

# GURCA OPEN MEETING MINUTES



**Monday 20<sup>th</sup> March 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, Alan Bell, Jan Bell, Charles de los Santos, Roy Macgregor, Jim Molyneux, David Ferguson, Andy Griffin, Caroline MacDonald. Margaret Henderson, Miranda Service, Calum Brown, Barbara Shaw and Darlene (visitor from US)

**Apologies:** Fiona Macdonald, David Fraser, Margaret Varwell, Adrian Varwell Fraser Mackenzie, Dominic Thierry,

## **1. Minutes and Matters Arising**

The minutes from the previous meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2023 had been posted on the website and were available prior to the meeting. These were proposed by Mary Tiles and seconded by Suzanne Irvine  
There were no matters arising not covered by the agenda.

## **2. Community Action Plan (CAP)**

SC explained that progress against the actions emerging from the CAP was being monitored at the quarterly meetings of the joint group comprising Glen Urquhart Community Council, Soirbheas, Loch Ness Hub and GURCA. A summary of the key actions for GURCA had been produced and was circulated. The other parties to the CAP would produce similar documents with their own key projects.  
SC did not intend to go further through the list of GURCA actions, as the priority projects / items would all be covered by this meeting agenda.

## **3. Community Woodland**

DL thanked everyone who had come along to the Woodland consultation event on the 19<sup>th</sup> February. The event had been well attended, with a wide range of groups represented and a range of activities for attendees. There had been valuable feedback from the session, both informal and through 35 completed feedback forms. The key message is that most people do not want to see dramatic change for the woodlands. Some popular themes were:

- Bradley Martin garden to be a community garden, with outdoor shelter and space for marquees etc for events
- Additional parking for the hall could be considered in the Bradley Martin area
- Paths in the woodlands to be improved and seating areas provided
- Space for children's outdoor activities to be created
- Keep the woods tidy, but not over manicured

- Plant native species
- Facilitate wildlife

GURCA is now going through the process of the purchase, which it hopes to conclude by May. Once a completion date is known, a further event will be arranged and details provided

#### **4. Old Shop site**

GURCA, Glenurquhart Shinty Club (GUSC) and David Fraser have met with the Chief Executive and Chair of Highland Housing Alliance (HHA), who own the site, and GURCA / GUCS have made an offer to purchase the site. HHA have responded now to say that they would be minded to sell to the community, if the right price can be agreed. This matter is being taken forward jointly by GURCA and GUSC.

#### **5. Springfield Drum Farm development**

SC advised the meeting that Springfield have submitted a revised planning application, reducing the number of houses to be built from 94 to 81, but making them bigger houses. Springfield say their research suggests the demand is for bigger houses. Our Community Action Plan consultation suggests the opposite, with a strong message that there is a need for smaller, more affordable houses. Springfield also wish to amend the phasing of the site development, putting back the commercial site development until the end of the project.

The Community Council will be responding to the amended application, and it has been suggested that GURCA might also do so. SC sought views from the meeting. There was no support from the meeting for the Springfield proposal. Some specific questions / comments were:

Charles de los Santos – would the commercial site incorporate a new nursery? SC – no, there was no onus on Springfield to build anything on the commercial site, although a new nursery could be sited there.

Miranda Service – are Springfield planning to scrap the commercial element altogether? SC No, simply change the phasing of the works and do the commercial element last.

Gordon Watson – if the commercial element is left until last, will that mean we will have the herras fencing creating an unattractive façade to the road through the village for the next several years?

Mary Tiles – agree with Gordon Watson, and Springfield should be compelled to complete the commercial site as originally proposed.

Monique Riddle – the original order of works did make some sense, but this amendment does make you seriously question Springfield's purposes

Jim Molyneux – how long will Springfield be allowed to keep changing their plans to suit their own purposes?

Alan Bell – strong concern that bigger houses in this development will look out of place for the location and impact on the character of the village centre.

Margaret Henderson – seeking clarity on where the access to the new houses will be. SC - there will be a slip road from the A82 between the fire station and Kilmore Road.

SC confirmed GURCA would make a formal response to the proposal, after the Community Council meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> March, where this would be discussed in more detail. Everyone is welcome to attend the Community Council meeting which will be held in Balnain Hall.

## **6. Glenurquhart Public Hall.**

CW advised the meeting that in response to concerns about the appearance of the hall, a wish list of maintenance and repair jobs had been produced by the Hall committee, which had been shared with Men's Shed. Men's Shed have kindly volunteered to do quite a few of the jobs on the list.

