

GURCA OPEN MEETING MINUTES

Glenurquhart Rural Community Association



**Monday 12th September
Meeting from 7:00pm**

Glen Urquhart Public Hall

Present: Susan Clark (SC) Chair, Carolyn Wilson (CW) Secretary, Dan Light (DL) Community Development Officer, Gordon Findlay (GF), David Fraser (DF), Dick Beach, Julie Dell, Neil McInnes, Gordon Watson, Miranda Service, Barbara Shaw, Mary Tiles, Adrian Varwell, Margaret Varwell, Alan Bell, Jan Bell, Susan Irvine, Grace Woolmer-White, Brian Balfour, Carol Balfour and Dominic Thierry.

Apologies: Monique Riddle (Treasurer), Chris Ballance, Christine Hart and Fraser Mackenzie.

1. Welcome

Susan Clark (SC) opened the meeting with a few moments of reflection to celebrate the life of HRH Elizabeth II and her passing on 8th September. Although the Queen may not have visited Glen Urquhart on any official engagements, the people here have commemorated occasions such as the Coronation with tree planting at Blairbeg Park; and with events held to mark the Silver, Golden and Diamond Jubilees. Most recently in June the Platinum Jubilee was celebrated with a Community Picnic, with GURCA working in successful partnership with Glen Urquhart Shinty Club.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising

Dan Light (DL) summarised the minutes from the AGM and Open Meeting 21st June 2022. This meeting's agenda provided the opportunity to provide an update on the majority of these points. The minutes were proposed by Gordon Findlay (GF) and seconded by Carolyn Wilson (CW) and are available on the GURCA website.

Carolyn Wilson (CW) gave a brief update on GURCA's finances in Monique Riddle's absence. This included the Hall's accounts; a number of new and repeat bookings have been taken and have had a positive impact on the Hall's income as we head into the busier Autumn period. With inflation and in particular Electricity and Oil costs rising significantly (and with uncertainty around these rises and the support available) the Hall's price scale for rental will need to be evaluated. Prices have remained the same since 2014. The Committee are due to meet later this month to finalise this. The aim remains to keep the hall affordable for all local Groups who benefit from its use. Any updates for this will be communicated with the community via Mailchimp (email newsletter), the GURCA website and Social Media.

DL thanked the committee and in particular Miranda Service for their hard work in getting bookings such as the Blas Festival back at the Hall. Unfortunately this week's Jazz had been cancelled. **CW** thanked the committee for fundraising including the tireless efforts of Alan and Jan Bell with the raffle at the Highland Games and on the evening of the Blas Concert.

3. DTAS Conference and DTAS Film – Our Story Blas

SC Explained that GURCA had featured as the Virtual Case Study at the DTAS (Development Trusts Association Scotland) 2022 Conference. A 15 minute film was produced by GURCA for the conference and the film used in a 90 minute question and answer session with development trusts from across Scotland present. **SC**, **CW** and **DL** attended the conference and the film was well received. Katie Little (DTAS/Community Shares Scotland) and Alice Duthuille (DTAS) visited the Glen for 2 days (14th & 15th June) as part of this process. **DL** worked on the content whilst Chris Dell completed the filming, sound and editing. Toby Stainton provided some Drone Footage and Fraser Mackenzie provided narration. This Community made film is available on the GURCA website and also YouTube we are grateful for all of the efforts people have put into making this film.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqMTUeYXQR8>

The film tells only part of the story and we hope there will be a lot more to tell.

Please share it with anybody who might be interested. We were thrilled to be able to meet up with Development Trusts from across Scotland and a range of organisations that support them in their endeavours. Moving forward we can all gain so much from sharing information and collaboration and the networking opportunities that have arisen through the conference.

4. Tom Arthur's MSP Visit July 21st

Tom Arthur MSP (SNP): Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth visited the Loch Ness Hub and Glen Urquhart Public Hall on Thursday 21st July, Mr Arthur and Ian Brown (Highland Council – Leader Inverness City and Area Leader) were present and met with members of the Hub Board, Team, and representatives from GURCA. **SC** described how the visit to the Hub showed what the Community '*Can Do*' and then the Hall '*what the Community would like to do*'. Mr Arthur is promoting the idea of Community Wealth Building and his visit coincided with a review of the Community Empowerment Act 2015

(<https://www.gov.scot/policies/community-empowerment/>).

Productive discussions were held about some of the first hand difficulties and blockages communities face when trying to develop projects such as the Hub and the refurbishment of the Hall.

