

# Representations received regarding CAT request from Groam House Museum for ownership of Mill Cottage, Rosemarkie

Personal information redacted by Highland Council for data protection reasons.

## Representation 1

I am writing to you to OBJECT to the proposed community asset transfer of Mill Cottage, 17 Bridge Street, Rosemarkie, IV10 8UP to Groam House Museum.

This property should be retained as housing for locals in need.

Further, the documentation submitted by the requesters is disingenuous, such as the proposal to install a bridge on land not owned by them and where the landowner has said they would not allow such a bridge to be installed.

## Representation 2

With regard to the above property and the proposed Community Asset Transfer to Groam House Museum, Rosemarkie - I would advise that I am strongly against the transfer. Local affordable housing is in very short supply within Rosemarkie and the larger Black Isle. As such, Highland Council should do all it can to maintain the housing supply wherever possible.

With a shortage of council properties to rent or affordable housing to buy, young families are forced to move away. If young people are forced to move away, then a community will not prosper. We should be doing everything possible to ensure that our young folk can live in the area they grew up in and as such this means ensuring there is a supply of housing for them. Being a bungalow, this is also an ideal property for an elderly person and is in close proximity to the shops for them. Mill Cottage, if funding is not available to bring the property back up to a habitable standard, should be sold on the open market with the funds being used to renovate other empty properties within the area. The property should not be sold/transferred as anything other than for residential purposes with clauses made within the title to ensure this. In this regard, I have very recently become aware of a post on Facebook by Highland Council looking to buy properties with a view to bolstering council housing stock. Why would they then consider giving up a property which only needs renovated? According to the proposal, it will cost approximately £20,000 to bring this property back to habitable standard, why would Highland Council then consider buying a property for upwards of £100,000 when it's cheaper to renovate one on their own housing portfolio?

This property has lain empty by Highland Council for many years with local people asking to purchase it on many an occasion to no avail. To now allow the transfer to Groam House for a nominal sum, even at market value, to be used as a community space and store room is going completely against community values within the area. There is ample provision and space for events, meetings and gatherings, large and small scale, within Rosemarkie and the wider area already, to use this cottage for such events will only dilute what is currently available and ensure that nobody, and especially not the community gains from this.

Access to the property is limited with no onsite parking. There is parking across the road, which is frequently full, as it provides access to the beautiful Fairy Glen, extremely popular with both locals and tourists. The Council has already reduced this car park area in size by "temporarily" dumping the ground/rubble from a previous build many years ago. This ground was never removed! Pedestrian access to both the property and car park is also restricted as it is along a narrow, busy main road with no pavement. I appreciate GHM wants to put in parking space on the property grounds, however this will not be sufficient to meet the full needs of what is proposed. With regard to pedestrians, they propose to develop the path behind Bridge Street, this will only be possible with the owner's permission, have they received this? Once again, I am strongly against this property being used for anything other than residential purposes.

### Representation 3

Please can I register my own formal objection to the proposal for Mill Cottage to be transferred as a community asset to Groam House Museum.

The property has been a home to many people over the years and several remain in the village now. The house should be either returned to the housing stock with the modest improvements required to do so or be sold at full market value and the funds used to support further local social housing.

The property from proposals does not meet the needs of GHM in any case and therefore they will require fundraising or grants from other causes in order for it to do so. This again would be a waste of public/grant money that could be put to better if they were to find a storage unit for what they require.

It is referred to that GHM would use the centre as a community hub. There is already a village hall with two separate rooms for meetings only yards away. The pub again only yards away has a function room used for meetings above. The Beach cafe also is available for meetings and events.

The location of such a hub on an already unsafe road would lead to further parking and traffic issues. The village is trying to seek a 20mph limit as this is wholly unsafe as it is without exasperating a problem in between two blind bends.

