

17 May 2011

ALLOCATIONS POLICY FOR SUBSIDISED HOUSE SITES – MAY 2011

Introduction

1. The West Harris Trust was formed in 2008 to take ownership of the West Harris Estates from the Scottish Government. The Trust is governed by social and community benefit considerations and as such all income generated is used for the benefit of West Harris.
2. West Harris has experienced significant population decline over the past several decades, with a 50% population loss since 1951. This decline has been especially marked in the number of young families, with no children of pre-school age in the area.
3. One of the primary aims of the Trust is to strengthen the community by attracting new families into the area. The Trust, in partnership with local grazings committees, will offer house sites for sale at a significant discount to the current market value.
4. The sale price of these house sites will include the costs incurred by the Trust in any surveys, legal costs, and other fees incurred in the process of obtaining outline planning consent.
5. The Trust will encourage the building of homes which are compliant with the local authority's Design Guide and in keeping with the local environment, and will promote the use of renewable energy applications.
6. All sites offered for sale will be openly advertised within Harris and on the Trust's website.
7. The West Harris Trust aims to offer an open and transparent system of allocating house sites. The Trust will treat all applications in the strictest confidence. All applications will be considered by the Housing Panel sub-group of the Board of Directors. This Panel will be comprised of four Directors and independent Member from a local community body.

Allocations Process

8. The Trust will name a closing date for applications, after which the Housing Panel will meet and consider the case of each applicant. Provisional site awards will be made based on a points system, the details of which are outlined in this document.

9. The initial award will not become a formal allocation until payment of a reservation fee of £1500 has been made. The reservation fee is to be paid within 30 days of the Trust giving notice of the provisional award; if the fee is not paid by this time the award will expire and the site will be re-allocated. In exceptional circumstances this deadline may be extended at the discretion of the Housing Panel. Following receipt of the deposit prospective purchasers have a 30 day period during which they are entitled to a full refund should they change their mind, thereafter no refund will be made.

10. The reservation fee will be non-refundable, but will be accepted as part payment against the price of the house site.

11. Upon receiving the reservation fee the Trust will issue a receipt and will confirm in writing that the Trust has made formal allocation for a specific, identified site.

12. The Trust's offer of a house site will remain open for a period of two years from the date of formal allocation, during which time applicants will be expected to proceed with their planning and funding applications.

13. All offers and awards made by the Trust will be made on an individual basis to a named applicant and will not be transferable without the Trust's prior consent.

14. Final sale of the site will be dependent on the applicant being able to provide evidence to the Housing Panel that:

- a) That full planning consents have been obtained, and
- b) That funding is in place and/or a demonstrable financial commitment has been made towards construction.

If this evidence is not provided within the two year offer period then the offer will lapse and the site will be available to the Trust for re-allocation. In exceptional circumstances this deadline may be extended at the discretion of the Housing Panel.

15. The final timetable for payment, less the £1500 reservation fee, will be agreed with the Trust as and when the evidence is provided.

Allocation Criteria

16. The Trust believes Seilebost School is central to our plans of re-generating the area; to this end priority will be given to families with young children committed to placing their children in this school. For the purposes of this policy, a 'family' will be held to be a group of at least one adult and at least one child under 18, ordinarily resident together.

17. West Harris is a remote rural area. It is important that applicants interested in moving to the area fully appreciate this. Due to the importance of long term commitment we are allocating additional points to applicants who have prior experience of living in Harris or another island community.

18. Economic regeneration of West Harris is also important, additional points will be allocated to those with presenting a viable business plan which will help the community to broaden and expand economic activity.

19. Should incorrect and/or false information be given, the Trust reserves the right to withdraw any site allocation or offer of sale.

Conditions

20. The Trust is a community body and as such will aim to preserve the Community interest in land sold for housing, to ensure that houses are actually built and that speculation does not occur. To that end, the Trust will impose a number of conditions to ensure these objectives are met.

21. That in the event of a sale of the site or of any house built upon it within ten years of the Trust's sale to the applicant, the Trust will be entitled to recover the difference between the discounted price and the market value prevailing at the time of the initial sale. This difference in price will be fixed by the Trust at the time the site is sold and will be index-linked to the RPI measure of inflation.

22. That any house built on the site will be occupied as a permanent residence and not let as rental accommodation.

23. The Trust, in order to preserve the Community interest in the land, may insert a clause giving it a right of pre-emption in the event of any future sale of a house built on the site.

Grievances

24. The Trust will aim to ensure fairness and openness in all allocations. Should an applicant feel that the Housing Panel have made an incorrect or unfair assessment of their application it will be open to them to ask the Trust's Appeals Body to reconsider the decision of the Housing Panel within fourteen days of the assessment.

25. The Appeals Body will comprise of two Directors of the Trust, uninvolved with the Housing Panel's decision, sitting with an independent Member from a local community body. The Appeals Body will examine any decision of the Housing Panel referred to it and will consider whether the decision was, or was not, made in accordance with this policy. If any decision is found not to have been decided in accordance with this policy, the application will be referred to a full meeting of the Board of Directors for a final decision.

Assessment Criteria

1. Personal Circumstances

Status		Points
Family with children	Children of pre-school age	30 per child
	Children of primary school age enrolled, or to be enrolled, in Seilebost Primary.	25 per child
	Children of secondary school age, or of primary school age to be enrolled in another primary school in Harris.	15 per child
	Children having left school, or children of school age to be enrolled in a school outwith Harris.	5 per child
Applicant and partner (if applicable) with no children	Aged 18 to 25	15 per adult
	Aged 26 to 35	10 per adult
	Aged 36 plus	5 per adult

2. Social

One or more family members (excluding any children) born or brought up in Harris, or	30
One or more family members (excluding any children) having lived in the Western Isles for more than 12 months, or	15
One or more family members (excluding any children) having lived in a small, rural community	10

3. Economic

Applicant has a viable plan to start local business with 1 to 5 employees within 2 years	50
Applicant has a viable plan to start local business with 5 or more employees within 2 years	100