

GLENNURQUHART RURAL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

MONDAY 17th JUNE 2019

Annual General Meeting

Present: Susan Clark (SC) Chair, Carolyn Wilson (CW) Secretary, Nicola Vestey (NV) Treasurer and 25 others. Full list of attendees is attached as Appendix A

Apologies: Apologies were received from Anne Macdonald.

AGM Business

1. Previous minutes and matters arising:

The minutes of the AGM held on 18th June 2018 had been circulated in advance and had also been available on the GURCA website. Approval of the minutes was proposed by Gordon Findlay and seconded by Nicola Vestey.

There were no matters arising not covered by the agenda.

2. Chair's Report:

SC gave the following report:

“It is now 2 years since the members of GURCA voted in favour of the organisation changing its constitution to become a two tier SCIO, so I thought I'd review what has happened since then.

You'll recall that the original driver for making the changes was that we were struggling to obtain any serious funding for what we'd like to achieve for the hall here, and it was felt this was most likely due to the hall's outdated and now inappropriate constitution. The proposal was that we would take the hall under the umbrella of GURCA, and move things forward with the benefit of suitable governing documents.

About a year after GURCA's organisational change, we completed the transfer of the hall ownership and governance. I'm happy to report that – as promised – nothing about the day-to-day management of the hall has changed; the hall management committee continues to ensure the smooth running of things, and, as its Chair, Gordon Watson, reported at our last open meeting, the hall had a successful year and its day to day finances remain healthier than they have been for many years.

One of the key aims for all of us was to prioritise our efforts to update and improve this wonderful facility. To this end, we have established a new Project Group. The original Planning Consent for the hall had lapsed, so the group has reviewed those plans and after consultation with the hall committee, has agreed a few changes (including a revised heating option) and submitted a Planning Application for the renewal of the consent. Over the summer, the group will be working on obtaining tender prices, to allow us then to start exploring funding options. We still hope that it may be possible to undertake work next year, but if not, in 2021.

So, that was the thing that started all this off, and led to GURCA becoming a two tier SCIO, with the powers of a Development Trust.

You may remember that when we made this change, one of the first things we did was consult local groups and individuals about the kinds of projects and developments they felt would be good for our local way of life, quality of life and economy. Our aim was to capture all this information, and then commission a professional team to develop a Community Action Plan for Glen Urquhart, which would set out and most importantly, prioritise, all our aspirations. This would be our key document, which would allow us as a community to focus on the things we agree to be most important, and avoid situations where we compete with each other for thin on the ground funding.

Unfortunately, thin on the ground funding has delayed the production of our Plan, which is a huge frustration. However, we hope that we can commission some work on this soon, and get our key stepping stone in place.

Meanwhile, the path towards the orderly development of a local action plan was hindered – if that's the right word – by several unexpected developments.

First of all, our community was shocked and saddened by Visit Scotland's decision to pull out of the local TIC. It was felt that GURCA was the body most suited to being able to explore ways in which this building and facility might be maintained.

At the same time, the GURCA Board of Trustees was approached with a proposal that the Community Empowerment Act should be utilised to allow an Asset Transfer Request to HES for the visitor centre and car park at Urquhart Castle. Again, GURCA was the only local body with the requisite powers to take on such a facility.

Meanwhile, the housing development opposite the health centre had led to the community having the option to take over some of the associated land for community ownership and use.

All of these things emerged by pure coincidence, at a time when the new GURCA organisation was finding its feet. You all know that we then went through a process of public consultation and we have tried throughout all this to be as open and transparent as possible. The GURCA trustees do NOT make decisions that will impact on our community – rather, they act as the conduit to allow options to be considered and the majority view to be upheld.

We agreed, through consultation, that whilst all the above were projects the community would like us to look into, the real priority, due to time constraints, was the TIC.

I can tell you that a huge amount of work has been done, on behalf of our community, into looking into options for the TIC. Whilst it may be frustrating for some, we had to keep in mind that if GURCA is going to be committed to any form of business arrangement, it must be something that has a business case. We cannot recklessly commit community assets or funds.

