



Community proposal Q4.1 Introduction

Groam House Museum is an award-winning museum, located on the High Street in Rosemarkie. It houses a renowned collection of carved Pictish stones from the time when an important Pictish Christian monastery occupied the site. It also houses a collection of the works of Scottish artist, George Bain, which is now recognised as a collection of National Importance by the Scottish Government. In addition, it has a collection of items of local history.

The museum building itself is relatively small – with space only for two exhibition areas and no other facilities. It has no storage space for its collections, and lacks even toilet and washing facilities on account of space limitations. The museum's collections are far more extensive than can be displayed at one time, so the bulk of the items are stored in separate leased accommodation in the Rosehaugh Estate near Avoch, 4 miles away. This rented facility provides a space of approximately 45 m² which is shared between storage space, office space and workshop. There are two other storage areas at the same location which the museum uses for storage of non-collection items. The museum also shares space at a store in Balintore for some of the more bulky items of its local history collection. These are to be relocated shortly.

Although physically small, the museum has a significant influence locally within its own geographic community, and more widely academically, and artistically. It regularly achieves 4-star museum status from VisitScotland, as well as scores of around 4.5 out of 5 from Tripadvisor and Google. Google lists it as one of two top attractions in Rosemarkie.

The museum has relied during its 40 years of existence on the support and active engagement of the local community. Volunteers (about 25 of them at any one time) run the museum, raise funds for it, and support it in a wide range of ways. Our volunteers are crucial to the museum, without them we wouldn't/couldn't exist. They participate as volunteers for a range of reasons, but ultimately because they get something out of it – the social interaction, having a sense of purpose, learning new skills, pursuing an interest, or just having something to do. For our volunteers, we organise training courses in the skills they need in a museum – everything from cataloguing and documenting artifacts, to conservation work, photography, effective writing, research methods and much more. And on top of that we organise social get-togethers for our volunteers, and mutual training sessions.

For others in the community, including specific target groups such as school children, people with mental illness, the elderly etc, we offer skills development and craft workshops – in the past these have included felting, mosaics, knitting, woodworking and more.

Then there are the events we run to raise funds for the museum – our coffee mornings, plant sales, book sales etc – which are so well supported locally and generate around £4000 - £5000 a year for us. Other events are just fun, but keep the museum in the local community eye – such as the village scarecrow display and open gardens scheme,

So we have a strong track record of actively involving the local community; ultimately the museum owes its existence to the support from the community, and the support the museum provides in return.

Generally speaking, the main difficulty in organising these events is finding a place to host them. Some are easy – the scarecrow display involves scarecrows outside people’s houses, and the open gardens similarly uses local gardens. Big events such the book sale are accommodated in the Gordon Memorial Hall in Rosemarkie or the Free Church or Town Hall in Fortrose, but the smaller workshops and events often require quite imaginative use of space to house them – including erecting a gazebo outside the museum for workshops, using space in the museum itself when it is closed, and using volunteers’ own houses. This difficulty in finding suitable space serves to restrict what we do as a museum, and a local facility nearby would enable us to offer more activities and more involvement with the local community.

Objectives

The objectives behind this application are to further develop the engagement and support of the community by Groam House Museum, by offering a facility for the local community to use, a facility for Groam House Museum to deliver training, workshops and other activities both linked to the museum’s collections and more generally, and to provide a more local facility for volunteers and staff to access and work on the collections. This breaks down into:

- Providing facilities for the museum to offer training, instruction and workshop activity linked to the museum’s collections and the local heritage; increasingly we hope to build on our track record of reaching school pupils, the long term unemployed and people with disability, both physical and mental, so as to provide them with new skills and work experience.
- Helping to deliver the proven benefits of volunteering and engagement with local heritage as a means of improving wellbeing amongst the museum’s volunteers, staff and the local community generally.
- Bringing the bulk of the museum’s collections, not currently on display, closer to the museum itself, to better enable volunteers and staff to work on them, and to make them more available for access by the local community. Ultimately the museum, and its collections, belong to the community and the more accessible the collections can be, the stronger will be that sense of ownership.
- Enabling the museum to offer increased display space for local heritage and specific exhibitions relevant to the local community.;
- Providing a resource for local individuals and groups to meet and participate in a range of activities, offering facilities that are smaller and hence more affordable, than the existing facilities.

