

## **THE GATHERING PLACE**

### **A sanctuary for body and mind**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In 2009, the first in a series of community consultations took place in Kingussie entitled “Our Community - a way Forward” which identified the regeneration of the former Highland Folk Museum, Am Fasgadh site as the highest and most urgent priority for the community. The Am Fasgadh Regeneration Company (Kingussie) Ltd [ARC] was established in 2011 to look at ways of regenerating the falling tourist numbers in Kingussie following the national economic downturn and the relocation of the Museum to Newtonmore. ARC’s principal strategic objectives were and still are to:

- Providing recreational facilities (and assist when required) which will be available to all members of the community and public at large with the objective of improving the conditions of life and wellbeing. Thereby building a stronger more effective community.
- Economic community development including urban and rural regeneration.
- Improve the health of the people in the community and educate and inform about the local environment, culture, heritage and history.
- Sustain improvement of the environment.

The original project, “The Cairngorm Centre” proposed in May 2018 had proved to have been on too large a scale, too fragmented and too expensive. Issues such as displacement from local established businesses were identified. These issues have now been thoroughly addressed with a new smaller, more focused proposal.

ARC has been successful in gaining support from Scottish Land Fund Stage 1 allowing us to engage a professional consultant to undertake a robust business plan, a feasibility study and a current community consultation to take the project forward to the next stage of development. We have also received funding from Architectural Heritage Fund to help with this initial professional help. We are in touch with the Highland Council to pursue a Community Asset Transfer of the buildings and land required to house the project.

ARC (Kingussie) Ltd is the owner of the local allotments which are rented to The Kingussie Allotments Association. We have reserved three allotments for our own use to enable herb and shrub cultivation for use in the planned Botanical Garden. ARC members have also been running the Badenoch Film Club which have been meeting every Monday from September until April providing community entertainment, a social gathering which helps promote ARC and raise funds.

We are in talks with the other groups of the Community to ensure all are on board with the concept of the project and what we hope to achieve. These include Age Concern Scotland, Church of Scotland, Health Social Care, The local surgery, Digital Health Dept at UHI, Regional Screen Scotland, The Wade Centre, Kingussie Community Development Company, Cycle Friendly Kingussie, Kingussie Vicinity

Community Council, Caberfeidh Horizons, Cairngorm National Park Authority, Kingussie Business Forum and The Society of Badenoch and Strathspey Artists.

## **NEEDS**

It has been seen that our Community Needs:

- a. A quality, central all-inclusive gathering place for Residents and Visitors to meet
- b. A safe destination for vulnerable, and isolated people of all ages to congregate without fear where alternative help can be sought
- c. A cycle hub for the use of residents and passing cyclists, creating a training facility to develop a mountain/touring bike experience
- d. A Community Art/Cinema to create a social destination for young and old to meet and to counteract social isolation
- e. An events space for small to medium sized bespoke weddings
- f. A tourist attraction to encourage visitors to stop, visit, play and stay locally
- g. An opportunity for quality employment as well as voluntary activities
- h. Opportunities to strengthen community and improve mental and physical health
- i. Regeneration of the East end of the town
- j. An opportunity to preserve a significant building which is part of Badenoch and Strathspey heritage

In Kingussie there are several empty High Street premises which appears to be a common theme in Highland towns. There are numerous reports in the media regarding dying town centres in Highland Communities with loss of social connections through less community led activities. Social isolation in Kingussie appears to be increasing due to lack of a local quality destination being available. More and more activities are being centred in peoples' homes with the use of online shopping and online entertainment leading to the loss of more facilities on the High Street and leading to further isolation across all ages within the local population.

## **AIM**

Our aim is to deliver:

**A Cycle Hub:** Kingussie is already known as a cycle friendly town and have a large group known as Cycle Friendly Kingussie (CFK) under the charitable wing of Kingussie Community Development Company (KCDC). CFK meet and cycle out 2-3 times per week in various sizes of groups in varying abilities. ARC would like to promote cycling as a tool to benefit mental and physical health. Kingussie has no cycle hire or repair shop or a place for cyclists to meet. A tourist activity related social enterprise is seeking to use the former Store and Workshops to create a Cycle Hub. This could be linked to the school to include training in all aspects of cycling such as tour guiding, repair, hire and sales experience. It will also be a centre for the storage of the local ebikes and trikes and a place for cyclists to congregate.

