Phase 2:

1. Continue marketing the project to increase membership;
2. Market the project to a wider audience, both in spiritual beliefs and age to increase membership;
3. Investigate potential collaboration with an existing eco project;
4. Investigate Local Authority / Housing Association partnerships to reduce land purchase costs and make affordable housing more widely available;
5. Investigate land donors/sponsorships/Forestry Commission land to reduce land purchase costs;
6. Present 3 planning authorities in the top 3 locations (Perthshire, the Borders and Ayrshire) with a project proposal to determine planning permission feasibility;
7. Investigate funding for remaining phases of project;
8. Investigate legal structures to determine most appropriate one/s for project;
9. Carry out a site-specific feasibility study looking at 3 appropriate sites based on a 10-40 acre site in the top 3 locations (Perthshire, the Borders and Ayrshire);
10. Present the findings of the site specific feasibility study in a cost scenario report to firm up costs to members - the scenarios will look at the 3 locations/sites with a maximum of 50 houses and will be presented as models for people with varying levels of money, time & commitment;

11. Create a 5 year business plan for the project on the chosen site confirming project objectives, milestones, income and expenditure with projections of anticipated businesses and potential income streams;

Please note that the lack of clarity over the projects location and founding residents at the start of Phase 2 means it is not possible to create a business plan until Objectives 9 and 10 above have been carried out. It is recommended that these objectives be completed in Phase 2 to enable the Trust to identify the best location and cost model for the project. It is hoped by doing so enough information will then be obtainable from potential residents on intended businesses and potential income streams in the location for the village and a business plan can then be developed for use in funding applications to be submitted in Phase 3.

1.4.8 Phase 2 Project Plan

Table 1: Overview of Phase 2 Project Plan

	Objective	Overall Timeline	Objective 1	Objective 2	Resources Required
1	Develop Bodhi Building – a capacity building programme including fund-raising events	3 years; August 2004 – July 2007	Increase Trust's membership by 30 members by end of July each year; Organise 4 Bodhi Building events per year;	Hold 1 major fund-raising event by end of July each year;	Volunteers for publicity, Bodhi Building event co-ordination & fund-raising events - volunteer expenses & materials £1000/year; (any trainers fees not included in costs)
2	Investigate potential collaboration with existing eco project	3 years; August 2004 – July 2007	Determine whether the project would benefit from collaboration	Investigate more thoroughly the definition of the village.	Management Committee to develop relationships with and research existing projects and determine whether collaboration is appropriate
3	Investigate LA / HA partnerships	October 2004 – March 2005	Expand potential for affordable housing	Reduce land costs	6 days work for paid co-ordinator OR volunteers Funding £750 plus expenses
4	Investigate land donor potential and FC land	October 2004 – March 2005	Reduce land costs		6 days work for paid co-ordinator OR volunteers Funding £750 plus expenses

5	Present 3 planning authorities with a project proposal	October 2004 – March 2005	To determine planning permission feasibility	To determine type of partnership with LA / HA	9 days work for paid co-ordinator to develop proposal, research LA plans, conduct meetings/ presentations Funding £1125 plus expenses
6	Investigate funding for remaining phases of project	October 2004 – March 2005	To reduce project costs for members	To determine options of public funded aspects of village	12 days work for paid co-ordinator OR volunteers Funding £1500 plus expenses
7	Investigate legal structures further	October 2004 – March 2005	Confirm legal structure/s for project		6 days work for paid co-ordinator OR volunteers Funding £750 plus expenses
8	Carry out a site-specific feasibility study & write a cost scenario report	April - September 2005	Confirm land and infrastructure cost scenarios	Investigate loan potential	25 days work for paid co-ordinator to research sites, carry out study, develop cost models and write report Funding £3125 plus expenses
9	Write a 5 year business plan based on the chosen site for the project	September - November 2005	Confirm project objectives, milestones, income and expenditure	Produce document for use in Phase 3 funding applications	25 days work for paid co-ordinator to collate objectives, timelines, present income & expenditure budgets, write report Funding £3125 plus expenses
	Totals	October 2004 – November 2005			£12,125 plus expenses

1.4.9 Funding for Phase 2

For the purposes of funding applications project tasks that require funding can be summed up as followed:

1. Project co-ordination
2. Research & development work
3. Site specific feasibility study
4. Compilation of a business plan

The total estimated budget for Phase 2 is £12,125³. Potential funders to investigate for Phase 2 are seen below:

- Scottish Community Foundation (staff and running costs)
- Awards for All (second phase funding)
- Lloyds TSB (business plan funding)
- Direct Grants (staff and running costs)
- Energy Saving Trust (feasibility work)
- SCARF (community research work)
- UVAF - Unemployed Voluntary Action Fund (volunteer activities)
- RIAS Millenium Awards (feasibility studies)

1.4.10 Beyond Phase 2

Following the timeline presented in Section 1.4.8 above will result in the completion of Phase 2 by November 2005. With a comprehensive and thoroughly researched business plan in place the project will be well prepared to continue into Phase 3 which could be defined as the implementation phase comprising the following objectives:

- 1.Fund-raising through avenues identified in Phase 2
- 2.Formation of any feasible partnerships identified in Phase 2
- 3.Formation of legal structures
- 4.Land acquisition/purchase
- 5.Develop architectural brief & acquire planning permissions
- 6.Installation of infrastructure
- 7.Construction of dwellings and buildings – phased over 4 years
- 8.Develop a 5 year management plan⁴ for the model arts eco village;

If the resources are available the implementation phase could begin in early 2006. The timeline for Phase 3 will primarily be determined by funding to carry out the objectives, and the progression of any partnerships that may assist in land acquisition and housing developments. Whether or not the project is developed into Phase 3 through the work of a paid consultant or development officer, or by volunteers and the Management Committee also impacts on its timeline.

³This is based on £125/day for a project co-ordinator including administrative expenses but not travel.

⁴A management plan describes how the residents will manage the land and village infrastructure.