

Glen Urquhart Rural Community Association

Our Community Land Journey

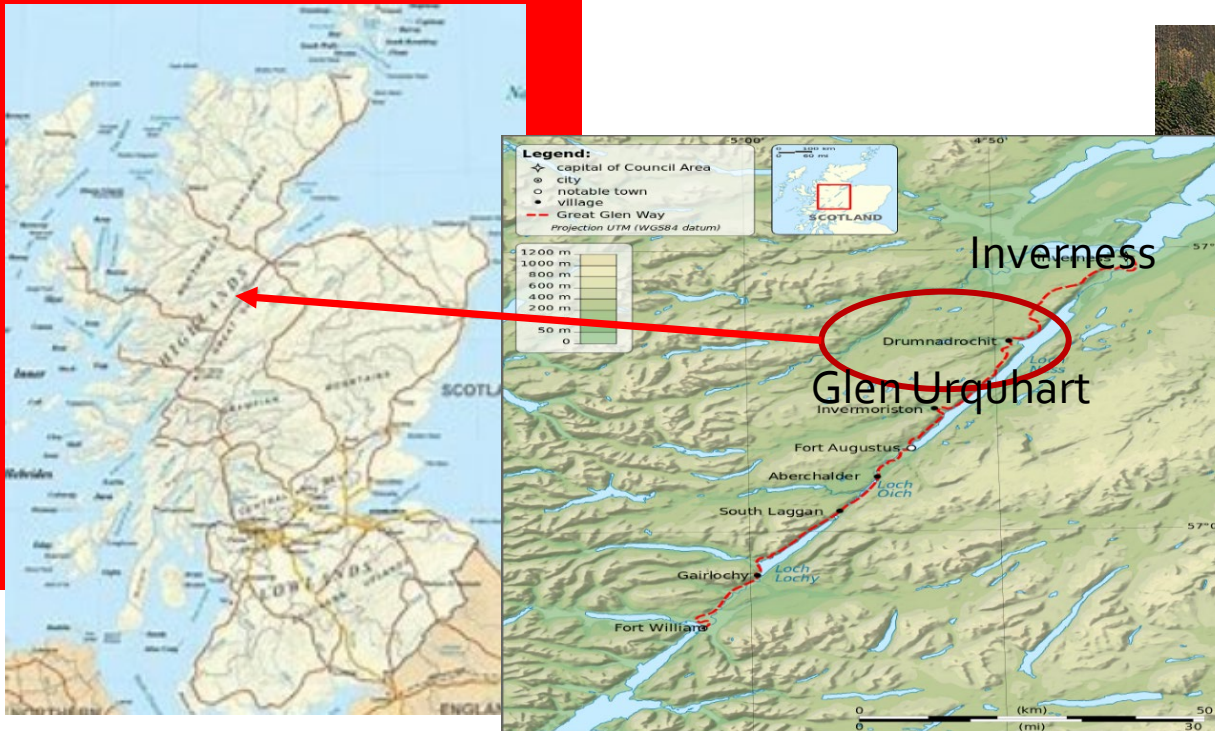


Glen Urquhart Rural Community Association



"Get going with GURCA"

- We are a development trust based in the village of Drumnadrochit in the Highlands of Scotland – close to Inverness and Loch Ness
 - Around 2,200 people live in our area (Glen Urquhart Community Council area)
 - The area has fewer young people than the Scottish average - 14.7 % are aged 0–15 years (Scotland average—16.8%)
 - The area has fewer working people than the Scottish average - 60.7%
 - There are more older people, some with dependencies for assistance - 24.6% are aged over 65 years (Scotland average—19.3%)
 - The 'dependency ratio' (the ratio of non-working age to working age is 0.64. (The Scotland average is 0.56.)



The Village Green Drumnadrochit – A community owned asset

Background on The Community Association



Glen Urquhart Rural Community Association - GURCA

- Established in 1949 ; reconstituted in 2017 as a Two tier SCIO and Development Trust
- A board of elected trustees and a membership of almost 500 community members
- Our aim is to identify, support and deliver community led initiatives to improve the quality of life, work and leisure for the people of Glen Urquhart
 - The Trust owns and manages a number of community assets including the village hall, village green and woodlands
 - The Trustees are active with a range of relevant skills and experience

Members and the wider community asked us to consider and develop options for community operation of the local tourist information centre following the Visit Scotland decision to close the facility in 2018

- A key board objective was to ensure that a sustainable plan was established for the project
- Since then engagement with the community has continued to grow. In 2022 the Trust working with the community and other stakeholders developed a Community Action Plan
 - This encompasses the community's aspirations for the place it wants Glen Urquhart to be and describes a number of outcomes that guide the projects being undertaken by the Trust

Public Meeting 2018

[Community Action Plan - Glenurquhart Rural Community Association \(gurca.co.uk\)](http://gurca.co.uk)

A successful Community Asset transfer started the Community Land journey



Before....unloved



....and after



Our experience & observations

- Community support & positive engagement with other local stakeholders DTAS, the Scottish Land Fund and The Highland Council were very important
- A longer timescale than we'd expected and we had to persevere to secure the asset transfer.....and concurrently we had to secure funding to make the asset sustainable and the business plan a reality.