**Digital Health Experiences: Opportunities for individuals and community groups to access and engage with practical and restorative digital health activities.**

The internet provides a crucial way of accessing health and social care information and services, particularly in rural areas yet there are still many people unable to take advantage of current and emerging digital technologies which can help support our physical health, mental health and wellbeing.

A digital health hub within 'The Gathering Place' could provide real and virtual access to activities as well as an opportunity try out Virtual Reality experiences, big screen gaming or wearable devices to monitor your 'vital signs' while you're out on a walk or cycle run for example. The hub could also provide a safe and restorative environment for people to learn digital skills, communicate with health providers, complete online documents for housing or other social support as well as assistance with digital self-management health programmes and connect with others for group activities.

**Botanicals:** Wellbeing is very much at the forefront of this project and will be enhanced by creating a destination where residents and visitors are made to feel part of the community. The garden will be designed to offer solace for body and mind. The importance of green places and spending time in them has become increasingly recognised. We have in our Community people with expert knowledge gardens and of traditional medicines and botany with a remit over garden planning. A Committee member is actively researching the work of Alexander McCuthcheon, a local pharmacist who recorded the food and medicinal use of many local plants used in and around Kingussie. It is proposed converting the garden to create a wellbeing green space drawing on her holistic knowledge of health maintenance and traditional local herbs.

**Community Cinema:** We recognise that a community cinema enhances an area for both locals and visitors. Much value is attached to a shared screen experience and highlights the importance audiences attribute to local cinemas as pure entertainment or escapism. This can benefit all ages counteracting and addressing social isolation which can lead to both mental and physical ill health. Our small scale Film Club equipment can be adapted to allow on line gaming enjoyed as a shared experience rather than the present system linking individuals in their own homes thus helping to diminish social isolation. We are in discussions with Creative Scotland regarding this.

**Movies for Dementia and Alzheimer sufferers:** Short Classical movies and professionally shortened classical films that appeal to Residents of a certain age and disability will be screened. This would give access to this group to allow them to enjoy a shared screen experience where a full length feature could prove too arduous for them.

**Afternoon Groups with Tea:** Vintage or Art Films serving tea and cake

**Crying Babies:** Entertainment for parents with babies where no one will mind the disturbance of crying child because next time it could be their baby making the noise.

**Bespoke ceremony/Wedding Space:** The events space and garden will be used for bespoke Weddings including the Ceremony and Photography in the Garden. It is hoped to open the historical link with the Parish Church for those that still want the traditional Church Ceremony.

**Mums & Tots:** Again linked with the Church the events and/or cinema space would be more child friendly and more readily available than the present facilities they use.

**Other Groups:** The cinema equipment and seating will be completely storable to enable the space to be used for purposes such as classes, lunch clubs, community meeting, arts and crafts, presentations and talks. The Kingussie Country Dance Club are interested in using the venue as is the Parish Church.

**Where to next:** Creating external destination boards to show what is available in the immediate area and local vicinity as well as displaying activities in neighbouring localities.

**Local Heritage:** Depicting local heritage via boards and artefacts. A history of the site and showcasing Kingussie as being a spa town in Victorian time which led to the building of St. Vincent's Sanitorium.

**Festivals:** We hope to reinstate "the Little Town of Festivals" which connected many venues and created a festival every month of the year for both residents and visitors to enjoy. "Food on Film", "Wellness Week" and "Art Festival" involving the 3 local Galleries. The Beer Festival connecting the hostelrys and caterers "The Book Festival" involved Caberfeidh Horizons and the First Class Second Hand Book Shop and Library along with other venues for "Readings", many of which were by the actual authors.

## **SUMMARY**

Our vision is a simple one, to create a community space where all members of our community and visitors, feel welcome and valued. Where friendships are formed, activities carried out with like-minded people; individuals are respected; their needs accepted and nurtured and where everyone's health, both mental and physical as well as personal (social and emotional) wellbeing is paramount. "The Gathering Place" will be self-sustaining whilst adding to the cultural and economic viability of Kingussie and surrounding area.

We aim to create an asset which will satisfy community as well as visitor needs and enhance the town as a tourist destination; to give members of the community an investment in their town providing a greater sense of destiny and belonging. The "Gathering Place" will act as a focal point for the Community as a whole and visitors alike. It will provide employment and training facilities, thereby enabling Kingussie to become economically stronger and more sustainable. The Gathering Place will provide a different type of visitor experience with health and wellbeing at its core.