All the materials required by the Men's Shed to achieve this have been donated to us by Garry Mackintosh at HIS.

CW has also spoken to Thom Macleod of Compass, and he will revert to us with ideas of any of the jobs his team can assist with.

SC wished formally to record our sincere thanks to Men's Shed, Garry Mackintosh and Thom Macleod, for their help with this project.

CW also advised the meeting that a grant application was in place with Soirbheas to fund new tables and chairs, and replace the worn out floor coverings in the meeting rooms, side corrido and kitchen. We hope to hear whether this has been successful in early April.

SC said it was encouraging to see how well used the hall is again, following the impact of Covid restrictions. Bookings are back up to pre Covid levels, and GURCA is supporting activities in the hall in the daytime on days when there has, historically, been less demand.

## **7. Men's Shed**

David Ferguson gave an update on Men's Shed. The group meets on Wednesday evenings in the former cottage attached to the hall. Members of the group have been working hard to make this into a more practical and habitable space for their activities.

The group has been doing various jobs for the hall DIY project, and has also been making bird tables for Balnain School.

Anyone is welcome to come along and join the group. The concept of a Women's Shed is also being considered.

The group have always been aware that the arrangement at the cottage will be temporary, due to the aspirations to redevelop the hall in the longer term. They have been looking for a permanent location, and are currently working on a potential Community Asset Transfer of the forestry buildings at Balnain. They have developed a Business Plan to support this, and the next step will be community consultation.

## **8. Community Development Officer**

DL advised the meeting that a grant of £8k had been secured, to allow the continuation of the various mental health initiatives he had been running for the last year.

DL plans to continue the existing activities but also introduce new activities to support other social groups not yet benefitting.  
SC asked the meeting to pass on to herself or DL any ideas they might have about activities or groups of people who might be targeted.

## **9. Litter picks**

Charles de los Santos confirmed that the monthly community litter picks would recommence in April. 21<sup>st</sup> April is the first date. There will also be a few 'pop-up' litter picks. All dates will be publicised through the usual channels.

There was a wide ranging discussion about the frustrations of seeing litter reappear, sometimes only days after the litter picks, but Charles felt that we should try to continue to lead by example!

One area where there are particular issues is around the school, and it was agreed we could give feedback to the school about this through our High School GURCA Trustee representatives.

There was also strong feeling that there should be more and/or bigger bins in popular areas, and that in the summer, bins should be emptied more frequently. Jim Molyneux also pointed out that the 2 bins from outside the new cemetery had disappeared! David Ferguson, as a Community Council member, agreed to ensure these concerns were raised with the Community Council.

## **10.AOB**

***Hi-Trans project*** – a paper was circulated to attendees about a project to improve the path and create a shared cycle path / walkway between Loch Ness Hub carpark and Druimlon. This had been received today, and it sets out the background to the project brief. If there are any comments on the paper, these can be passed to GURCA. Please let Susan or Carolyn have your comments by 31<sup>st</sup> March.

***Pedal power*** – SC advised the meeting there was to be a cycling event / exhibition on 15<sup>th</sup> April, on the village green. This was tied in with the World Championships in Glasgow, and there would be various activities for all the family, including a pump track for children.

***King's Coronation*** – SC asked whether people felt they wish to recognise this event and arrange any kind of celebration. If so, GURCA would be happy to facilitate wherever possible by allowing use of its community facilities. There was no interest registered from the meeting attendees.

***Hall Committee*** – Miranda Service said that the Hall Committee was seeking new members. Additionally, there was a real requirement for a small sub-committee (who need not be members of the main hall committee) to be responsible for social / music events at the hall. If no volunteers can be identified for this, it is likely that events will no longer take place, because the current committee does not have the capacity to take this role on as well. The meeting was urged to consider any potential individuals with an interest in music and the arts, to take on this role.

**Post Office** – SC was pleased to advise the meeting that following the work undertaken to identify potential alternative retailers to take on the Post Office services, the pharmacy had now formally applied to the Post office to take over provision of services. The pharmacy owners already run Post Office services at a branch in Edinburgh, so they understand the business. It may take some time for the process to complete, but it is good news that the community will not lose its Post Office services.

**Glen Urquhart Bulletin** – DL reminded the meeting that Fraser Mackenzie is looking for articles for this year's Bulletin. He suggested that Men's Shed might provide a piece.

**Next Open Meeting will be scheduled as an AGM Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July at Glenurquhart Public Hall, 7pm.**