Our Timeline

- May 18** – Public Meeting to assess support for community ownership of the building
- Oct 18** – Visit Scotland close the facility
- Dec 18** – ATR submitted
- 2019** – Community volunteers run the building over the summer
- Nov 19** – Council agree to the asset transfer
- 2020** – Securing funding for the social enterprise
- Feb 21** – Sale of the asset finally completed
- May 21** – Loch Ness Hub ready to open



Asset Transfer to a sustainable Social Enterprise



Creating A sustainable Social Enterprise

A source of revenue was needed to ensure community ownership of the asset would be sustainable

The purchase and operation of a baggage transfer business, moving bags between accommodation providers for walkers undertaking the Great Glen Way

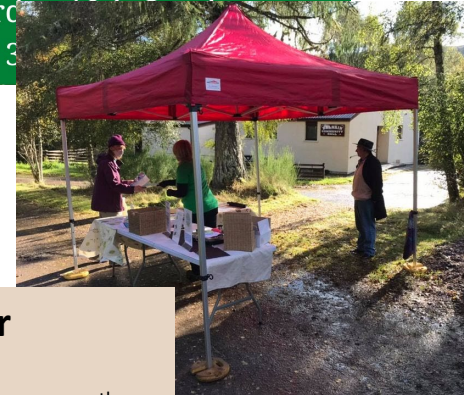
- Provides a viable business plan
- Sustains and creates new jobs
- Is a source of on-going community benefit

Success leads to success.....

- Securing Scottish Land Fund support for the building purchase (~£85k) helped establish credibility and momentum for the project
- In early 2020 further funding for the set up of the social enterprise was also obtained from SSE (£80k) and a local charity, Soirbheas (£30k)
 - But to succeed there was much still to do
 - Refurbishment of the building was required
 - Purchase of the baggage business had to be negotiated

.....a funding gap of £110k still remained and lockdown was on the way!

Planning a Community Share Launch in Lockdown!



A community share offer enabled us to both close our funding gap and confirm community support for the project

Loch Ness Hub Limited was established a BenCom in May 2020

Fantastic support was provided by Community Shares Scotland and Community Share Practitioner Dave Hollings, helping us prepare our share prospectus

Timing was going to be key!

A very Successful Share Offer

The Share Offer was open from 19th Sept to 17th Oct, with a series of events over the month. Opening day, local pop up's and a final push!

We raised our maximum target £110,000, with over 300 individual investors

We added to the team and had someone focused on pulling the activity together.

The use of social media to help get the word out and to maintain a high level of interest and engagement was vital



Where are we now?



Refurbishment of the building

Community Led Tourism funding (HIE) enabled refurbishment of the building in winter 2020/21

A toilet upgrade, introduction of a motorhome facility, new heating system, digital signage & Ebike infrastructure

The Hub today.....

- We opened our “new” facility to welcome visitors to Glen Urquhart and promote the local area on 2nd June 2021
- In addition to the social enterprise we’ve now developed community transport services and are promoting active travel
- There is a real sense of local pride, with the building now universally referred to locally as “The Hub”
- GURCA has an income stream from rent
- Up to 14 local jobs have been created
-and the story goes on.....



What happened next?



Community Woodlands

An opportunity arose to purchase 2 plots of woodland and the garden area next to our village hall

A business case was developed and this was presented to SLF and funding approved in 2022

The woods today.....

- We collaborate with the local Community Woodland Group to maintain the woods
- Schools have been involved in bird surveys
- A community woodbank has been established and last weekend 60 bags of wood distributed to 30 households
- Project with local nursery to create an outdoor classroom area ongoing
- A disc golf course has been established in another part of the woods – listed as in the top 5 courses in Scotland to play



And then?



Men's Shed

Our local Men's Shed approached GURCA with a view to assisting to purchase a FLS site for their new home

GURCA acted as the umbrella organisation to support this – GURCA now own the land and buildings and lease to GUMS



Collaboration.....

- Men's Shed have learned how to write funding applications
- This has resulted in them obtaining funding to undertake major refurbishments to the buildings
- They meet twice a week and the venue now hosts a Ladies Shed as well
- GUMS frequently carry out projects to assist GURCA such as refurbishing our noticeboards and benches



And next?



Old Shop site

We are in the process of purchasing the old site in Drumnadrochit with a SLF grant

Business plan developed for a sports focussed fitness and wellbeing facility with new changing facilities for team sports – Shinty, Rugby, football

Collaboration.....

- GURCA already own Blairbeg Park adjacent to the site
- Previously HHA had applied for housing on the site but this was objected to by the community – appealed and rejected by reporter
- Collaboration between GURCA, the local sports club and a well developed business plan gave our application to the SLF strength.



Reflections



- The 1st asset transfer is probably the most frightening
- Don't limit your ambition by thinking of everything that could go wrong – use these to think about how to avoid those eventualities
- Be sure you know what you want to do with the land and building and that you have created a robust business plan
- Think about how you will manage the asset before you go ahead with trying to purchase
- Collaborate with other groups - strength in numbers

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