Drew Hendry (MSP, SNP - Inverness, Nairn Badenoch and Strathspey) also visited the Loch Ness Hub at the beginning of August.

The Success of the Loch Ness Hub project continues to act as a model to inspire and help other communities and we hope these visits, our attendance at the DTAS conference and film will continue to have a positive impact on other communities.

5. Community Action Plan

DL explained that the Action Plan was almost complete and noted that so much had changed since its launch in January. For context the plan was launched at a time of uncertainty with concerns around the impact of the Omicron COVID-19 variant, and as a result we were unable to hold a launch event. When the survey closed in April issues such as energy price rises and inflation were only beginning to be reported and so much has changed again within recent weeks. This context is important as the Plan forms a 20 year vision for the Glen Urquhart Community but also illustrates that it will be vital for groups here to be able to adapt and work together to support the community. The plan requires some final work with the Graphic Design team, and the Steering Group are meeting again on the 19th September.

A launch event/series of events will be necessary to publicise the Plan and its findings along with Social Media and other channels. There will be an accessible short summary version for those who do not wish to read the more formal 100 or so page document.

It is worth reminding people within the community that this is our ‘Community’s Plan’ and not any individual’s or group’s; and that an independent consultant has produced the document in partnership with Glen Urquhart Community Council (GUCC), Soirbheas and GURCA.

6. Community Development Officer Update

DL updated on the following: Wellbeing Activities.

Bite and Blether – these weekly lunches are averaging around 10-12 attendees per week. Within the limitations of storage and kitchen facilities we have been able to produce a wide variety of meals that have been appreciated – we have always been able to cater for any dietary needs, offer choice and no one leaves hungry. There is minimal waste and the Larder has been used to redistribute food, it is helpful when ‘Laddies night’ follows on the same evening.

Laddies Night – Numbers are still lower than hoped a ‘busy’ night might be 4 or 5. We were able to make some good use of the bookings by hosting the Men’s Shed Meetings in June/July. We’ve had fun with outdoor cooking, games and Cornhole but please help us to spread the word and encourage folk to come along, the more participation the more activities we will be able to offer. **DL** mentioned the relevance of World Suicide Prevention Day (10th September) and how these groups are helping promoting better mental health and helping people to overcome loneliness. It is important that we continue to listen, talk and support each other.

Hall of Games – The term ‘Warm Bank/Warm Spaces’ is now in common use and is the concept of public/community buildings being open for those in the community to use when heating is unaffordable. We are going to run weekly sessions (most likely) on Thursday afternoons where a warm welcome in the truest sense of the word will be on offer. A variety of games will be available for some fun, along with hot drinks and snacks. Ideally ownership of this group will be passed on to the attendees e.g. each one providing a round of questions for a quiz, sharing a card game etc. Hopefully this will link in with lunches and ‘Laddies

nights' in attracting a wider audience for all these and the many other groups/activities on offer locally. The aim here is to offer a safe and welcoming warm space for our community.

SC noted how GURCA are in discussion with Soirbheas to look at how the wider concept of community Warm Banks/Spaces can be funded as we face an uncertain winter.

Art Classes - GURCA are grateful to Marj Tait and Jenny who has been volunteering for these sessions on Friday afternoons, (First Session for Children, Second for Adults). These are both oversubscribed and have proved very popular. DL has been along to both and has been able to provide refreshments for them via the Mental Health and Wellbeing fund. The Classes are funded by a Tier 1 grant from Soirbheas with any donations received going to the Hall refurbishment fund. We would like to thank Marj and Jenny for their efforts.

7. Community Land Update – Including Woodlands.

Woodlands

SC briefly recapped on the efforts last autumn in pursuing a Community Right to Buy for the Bradley Martin Garden (Plot1) and Blairbeg Woods (Plot 2) behind the Hall.

GURCA have been meeting with the landowner who acquired these two plots who is also the owner of woodland opposite (either side of the Church)

Plot 1 Bradley Martin Memorial Garden

Plot 2 Blairbeg Woods North (Large Triangle Plot Behind the Hall)

Plot 3 Blairbeg Woods East (Opposite the hall between the Care Project and Church)

Plot 4 Blairbeg Woods South East (along the A82 behind Scotmid site, the present owner would like to retain this plot)

Scottish Land Fund (SLF) Stage 1 provided funding for investigation work (Title Searches, Tree Surveys etc.) that took place as part of the fact finding process last year for Plots 1 and 2. Negotiations have taken place with the owner over the summer and a deal has been agreed to progress things further.