If the council were to sell on the property at full market value there could be a condition on sale to prevent it becoming a holiday home. However that would still be better than using a residential property for storage. There are several holiday homes in the village and they do provide business to the local economy so I am not totally against this. However there is a distinct lack of social housing and even affordable housing so primary this should be the goal. A family could buy this and make the modifications suitable to live there. Several families have had to leave the village in recent years due to insufficient accommodation. I have a family member and two friends who are trying to return to living in the village and there is currently not a single property for sale. One sold last week on the day it went on the market. Several locals have offered or requested details to buy Mill Cottage in recent years.

We need to make our communities sustainable so that families can continue to make their lives here. The Scottish government policy is to create more social housing not reduce this so please do not give our social housing away.

## Representation 4

I am against this CAT on the grounds that this should remain a residential property. The greatest housing need is for smaller properties, indeed the Highland Council has recently advertised to buy in larger houses in part due to the lack of smaller properties to downsize to.

I know several local people who tried to lease or buy the property but were told it wasn't available as it was going back into housing stock, possibly for emergency housing.

I have seen the plans and also the museum offices at Rosehaugh, the property is not suitable to accommodate proper storage and offices.

This is a residential property in a conservation area.

Bridge Street is a busy main Road with no pavement.

I fully appreciate the need for storage and offices if the Rosehaugh site becomes unavailable but feel a more suitable site should be looked for. A new purpose built unit would probably be cheaper.

The Highland Council claimed Mill Cottage was too expensive to renovate but they have just spent over 40k renovating a house in Millers Arch.

Cllr Gordon Adam has publicly stated it was his idea as a thank you for taking on the toilets, he has made no effort to consult the community first.

## Representation 5 - Fortrose & Rosemarkie Community Council

Mill Cottage, 17 Bridge Street, Rosemarkie

Please find attached the submission from Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council

We were asked by 23 local residents who were against the proposal for a public meeting which we were unable to hold due to covid rules but a recent survey by residents of local residents showed over 80% against.

Shortly after it became known that the Janitors house at Fortrose Academy and Mill Cottage, Rosemarkie had become empty the Community Council (CC) received enquiries from village residents as to when these council owned properties would be available to meet local housing needs and be ready for occupation. The CC has since this time regularly asked attendant ward councillors about these properties.

At first we on the CC were told that both properties would both be returned to housing stock but this decision was subsequently amended such that the Janitor's house would be retained as housing stock but Mill Cottage would be sold with the rationale being that it needed considerable work and would be too costly to renovate. This was some years before the housing boom, at a time when the council is citing lack of funds as reason for cutbacks, it could still sell the house with conditions on residential use and not for short term letting.

The CC have additionally been contacted by a number of local residents who had tried to lease or buy the property without success. One such resident was told it was no longer for sale because it was to be renovated for emergency housing, this appearing to contradict the statement about the cost involved.

At no time was the CC made aware the property was available and being considered for an asset transfer by Highland Council even though Cllr Adam was aware as was clear when he later advised the CC and others that it was his idea for Groam House Museum (GHM) to take ownership of this asset as a 'thank you' for taking on the public toilets, which were it the case that there was no local housing need ,would perhaps be understandable.

Prior to being aware of the proposed asset transfer, the CC had been in contact with a housing trust to see if anything could be done to return the house to social housing, not wishing to see a property suitable for housing need lost and consider the use as storage and office space inappropriate.

Bridge Street is a busy section of the A832 with no footpath, parking is limited, adjacent loading difficult and the plans for the house to be used for office space and storage purposes does not seem practical. Indeed GHM state that if they require to move to a larger premises they may return the building to housing. Having seen their Rosehaugh premises the CC is surprised that they propose to spend a considerable amount, of what will be public money, on renovating unsuitable premises.

Of the two empty houses in question the Janitor's house would have offered more suitable and useable space for GHM as well as offering strong educational links given the proximity of Fortrose Academy.

The CC greatly value the Museum and we would strongly back any submission by them for an appropriate site suitable for their storage and office needs, a purpose built building would be better value.