The need

The need which the purchase of Mill Cottage will meet has been alluded to above, and can be summarised as:

- There is a need for skills development, education and support for young people, the long term unemployed and disadvantaged groups – which Groam House serves to a limited degree at present
- A continuing need for general training and skills development for the local community
- Groam House is constrained in space for delivering these required services

- Bringing the collections of Groam House closer to the community to which they belong - to enable easier and more meaningful access to local heritage, and to facilitate working with the collections
- A long-standing interest (over the 40 year life of the museum) for the community to engage more with the museum and its collections
- Limited access to suitable venues for small group training and workshops - existing facilities locally tend to cater for larger groups
- A possible future need to seek alternative storage and workshop accommodation for the museum in the future.

Changes proposed

Mill Cottage is currently in a poor state of repair though is overall sound and watertight. The current Home Report prepared for The Highland Council estimates a spend of around £20,000 to bring it to a habitable standard.

We propose to repair the property and to effect alterations to make it better suited to the community's needs. The changes are:

- Retain the existing layout of the cottage largely as is, reducing the area of the existing bathroom to provide an accessible toilet and expanding the area of the entrance hall to improve accessibility.
- Remove the existing outhouse to the rear of the property and erect a new extension approximately 9.5m x 5m, to provide a purpose designed storage area with workshop area for the curatorial staff and volunteers to work.
- Re-develop the exterior area of the property (currently overgrown) to provide a quiet area of garden to the rear, for use by the local community, and small garden area to the front with parking for two cars (one of which for disabled parking)
- Provision of secure cycle storage to encourage access on cycle and foot
- Development of the footpath to the north of the properties along Bridge Street, so as to provide a safe walking route for people accessing the property from the main public car park designated as for visitors to Groam House.
- Provision of audio-visual facilities to support lectures, on-line engagement with wider audiences

Planned activities

Practical workshops – working on aspects of the museum's collections (for example, effective writing, cataloguing methods, research methods)

Practical crafting workshops related to the collections but aimed at skill development and training – for example creating mosaics, animation techniques, photography, felting, woodworking.

Instructional sessions – for example, on local history and heritage, Pictish history, the work of George Bain, the development of Celtic Art

Supplementary exhibition space on specific subjects – for example, “Rosemarkie Man” – a skeleton found in a cave in Rosemarkie beach dating from Pictish times; Celtic Art, local history photographic archive

Lecture programme – combining the small local meeting area of one of the rooms with the use of Zoom to extend to a wider, global audience.

Project timescale

Project milestones

March – November 2021 – preparatory work

November 2021 – Scottish Land Fund application; CAT application

May/June 2022 – decisions re funding and CAT

If successful:

July 2022 – Surveys commissioned; detailed architectural plans developed; fundraising and grant applications for development commenced

August 2022 – Planning application submitted; schedule of works drafted; legal work on transfer of ownership commenced

October 2022 – Schedule of works finalised; tenders for work sought; planning approval granted (with any conditions)

November 2022 – transfer of ownership completed; initial contracts assigned; internal renovation commenced

December 2022 – subject to funding, contracts assigned for extension, site development; work commenced

May 2023 – building and landscaping completed; transfer of collections commenced

July 2023 – transfer complete

Project management

The museum uses PRINCE2 as its project management methodology, the most widely accepted project management tool in the public sector. This embodies a formal risk assessment methodology, which will enable the project board to identify and manage the risks associated with the project.

Key risks identified at this stage are concerned with approval of our CAT application, and the approval and timing of funding to support the acquisition and subsequent development.

In the event that either funding for the transfer, or approval of the transfer, are not forthcoming, the application will lapse. Once the transfer is agreed, and the funding for the transfer is available, the next key risk is concerned with the timing and agreement of funding for the development. This is less critical, as the property can be put to use by the museum with relatively minor improvement, within the scope of the museum's own funds, and further development delayed until further funding can be obtained. We have already approached Museums and Galleries Scotland, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, both of which have given positive feedback to our potential future bid for funding.