An application to the Scottish Land Fund (Stage 2) has been submitted in the hope the fund will be able to provide 95% of the lands value. There is potential for the remaining 5% to be gifted back to the Community by the landowner.

A comprehensive application has been submitted including a variety of projects that can take place in the woodlands. These include work to improve their biodiversity and the path network; their use for wellbeing activities for groups such as arts and bushcraft; sports like Disc Golf (there is a course at Torvean Inverness) and a partnership with the Craigmonie Woodland Association to manage the woods. We can learn from many other locally owned woodlands on projects to facilitate work experience and partnerships with groups e.g. to provide a Dementia Friendly Woodland space for the Care Project which backs onto plot 3. There is a great deal of potential and community benefit if we are successful.

The acquisition of the Bradley Martin Memorial Garden (Plot 1) has many potential benefits for the Hall including its use as a breakout space, the potential for erecting a Marquee for

Weddings and Festivals, a community garden and disabled/accessible parking. These all support the Hall's redevelopment plan and our aspirations for the future.

If the application progresses successfully then consultation will be required to engage with the community and understand their ideas, hopes and wishes for these spaces. The process can take around 4 months with possibly another 4 months to complete the purchase provided all goes well.

The Application includes assistance with Legal Fees, repairs to the stone wall on the A82 and for some professional arboriculture work to manage trees that present a hazard (especially in Plot 2 behind the Hall).

Old Shop Site, Blairbeg Park.

SC and Garry MacKintosh (Glen Urquhart Shinty Club President) are in talks with the Highland Housing Alliance with regards this land after development of 15 Flats was refused earlier this year.

An SLF Stage 1 application is to be prepared. If successful this funding would be used to establish Values, Titles and a Business Plan etc. There is potential to develop facilities that benefit the Shinty Club and other Community Sports. The likely model is for GURCA to look into purchasing the land and the Shinty Club to then develop facilities. At present the Pavilion does not meet the needs of the increased number of teams e.g. that now operate such as the ladies team and various youth teams.

Alan Bell (**AB**) enquired about the use of this land for Facilities such a Tennis court. **DL** described how a MUGA (Multi Use Games Area) had been mentioned in the Community Action Plan. Barbara Shaw asked about if Children been involved with the CAP process. **DL** said that the two Primary Schools had been involved. The High School also spent part of a Non-curriculum day on this and information was fed back to the consultant. **DL** felt it important that Children's views are sought with projects such as these and as and when would be happy to engage further as appropriate.

David Fraser (**DF**) added the Highland Housing Alliance may not wish to sell and thus **SC** reminded the meeting of the potential for a CRtB in the future giving the community first refusal if the land comes up for sale.

Suzanne Irvine (**SI**) described the positive impact of the Mural Artwork on the HERAS fencing and asked if art could be displayed on the fencing. **SC** stated that the murals had been funded by a private individual.

An artwork project could be used to improve the appearance of the fencing at the Springfield site. Springfield were one of the main sponsors of this year's Highland Games.

At this point **DF** explained Springfield should have/should be in the process of setting up a Community Liaison Group to work with residents on the various issues. There have been problems with dust at the Springfield site over the last few weeks since works commenced and Springfield have a responsibility to work with local people and Groups such as GUCC.

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8. Post Office

SC outlined some of the work that was taking place behind the scenes with regards to Drumnadrochit Post Office. The Post Office is on the market again and there is a CCL (Elgin) For Sale sign outside.

https://www.rightmove.co.uk/properties/124571429#/?channel=COM_BUY

GURCA have been working with GUCC, Soirbheas and the Loch Ness Hub. At this moment two parallel projects are underway.

The first would require the movement of the Post Office Counter to the front of the Business to support the business when it is quieter over the winter (this makes for more efficient use of staff with the till/counter all in the same area).

The second is centred around a piece of work that is currently taking place with support from Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Just Enterprise. They are looking into the feasibility of the community purchasing the building and running the post office from within it with complementary retail, and the potential for social housing in the remainder of the building.

The meeting provided the opportunity to assess the support of GURCA members for local groups to continue to pursue these projects and ascertain if there were any objections. There were no objections from those present and the consensus was that it was sensible to carry on with these projects and that groups should keep working to investigate all options. As a result working group will be set up.