We believed that, with George's baggage business, we had found a great opportunity to allow us to take over the TIC and provide quality tourist information, whilst having a business that would provide local benefits and an income stream to allow us to maintain the building going forward. The proposal also met the demanding criteria that would allow us to obtain land fund funding to purchase the building.

Unfortunately, we have so far been unable to convince business funders to lend us the money required to set up this venture. This has been very frustrating, because – as I have already said – a huge effort has been put into producing a business plan (thanks particularly here to Nicola and Gordon) and – really encouragingly - we have identified and put in place

a keen and very skilled team as a shadow board of directors for the venture. It's particularly encouraging that this team includes several new names!

However, all is not lost – we have obtained agreement for the community to have use of the building this summer, and the shadow board has come up with plans that will allow this to generate some revenue for GURCA, and provide some much needed tourist information during the peak visitor season. The TIC looks a lot cleaner and tidier than it did, and last week it was occupied by local traders for 4 days. The Heritage Group has become involved, and put a display in place about John Cobb, and Grow Urquhart have put eco planters outside the TIC. This is such a great example of the collaboration our community has the potential to achieve! We've already had feedback from the traders that large numbers of tourists came in, looking for information. This has strengthened our resolve to continue to work to try and secure a longer term future for the TIC under community management.

While all this has been going on, Gordon Watson has been doing a great job of tying down a suitable long term arrangement for the housing development land, to ensure this is in community ownership and maintains a green space amongst the new build.

Meanwhile, we have set up a Liaison Group which has been keeping contact with HES, meeting several times, and maintaining pressure on them to engage with our community and consider how it might work better with us. We have seen some small advances: HES have committed £2.5k to the CAP and £5k, and staff time to the Cnocan Burraidh project, and they have agreed to hold a meet the retailer event for local traders who would like to be able to get their products on the shelves in the visitor centre.

However, I think it would be fair to say that progress in other areas has been slow. We have asked HES to consider free entrance for local people but they have to consult internally on this as it has implications nationally. HES have carried out an economic impact assessment on the Castle and what it contributes to the area. We have commented that we do not feel it addresses community benefit adequately. Requests to potentially fund a portion of the hall project have not been responded to. And we still await the results of a transport study being done to look at options for the parking problem at the Castle and impact on the village.

So, the Asset Transfer Request definitely still remains an option, and HES are aware that this is not going away!

And of course, as well as these relatively new developments, we have continued to organise and run the bonfire and fireworks, and the children's parties at Christmas and Halloween. Last year, management of the kids parties was taken over by 2 new volunteers – Keri Postma and Louise Power – and I'd like to thank them for taking this on with such enthusiasm. I'd also like to thank Ron Fraser, who has looked after the bonfire for many years, but who decided to step down after last year's event. So far, despite requests, nobody has volunteered to take over Ron's role, and sadly, if we can't find a volunteer, the bonfire won't happen this year, which would be very disappointing.

This actually leads me on to the key point I now have to make – all of this stuff that has been going on does not just happen by magic! I am aware that some people have a lot of ideas – genuinely good ideas – about what might be done to make things better for our community. Unfortunately, there is only so much that a handful of people (who, let's not forget, are ALL unpaid volunteers, with lives to lead) can do at any one time.

I know that some people may be frustrated by what they perceive to be a slow pace of change. Some people have priorities – for whatever reasons – that are different to others. All I can do is reiterate what we have said all along for the last 2 years – we will always try to

understand what the community considers to be the priorities, and we will focus on those, to the best of our ability.

That's why a proper Community Action Plan (which will always have the scope to be amended and added to as circumstances demand) with agreed priorities and outcomes, is such a useful and important document. It's great that there are so many ideas coming forward, and such interest in what might be done, but at the end of the day, we are driven by the resources we have. And loads of ideas, but nobody to implement them, means that we absolutely MUST focus on priorities.

