



The Peatlands Partnership

Caroline Eccles of the Peatlands Partnership explains the Partnership's rationale for a peatlands field centre at Forsinard in the Flow Country.

The Peatlands Partnership is currently seeking expressions of interest from contractors with an interest in tendering for the building of a field centre at Forsinard in Sutherland. The field centre will be constructed on a brownfield site on the site of an existing building. It is located between the existing railway line and the A897 public highway within the small settlement of Forsinard and is some distance away from the peatlands that the Flow Country is famous for.

The field centre is within walking distance of the Forsinard train station and is ideally placed for the many volunteers and school groups who arrive by train and are likely to wish to visit the field centre on foot.

Over recent years, Forsinard has become a key centre for studying how peatlands help us tackle climate change, given their significant role as a carbon store. At present, for example, there are four PhD students and a number of other researchers from a range of universities and institutions who are undertaking monitoring and research based at Forsinard. Although the universities all have state of the art laboratories (including in Thurso at the Environmental Research Institute), there is no field station facility, where equipment can be stored and basic scientific work undertaken. A number of universities have also expressed a strong interest in using any facilities for undergraduate field studies.

In addition the field centre will provide accommodation for volunteers and provide office accommodation for staff working on the Flows to the Future Project and nature reserve. There will be an education room and facilities which will provide dedicated provision for the indoor element of teaching with visiting school children. From there they will get out to experience the bogs for themselves on the nearby Dubh Lochan outdoor classroom.

We appreciate that there have been suggestions that the Forsinard Hotel could have been converted into a field centre. The hotel has been on the market for two years and closed for over a year but two studies to look at all options, commissioned by the Project, both found that it was not a viable option to convert for the uses required, with higher building costs and long term energy and running costs. Many people can see the potential benefits the field centre and visitor developments at Forsinard could have for a hotel and we very much hope that someone is able to take on and realise that opportunity.

More information on the overall project is available at: www.flowstothefuture.co.uk

Notes

The Flows to the Future project is a Peatlands Partnership project, with RSPB Scotland acting as lead partner. The Partnership gratefully acknowledges funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and from the following funders and supporters; Environmental Research Institute, Forestry Commission (Scotland), Peatland Action fund, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Highland Council, RSPB, Scottish Rural Development Programme, Scottish Government, Scottish Natural Heritage and The Tubney Trust.

The Peatlands Partnership includes Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission (Scotland), Highland Council, RSPB Scotland, Plantlife International, The Environmental Research Institute and representatives from community and landowning interests. It is independently chaired by John Henderson of Scrabster Farm, Caithness.

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