

GURCA OPEN MEETING MINUTES



Monday 9th January 2023

Present: Susan Clark (SC) Chair, Carolyn Wilson (CW) Secretary, Monique Riddle (MR) Treasurer, Dan Light (DL) Community Development Officer, Gordon Watson (GW), Gordon Findlay, Suzanne Irvine, Mary Tiles, Fraser Mackenzie, Dominic Thierry, Alan Bell, Julie Dell, Chris Dell, Dave Stone, Charles de los Santos, Brad Garrison, Adrian Varwell, Erik Trelfer, Helen Maclennan, Billy Macleod, Fiona Macleod, Pam Fraser, Neil Macleod, Neil MacInnes, David Clark, Roy Macgregor, Maria Gonzalez, Amy Edwards, Jim Molyneux, Dick Beach, David Ferguson, Nicki Kipfmiller, Rachel Nixseaman, Darren Wisniewsici.

Apologies: Fiona Macdonald, David Fraser, Chris Ballance

1. Welcome

SC opened the first meeting and thanked so many people for turning out on a cold evening in January!

2. Minutes and Matters Arising

DL summarised the minutes from the previous meeting on 12th September 2022. These were proposed by Gordon Findlay and seconded by Monique Riddle.

3. 2022 review

SC gave a brief summary of what had been a very busy year for GURCA in 2022:

- Appointment, almost a year ago, of Dan Light, our Community Development Officer, and first paid member of staff.
- Replacement of the large windows in main hall
- Re-slating of the main hall roof
- Establishment of Bite n Blether, Laddies Night and House of Games
- GURCA being a featured Development Trust at the annual DTAS conference, and the accompanying video featuring our community (thanks to Chris Dell for his invaluable aid in producing this)
- Community Action Plan document completed and launched
- Funding secured for the agreed purchase of Community Woodland
- Discussions instigated with Highland Housing Alliance by GURCA and Glenurquhart Shinty Club, with input from Councillor David Fraser, over the potential purchase by the community of the old shop site
- Jubilee Picnic, Children's parties, Community Bonfire and Light Up the Glen
- Efforts to help retain a Post Office facility for the community going forward
- Genuine collaboration with other community groups – Community Council, Soirbheas, Shinty Club, Loch Ness Hub etc.

4. Community Woodland

DL explained that c.£136k had been secured from the Scottish Land Fund to cover the purchase of the three pockets of woodland in the centre of Drumnadrochit. The funding also assists with associated legal fees and some necessary tree work that has been identified.

Solicitors have been instructed by both parties, and it is hoped the purchase can be concluded by the end of April.

The Craigmory Woodland Association will be supporting GURCA in the management of the woodland.

A consultation event is being planned for Sunday 19th February, based in the hall but with the opportunity to explore the woods and have fun. The event will be aimed at everyone, including children! We hope to learn people's views on potential use for the woods, with regard to footpaths, heritage and leisure use.

More information will be made available nearer the day.

5. Community Development Officer update

DL told the meeting that the various initiatives to encourage social inclusion were all becoming established. Bite n Blether has proved popular, with around 12 – 15 attendees every Tuesday lunchtime. Laddies Night has a small but regular group of attendees, and Hall of Games has quickly established a core group of supporters.

DL encouraged everyone present to consider whether they know anyone who might enjoy any of these activities, and to make them aware of them.

Neil MacInnes asked whether there was a transport option available for anyone who might wish to attend but had no means of getting to the hall. DL said that if they contacted him we would do our best to sort transport for them.

Finally, DL reported that the community larder is being very well used. It is unfortunate that such a facility should be required, but encouraging that it exists and is being recognised and utilised by those who need it.

6 Other land / building issues

Post Office – following community consultation it was clear that respondents wished to retain a Post Office service in the community should the existing Post Office Counter close. There had been strong support for GURCA seeking to identify alternative retailers who might take it on. There was much less support for the option of GURCA either paying for the counter to be moved, within the existing Post Office, or seeking to buy the entire business and set up a community company under the Loch Ness Hub BenCom. Therefore, the latter options had been discounted by GURCA.