So, let me summarise the good stuff:

- We have transferred the hall to GURCA ownership and are working now to try and achieve its modernisation.
- We have secured use of the TIC for the community this summer, at no cost to us. We still have the opportunity to identify a longer term business use for the building.
- Through the excellent markets on the Green (and huge thanks to Marj and Karen for driving these events forward) we have generated much needed income for GURCA, and provided a great visitor attraction once a month through the season.
- We have just about finalised transfer of land to the community to protect green space in the new housing development.
- We have opened and maintained dialogue with Historic Environment Scotland
- We have continued to fund and run children's parties and the bonfire and fireworks (although once again, I have to mention the need for volunteers)
- We have established a GURCA website, with a community events calendar. This has the potential to be better utilised, once we can find a bit more volunteer time to maintain and develop and publicise it.
- We have increased GURCA membership, from a standing start 2 years ago, to over 270.
- We have made GURCA more recognised, relevant and purposeful

I'm sorry if this has been a slightly longer Chair's commentary than usual, but I think it's important to emphasise all the things that have been going on behind the scenes, and not forget the real achievements of our organisation. I would like to reiterate and formally record my thanks to all our volunteers, but particularly:

Keri and Louise who run the kids parties, and Ron for his years of work for the bonfire.

Marj and Karen for the fabulous work they have done to establish the Markets on the Green

Gordon Watson for his determined efforts to sort out the parkland lease.

Gordon Findlay for the huge amount of work he has put into the TIC and Castle Groups.

Finally, Nicola Vestey. Nicola has served as the Treasurer for GURCA for many years and has quietly and effectively fulfilled the essential task of keeping the GURCA books in order. In addition to this, over the past year she has put in a huge amount of work on the business plan for the TIC and been involved in many of the funding applications and discussions associated with that.

As you may know, Nicola will be stepping down from her role with GURCA, due to relocation. I'd like to extend thanks from all of us for all she has done. She will be a hard act to follow but a successor we must find!

Finally, I can't finish without reiterating that without willing volunteers, it doesn't matter how many good ideas we have, we will only be able to focus on priorities. So I ask all GURCA members to get behind the Community Action Plan, make sure we understand what your priorities are, and either become involved yourself in helping us to achieve them or, if you can't do that (and I fully understand that for many people, it's not possible) please bear with those of us who are trying to do it for you. We only have so much capacity and time!"

3. Financial report:

NV advised the meeting that the accounts had been independently audited and no issues had arisen from this. The accounts would now be submitted to OSCR.

A copy of the financial summary is attached as Appendix B

This year the accounts include the results for the Hall from the date GURCA acquired it, 1st August 2018

Overall GURCA incurred a small deficit of £11 but the hall surplus of £194 meant overall we had a small surplus.

Turning to income, we received a generous donation from the Etape last year, for volunteer work. The Bulletin provided a surplus of £295. The outstanding fundraiser was the Market on the Green and NV reiterated thanks to Marj and Karen. The fireworks cost £96 more than we recouped this year, but our costs included the one-off purchase of a large magnet for clearing the site after the bonfire. Likewise, the children's parties did not cover costs this year, but a lot of new equipment was purchased and this will all be useable in the future – net cost £361.

The grant of £500 was from Soirbheas for the website.

Grass cutting is our major expense. This was over £200 more expensive last year because pruning of the shrubs along the A82, and some weedkilling, was required.

We made donations of £500 to the Care Centre Housing, £200 to Cnoc an Burraidh and £50 to the Care Centre for the Christmas parties.

The professional fees were valuation costs for the hall and we have subsequently received £928 from HIE for this. The valuation of all our assets is now shown on OSCR accounts. The insurance covers all GURCA activities, including the hall.

Restricted funds. The Cobb Memorial funds continue to raise less than the costs, but there seems nothing we can do to address this. The Hall Development Fund is the major restricted fund.

Fraser Mackenzie asked whether our insurance also covered the Cobb Memorial?

NV suggested we would possibly need a valuation of the memorial. This led to a debate about the ownership of the memorial. The view was that as it was built by the Community Association, it might be assumed the association owned it.

ACTION: NV / CW to look into the ownership and insurance issues, and report back to members.

4. Constitution changes:

SC advised the meeting of two proposed amendments to GURCA's constitution;

(i) Following representation from David Fraser, the Board supported a proposal to raise the maximum permitted number of Trustees from 8 (plus 2 co-opted Trustees) to 10 (plus 2 co-opted Trustees)

(ii) After feedback from DTAS (Development Trusts Association Scotland) the Board supported a proposal to delete clauses 28 and 29 of the current constitution. SC explained that DTAS believed the clauses would preclude GURCA from accessing significant funding, due to their restrictive nature. The clauses are set out below.