Representatives from GURCA, Soirbheas, GUCC and the Loch Ness Hub are in agreement that the Hub is not large enough to accommodate a Post Offices (PO) counter and there are issues with capacity in the Summer (when the Hub is very busy), staffing and with winter opening. The PO Counter is a service and there is little opportunity for any profit, as a result PO Counters tend to sit alongside other businesses such as retail where there is the mutual benefit of bringing footfall into the business. Margaret Varwell raised the issue of staffing and the need for training as the various services offered by the Post Office can be complex.

The issue of the Post Box which had been removed from the front of the building was raised. DF updated that this was more of a Community Council issue and a replacement box is due to be installed in the Hub Car Park.

DF highlighted there is a real risk that the Post Office might close or reduce its operating hours over the winter period and that work to secure a van has and is also being explored.

SC has made contact with the Post Office and an expression of interest with regards the Community taking on the service.

This is a complex process with lots of variables and groups here are working together to do all they can.

Gordon Findlay (**GF**) pointed out the potential to lobby existing businesses such as Scotmid CO-OP which would seem a logical option for the Counter. **DF** mentioned they have been contacted previously.

Dominic Thierry (**DT**) raised the issues with mail sent from the Glen seemed to be taking longer than expected and that post arriving here was unpredictable and sporadic. This was not the fault of Drumnadrochit Post Office and there is confusion amongst the general public with the roles of Royal Mail Group PLC and the Post Office

9. Hall Repairs and Usage

CW had described Hall usage returning to more 'normal' levels earlier in the meeting. **DL** stated that the new windows (funded by Highland and Islands - Greening Community Assets with match funding from Soirbheas) and the new roof (Place Based Funding from Highland Council, matched by Soirbheas and GURCA) had made a noticeable difference to the warmth, dryness and soundproofing of the building.

10. Bonfire and Fireworks

GF hoped that this year's event will go as planned and the team that had previously helped have been contacted. This year the Saturday falls on the 5th November. There is always room for volunteers to help build the bonfire and collect donations on the night.

GF outlined the nature of the new Scottish Government Bill to introduce a fireworks licensing system for people wishing to purchase and use fireworks, This applies to category 2 and 3 type fireworks (garden & display level). With a £500 license fee and stiff penalties for noncompliance this should significantly reduce the number of private displays.

The Bill contains a schedule providing an exemption for charitable organisations (and those assisting them) who organise and put on public displays. GURCA has a public entertainment licence from Highland Council in place covering this event for 2022 and 2023 and are able to proceed as normal.

The Village display has always been marketed as a chance for the community to come together collectively for a single event thus reducing anti-social noise, nuisance and anxiety

Gordon Watson (**GW**) stated that it would be sensible to advertise this change in the Law via Social Media and other channels alongside the benefits of an organised Bonfire Night Celebration and **DL** will provide this. It is hoped Scottish Government will also have a media campaign in place to highlight this change.

11. Christmas Parties and Halloween Parties

DL explained that Laura Black and Kerry Postma who have previously organised these will be meeting in the next week and GURCA that will support where possible.

12. Light Up the Glen.

DL explained that he has been in contact with Dot MacKenzie who is organising permissions for this on behalf of the Light up the Glen Team and GURCA will support where possible.

13. AOB

SI asked if there were any plans to improve Christmas Displays on the Green, the tree and decorations were limited and not up to the standard of those in Invermoriston and Fort Augustus. It is believed there are some issues with compatibility with fixtures and the power supply on the green. There are no plans at the moment with other priorities pressing, but GURCA would support any group that wished to look into this.

Brian Balfour asked if there were any plans for a Community Ceilidh at the Hall for Hogmanay. These events have taken place in the past, including in more recent times an outside event at the Hub Car Park. Dick Beach explained that from experience these have always required considerable time and work to set up and have not been able to significantly offset any costs incurred through fundraising. Bands and other services at Hogmanay are obviously more expensive.

CW shared the following upcoming AGMS – The Horticultural Society will meet 26th September and the Loch Ness Hub 7th November.

AB raised his concerns with traffic in the village especially the volume of traffic and its speed across Drumnadrochit bridge, and the danger to pedestrians and other road users and there are regular near accidents. SC confirmed this was a matter falling within the Community Council remit, rather than GURCA.

DF stated that it is important that we continue to raise this issue and an A82 Safety Group had been set up with contributions from Fort Augustus, Glen Moriston, Glen Urquhart and Inverness West Community Council. This concern was minuted and passed on to the Chair of Glen Urquhart Community Council.

Adrian Varwell thanked GURCA and local groups for all of the work.