However, SC could confirm that a retailer in the village had expressed interest in taking on the Post Office services, and was in discussion with the Post Office about this. It will obviously take some time for anything to be concluded, but there is at least some hope for a positive outcome.

Old Shop site - GURCA, Glenurquhart Shinty Club and David Fraser have met with the Chief Executive and Chair of Highland Housing Alliance (HHA), who own the site. The community has offered to buy the site. HHA have already invested a lot in the site, so a deal that is acceptable to both parties will not be simple to achieve.

However, HHA have agreed to consult their Board and will get back to us within the next few months.

Meanwhile, the herras fencing around the site has finally now been repaired.

Car park – there was very strong support, in the community consultation, for GURCA to enter into discussions with Highland Council regarding the future of the car park. GURCA will take this forward this year, starting with an Expression of Interest for a Community Asset Transfer.

Glenurquhart Public Hall – although we were very pleased to be able to replace the windows and roof of the main hall, GURCA was once again turned down for the funding of the full renovation project, despite submitting a strong bid.

The project team has met with its professional partners to explore whether the necessary work can be split to allow us to submit applications for smaller funding packages. Obviously, this is not ideal, and will mean that the work will be spread over a much longer time period and be more disruptive to users, but the team is trying to examine every option to try and get the work done.

The QS provided revised figures for split work packages, at the end of 2022, and the project team will now consider the best way forward.

Alan Bell asked whether, meantime, it would be possible to encourage a ‘face lift’ for the hall, which was needing some exterior work to improve its appearance. He also mentioned the Spring Cleans which had always taken place.

Gordon Watson, Chair of the Hall Committee, said it was intended that an invitation would be put out to the community to assist with necessary work, The Men’s Shed were already being extremely helpful with odd jobs. CW said that historically very few people ever turn up to assist, so any help in getting out the message would be appreciated.

SC suggested that a list of the actual jobs requiring to be done should be drawn up so that people could assist with specific things, rather than just turning up and not being sure what was needed. Monique Riddle said this should be shared with local businesses and tradespeople.

The Hall Committee was meeting on 16th January and would set this in motion.

Men’s Shed – David Ferguson told the meeting that the group was still looking for an alternative site in which to be based. The group was very appreciative of being allowed to utilise the old caretaker’s cottage at the hall, but could not depend on that being available indefinitely, given the proposals to redevelop the hall.

The old forestry buildings at Balnain will be available and the group, assisted by GURCA, is looking into the feasibility of a Community Asset Transfer. This will not be straightforward, as the level of funding required means that a very robust Business Case will be needed.

7 Community Action Plan.

The Action Plan had finally been completed. However, SC told the meeting that it now needed to be acted on! A group, comprising GURCA, Glenurquhart Community Council, Soirbheas and Loch Ness Hub, had been set up to meet quarterly, to review progress.

GURCA's priorities for 2023 would undoubtedly be improvements to the Hall and the conclusion of the woodland project.

8 AOB

Dick Beach asked about the Village Green Christmas Tree, as many people felt that the trees in recent years had been unimpressive.

SC explained that the council have not provided trees for several years now, and the Games Committee was to be thanked for funding the trees in Drumnadrochit and Balnain in 2022. The Tree was a good example of something that everyone wants and expects to be there, but nobody 'owns'. It would be helpful if a small sub group could be established to ensure that suitable trees were funded, procured and lit every year. This only happened in 2022 at the last minute, due to the efforts of a small group of volunteers who are already totally overstretched.

Suzanne Irvine asked whether a tree should be planted? This was an option, but would need to be carefully considered, to avoid compromising the electricity supply, and sterilising an area of the green that is required for other use for most of the summer.

Adrian Varwell proposed a vote of thanks to the GURCA Trustees and team for the work that is being put into so many community issues

Next Open Meeting will be scheduled as an AGM Monday 20th March at Glenurquhart Public Hall, 7pm.