28 The board may, at its discretion, refuse to admit any individual or organisation to membership where they have reasonable grounds to believe that he/she/it might, if admitted to membership, act in a manner which would damage the reputation of the SCIO, undermine the efficiency of its operations and/or disrupt the proper conduct of its meetings.

29 For the avoidance of doubt, when deciding whether to admit any individual or organisation to membership, the board shall adhere to a transparent process which enshrines the principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination.

SC asked the members present to indicate support or otherwise for the Board's recommendation that the amendments be approved. After a show of hands, both amendments were approved. The constitution will be amended accordingly.

5. Election of Trustees:

In accordance with the Association's constitution, three of the current Trustees were required to stand down, although they were eligible to be re-elected. The three standing down were Susan Clark, Nicola Vestey and Gordon Watson.

The full list of Trustees, along with the other bodies they represent, for the coming year is:

Susan Clark (Games Committee)

Carolyn Wilson (Hall)

Nicola Vestey

Fraser Mackenzie (Shinty Club)

Anne Macdonald

Gordon Watson (Hall)

Pam Lucas (Community Council)

Gordon Findlay (Chamber of Commerce)

Co-opted Trustees are Councillors Margaret Davidson and George Cruikshank

General Business

6. Hall:

Gordon Watson, Chair of the Hall Management sub-committee, had given a full report on the hall's 2018/19 performance to the open meeting on 8th April, which is reproduced below:

“GURCA – Hall Committee annual report

The hall continues to enjoy a high level of regular usage as well as one off bookings. We are grateful to Miranda who works very hard at keeping bookings running smoothly.

Financially, the hall has had a solid 8 months since GURCA took ownership, recording a small surplus of a couple of hundred pounds. We supplemented rental income by running fundraising stalls at the games day and markets on the green, the latter being particularly successful. We are very pleased with this financial position, as heat, light and insurance alone for the period amount to over £3,500, so to continue to cover costs is an achievement and means we have been able to hold on to a healthy balance of general funds in the bank of £10,000.

On the management side, we are holding regular health and safety walk-rounds: recording and following up actions. In the course of the year we have repaired roof leaks and re-plastered damaged areas, and improved the lighting in the small hall, as well as regular maintenance tasks. For part of the summer we had to get by dealing with cleaning ourselves, but we are delighted now to have the services of a very effective cleaner.

As a subcommittee we have no constitutional obligation in respect of election of office bearers, but as a matter of good governance we will hold annual general meetings. This year's took place on 1st April, and the office bearers and committee were all re-elected to serve for a further year.

The hall redevelopment plan is progressing, under the auspices of a separate GURCA development committee. We have explored alternative energy solutions, and are now completing the technical design ready to submit building warrants. We have funds in the order of £17,000 to cover the current design stage. In tandem with these activities we will be seeking funding to enable us to proceed to the tender stage.”

Gordon told the meeting of the sponsored walk he was intending to undertake in August, in aid of hall funds – ‘Crawl for the Hall’. This would be the completion of the Loch ness 360 circuit, in 2 days, finishing on Games Day. The Games Committee would help publicise this event, and all support and sponsorship would be gratefully received.

7. TIC:

In addition to references to this in the Chair's report, Gordon Findlay gave a brief update. He thanked all those who were involved in the community occupancy of the TIC over the summer, in particular the heritage group and local traders. While this is happening during the summer, the TIC working Group is concentrating on understanding our options for the TIC going forward.

It has been disappointing not to have yet secured the TIC on a permanent basis, but we will continue to explore ways of financing a viable business. One option may be a Community Share Offer, which would also be valuable experience for us as a community given some of the bigger projects that may be on the horizon.

Meanwhile, if anyone would like to get involved on a voluntary basis, helping provide tourist advice when the TIC is open, please contact Gordon direct via visitdrumnadrochit@gmail.com

8. Urquhart Castle:

The Working group would be meeting on 19th June, before the next liaison meeting with Historic Environment Scotland on 24th June.

