

GLENURQUHART RURAL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

MONDAY 13th JANUARY 2020

OPEN MEETING

Present: Susan Clark (Chair), Carolyn Wilson (Secretary) and 18 others

A full list of attendees is attached as Appendix A

Apologies: Pam Lucas, Nicola Vestey and Fraser Mackenzie

Susan Clark (SC) welcomed everyone. She explained that this meeting had been called specifically to provide an update on progress with the acquisition of the Tourist information centre in Drumnadrochit, and the associated proposed Transport Hub and Social Enterprise business. It was not the intention to discuss other, unrelated issues at this meeting.

1. Transport Hub:

Carol Masheter explained that Soirbheas had commissioned a Transport Feasibility Study for our area, in 2019, and the recommendations for a Transport Hub had come out of this study.

Carol distributed a leaflet, describing the range of transport issues identified by the study, along with proposals to address them. The TIC was considered to be an ideal location for a physical Hub, to act as a centre for the coordination of the various strands of the strategy,

This is a big, ambitious project (c.£1m) and it will not happen quickly! The first phase of the proposals would include expansion of the number and locations of electric charge points for vehicles, an e-bike hire facility in Cannich and establishing 'walking buses' for local schools, to reduce vehicle congestion.

Full details of the transport study can be found at

<https://www.soirbheas.org/transportandenergy/>

Soirbheas is working in partnership with GURCA to seek funding to support the development, including funding a Project Manager. Linking the Transport Hub proposals to the TIC project, in this way, is proving to be mutually beneficial, as the overall vision is far more attractive to a wider range of funders.

2. TIC / Social Enterprise:

Gordon Findlay gave an update on progress with funding.

In addition to the funding sought for the Transport Hub project (which was being separately pursued), we need to obtain funding to:

- purchase the TIC building

- purchase the baggage handling business which will form the basis of the Social Enterprise
- cover the cash flow issues associated with the running of the business and the building, in the first few years.

Building

We have every hope that the purchase costs of the building (around £85k-£90k) will be covered by grant funding. Most of this will be from the Scottish Land Fund, with a small top up amount from Soirbheas.

Our applications for this funding have been submitted and we expect to hear whether we have been successful by the end of January / early February 2020. Subject to a successful outcome, we would expect GURCA to own the building (including toilets and 4 car parking spaces, but NOT the main car park) by May 2020.

Social Enterprise

We are exploring several options to raise the necessary funding for the purchase of the baggage business and the setting up costs associated with the social enterprise, which, overall, is expected to be around £200k. This package of funding options is more balanced than our previous attempt to find funding through loan arrangements, as more options have been opened to us as a result of the Transport Hub proposal.

SSE – with SSE’s encouragement, we are submitting an application this week to the SSE Sustainable Development Fund, for £80k. The decision should be known in April.

Soirbheas – we are applying to the Tier 3 capital programme for £30k

Community Shares – we are aiming to put everything in place to be able to put out a prospectus to the community, and beyond, for a Community Share offer. It is the intention to issue the prospectus and offer in late Spring, with a closure date three or four weeks later. The target would be to raise £50k in this way. Gordon gave an overview of how such community share offers work, and provided several examples of successful community share projects in Scotland.

Borrowing – we are meeting Social Investment Scotland later this week to discuss the potential to borrow enough to cover the funding gap.

Our Business Plan has been modelled on various funding scenarios, so that we understand the implications of a shortfall in any of these funding sources.

3. Baggage business purchase:

Tish Fearn gave an update on the progress of discussions with George Simpson, owner of Loch Ness Travel.

We have now reached a point where both parties are happy in principle, and terms of a draft Purchase Agreement are in place. A purchase price, and payment schedule is agreed.

The Purchase Agreement will include one vehicle, fully MOT'd and serviced, and will also allow for George to work alongside, and advise/assist, our team, for the first year of operation, at no cost. George will also introduce our team in person to the main holiday agencies with which he does business.

4. Questions:

Mark Osborne asked whether the business required more than one vehicle to function, and if so, why were we taking only one vehicle? Tish confirmed that we would require several vehicles, and the costs of leasing additional vehicles were included in our Business Plan. We were not taking all George's vehicles as he wished to retain them for personal use and another business (NOT in competition with the baggage business in any way!)

Jan Bell asked how many employees we would require to run the business. Gordon Findlay / Susan Clark confirmed it would be 6 employees, although these would not all be full time positions.

Adrian Varwell asked how the Jacobite Planning Application for a coach park near the doctor's surgery would impact on the community's aspirations for a well thought out transport policy? This matter had been discussed at the December Open meeting, when all members present had opposed the proposal.

The application had been withdrawn, but had now been resubmitted, with a few changes (e.g 'temporary' now means only 10 years!)

SC again explained how we had been made aware of this proposal with no discussion or consultation (despite the parties being involved in regular formal debate to consider transport issues arising from traffic to the castle and parking problems).

The view of the meeting was that the secretary should again advise all GURCA members of the application, so they could comment if they wished. It was also agreed that GURCA should comment, as an organisation, with the concerns that had been raised at the December meeting. Closing date for comments on the application is 22nd January.

5. Next steps:

SC brought the meeting to a close by thanking everyone for their attendance and constructive input. A huge amount of work has been undertaken to get us to this point. However, there is a lot more work now to be done in bringing this exciting project to fruition, and the more volunteers we can get, the better.

It was agreed that the Shadow Board will put together a list of tasks that need to be completed, so that we can circulate this and encourage members to get involved, who might otherwise believe they don't have the necessary skills.

Meanwhile, if anybody believes they can help, or is willing to get involved in any way, please let Susan Clark, Gordon Findlay, Tish Fearn or Carolyn Wilson know!

Appendix A – List of attendees

Susan Clark

Carolyn Wilson

Neil Barron

Gordon Findlay

Tish Fearn

Gordon Watson

Ann Macdonald

Dick Beach

Adrian Varwell

Jan Bell

Toni (Herbrer?)

Fiona Urquhart

Dot MacKenzie

Chris Dell

Julie Dell

Erik Trelfer

Mark Osborne

Lynn Kropp

Fiona Morrison

And Carol Masheter, representing Soirbheas