It was agreed that it may be sensible to hold an open drop in / consultation event to fully update the community on progress regarding both the Castle and the TIC. This would probably be scheduled for late summer / early autumn, when we would have a better idea of options for the TIC, and progress with the Asset Transfer Request lodged with Highland Council.

9. Loch Ness Homes Parkland transfer:

Gordon Watson confirmed that it was expected the paths through the parkland area on this site would be opened to the public within the next few weeks.

Skye Builders have confirmed that they will provide an interim path to link the Glenurquhart Care Centre to Scotmid and the surgery, until the permanent path can be constructed once the housing developments are complete.

Work to finalise the lease, to transfer the parkland to the community, is progressing and it is hoped this will be concluded over the summer.

10. Inner Moray Firth Local Plan:

There has been a 'call for sites' as part of the consultation process for the latest 10 year plan for our area. This plan will inform developments in the area for the next 10 years, so it is important that any aspirations and needs are fed into it, no matter how small. The plan can be accessed via the Highland Council website, where input can also be made.

Margaret Davidson pointed out that we can also make representations to make it known where we do NOT want development to take place.

It has been agreed that GURCA will make representation about the potential extension of the shinty field, and seek to protect the land adjacent to the shinty field

at the old Scotmid end, and at Pitkerrald, to prevent any development which would compromise the ability to play shinty (development too close to the fields would probably lead to friction, as stray shinty balls might be expected, inevitably, to cause some damage to housing). GURCA will also refer to additional car parking in the TIC vicinity and the potential local heritage trail, to protect a route taking in local sites of interest.

The Community Council will be submitting details regarding the aspirations for a new childcare centre.

Margaret Davidson urged members to consider this matter and ensure any aspirations were captured by the consultation process before the Plan was finalised.

11. Childcare centre;

Michael Thorp advised the meeting that the working group had looked at several potential sites, and were now speaking with Soirbheas about part funding of a Project Manager to help take this forward. Still very early stages, and the whole issue of funding would need to be addressed, should a suitable site be identified.

There was reference to the inclusion of a childcare centre on the plans presented at the recent Springfield Homes drop in session. However, the consensus was that this was not an indication that Springfield would be willing to provide any land or buildings at no cost!

12. Grow Urquhart:

Gordon Watson explained that this newly formed local group was set up with the intention of trying to encourage community growing, and to reduce food waste and single use plastic.

GURCA has given support in principle to the group, and agreed it might operate as a sub group of GURCA.

The group has applied for funding to help establish its operations, and is investigating several options for sites to become community growing locations. A site at East Lewiston / Kilmore is being looked at, and the plan will be to arrange a drop in session to consult local people about the proposals.

The group has provided a planter at the TIC, made of 'eco bricks'.

SC said it was important that Grow Urquhart did engage and collaborate with established groups, to make the most of established knowledge and skills.

13. Shinty Club report:

The Shinty Club had submitted the following report to the AGM, which was presented by Fraser Mackenzie

“Glen Urquhart Shinty Club – GURCA AGM Report 2019

This year the senior squad has adjusted to life in the National Division following relegation last year. However, new management has occasioned a series of improved performances

which sees us at the moment second in that league and hoping for promotion. We have also managed against expectations to make it through to the televised final of the MacTavish Cup which is a good advert for this community.

The junior team continues to play in North Division 1 and is performing well while our Women's team has moved up to the top Division in North Women's Shinty – again a positive image for the Club.

GUSC continue to maintain and improve where possible the playing area and pavilion within Blairbeg Park, ensuring continued accessibility for shinty for all ages and by the wider community. This season we have realigned and resurfaced the access road to the pavilion. The goal areas were reseeded over the winter period and regular cutting maintains the look of the pitch.

The Polaris Utility vehicle has been serviced as have the gang mowers. The club is pleased to note that the Utility Vehicle has in fact been useful for the Highland games in their setting up and packing down period.

The old Skate park continues to be an excellent addition to GUSC to facilitate our growing numbers of primary school children, and some work has been undertaken to maintain the perimeter fence.

a) The Club continues to progress with GURCA the process of purchasing the solum on which the pavilion stands. GUSC received a favourable quotation from a local firm of solicitors and have equally secured funding to progress this.

b) Contact has been made with Mr John Cameron about the purchase of the adjoining field at the school road end of Blairbeg Park the negotiation of an acceptable sum and the funding have been looked at by GUSC and we are currently seeking to raise extra funds towards this ongoing project.

c) GUSC have identified the need for a new minibus and are currently actively raising funds for this project with various fundraising events throughout the year as well as applying for the appropriate grants. We feel that the money we are on an annual basis spending on our old minibus is unsustainable but this is a vital piece of equipment for GUSC so every effort is being made to achieve our target.

GUSC would like to draw the attention of GURCA to the imminence of a new local plan and would like them to be aware of the possible impact on Blairbeg of potential developments at either end of the field and its effect on the playing of, specifically, the game of shinty.

Blairbeg Park has existed as a sports field since 1906 providing the space for the sport of shinty to be played without the negative effect of residential properties encroaching upon it.

- 1) Development on the Foodmarket site: Housing development on this site would be deleterious to the game of shinty because of the risk of balls going into the grounds, damaging windows etc. We could live with a residential development further up towards the existing houses at

the end of Balmacaan Road. An industrial site/workshop/or another retail outlet we could live with.

- 2) Residential Development on the field on the Pitkerrald Road side (referred to above as field at the school road end of Blairbeg Park) is also highly undesirable for the same reason as at the other end.

We would submit that with a rising population it is of the utmost importance that the recreational facilities we enjoy in Drumnadrochit are in no way compromised and we would request the support of GURCA in this endeavour.”

This led to discussion about the Shinty Club’s wish to protect the sports field from intrusive development.at the Pitkerrald Road end and the old Scotmid site. Margaret Davidson confirmed that if Highland Council does buy the old Scotmid site, the cost involved means that it is inevitable the site WILL be developed for housing.

At the end of the discussion, SC confirmed that GURCA will support the Shinty Club in its aim to retain sufficient space for sport – and particularly shinty – to take place, uncompromised by any development. This issue will be included in GURCA’s submission to the Local Plan process.

In response to a question from Gordon Findlay, Fraser has confirmed that the Shinty Club has 140 members registered with the Camanachd Association. There are other volunteers who also help out from time to time but are not formally registered.

14. AOB:

- Alan Bell confirmed there would be a whisky / wine stall again at the Games this Volunteers to help man the stall and / or sell the raffle ‘boxes’ would be welcomed. Please contact Alan if you are interested.
- **Beechwood / Cemetery path** – David Fraser has advised of a proposal to link the new Care Centre housing to the church via an upgraded path, which he feels should be a GURCA project. There was no objection in principle to the upgrading of the path, but there was concern about potential liability issues if this was taken over by GURCA. A meeting is to be held on 18th June with John Fraser who is offering the land. SC and Margaret Davidson will attend.
- West Lewiston phone box – There is concern that BT will decommission the phone box in west Lewiston, and GURCA has been asked to take this over. SC has asked the group involved to come back to GURCA with proposals for the box.
- Men’s Shed – SC advised the meeting that a new ‘Men’s Shed’ group is being formed, which would welcome anyone interested in becoming involved. Bruce Nelson is the contact for this venture: bruce.nelson0@icloud.com

15. Next meeting:

The next open meeting will be on Monday 2nd September at 8pm.

SC thanked everyone for attending the AGM and meeting. The meeting closed at 21.30

Appendix A

GURCA meeting 17th June 2019: List of attendees

Susan Clark

Carolyn Wilson

Nicola Vestey

Gill Austen

Neil Barron

Dick Beach

Jan Bell

Alan Bell

Pam Bellew

Peter Bellew

George Cruikshank

Margaret Davidson

Tish Fearn

Gordon Findlay

Ron Fraser

Elizabeth Griffin

Christine Hart

Pam Lucas

Miranda Service

Erik Trelfer

Gordon Watson

Roy MacGregor

Helen MacLennan

Fraser Mackenzie

Christine McKay

Adrian Varwell

Michael Thorp

Plus one - unidentified