GHM has had to drastically amend its constitution to enable this project and funding application to go forward. The papers submitted claim an 80% support but that is 80% of 52, ( the majority of which are museum members) when in Rosemarkie alone there are about 500 eligible voters.

There is great concern at the way council properties have been left to decay particularly a property in the most wanted category, THC figures from the Housing register show interest on the Black Isle in one bed bungalows at 282, total numbers on BI 27 number let last year 0. The THC is offering to buy in 3,4,5 bedroom properties, partly because they have no smaller properties for people to downsize to yet a small cottage is to be given over to storage and offices.

GHM had amazing plans to extend at their current premises but THC turned them down because they were in a conservation area, so is the cottage .

F&RCC would like the opportunity to and time to support the possibility of a community led project for Mill Cottage to remain a home and will support GHM in finding a more suitable site.

The CC cannot support the asset transfer which would lose a much needed home.

## Representation 6

I would like to register my objection to the Mill Cottage CAT, I am joining my voice to that of Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council who clearly state in their latest minutes that they are against the transfer, as is Rosemarkie Amenities Association and as a member of the Gordon Memorial Hall committee I can share that we as a committee are 100% against this transfer. This is every community body in the area against this transfer....

My reasons for the objection are as follows and in no particular order

- 1- The house is not suitable for the proposed change, it is in a residential street with no pavements and limited parking. The increased footfall could be dangerous. The suggestion that GHM could put a bridge across the burn to avoid people walking on the street does not and will not have the agreement of the land owner.
- 2- We have limited available housing in Rosemarkie and across the Black Isle. The council website states that there are 282 people on the waiting list looking for a one bedroom bungalow. If the house needs as little as £20k to bring it up to habitable standard why are the council not investigating this as an option. The need for affordable housing in this area must be the overriding driver here.
- 3- Highland Council are actively looking for houses to buy due to a significant shortage in the stock of social housing.
- 4- Councillor Gordon Adam said at a public meeting that he had suggested this transfer and that it should go ahead as a thank you to GHM for taking on the running of the public toilets in Rosemarkie. This is not a valid reason for this transfer
- 5- I know of 3 local people who have enquired about buying the house as a residential property and have been told it was not for sale

## Representation 7

There is a desperate need for affordable housing (both to buy and to rent) on the Black Isle. There are many posts on local Facebook pages looking for such housing in this area. For this reason, I am opposed to the request to transfer Mill Cottage to Groam House Museum for office and storage space.

My preference would be for the Council to renovate Mill Cottage as housing and let it out. This would provide much needed housing for a family, and would also provide the Council with an income from the property.

If this is not possible then I believe that the Council should sell Mill Cottage on the open market, with a condition that the purchaser must live in the cottage and not turn it into a holiday let such as Airbnb. I know of several people who have tried to buy the cottage in the past and were turned down. I am sure the Council could sell the cottage for at least £100,000 in its present condition.

Many people locally share my views on this matter.



## Representation 8

I would like to draw to your attention to the attached petition and survey in relation to the subject heading above.

### **Supporting documents not published by Highland Council for data protection reasons**

- **petition of 32 signatories**
- **Survey petition of 56 signatories**

The petition was carried out by another resident of Rosemarkie and the survey was carried out by myself, also as a resident, though in collaboration with F&RCC. Both of these were carried out this weekend (22-23/01/2022)

Attachment 1 (petition) has 32 residents of Rosemarkie AGAINST the proposed CAT.

Attachment 2 (Survey) was carried out on half of the streets in Rosemarkie (regretfully I couldn't manage more doing this on my own). A total of 56 residents were available and willing to sign the survey, indicating whether they were Against (A) or For (F) the proposed CAT. Of these, 56 resident, over 80% were AGAINST the proposed CAT.

The survey, in conjunction with the petition, I expect shows that the total against the proposed CAT is even higher, though I admit I haven't had the time to scan them for duplicates.

I trust this demonstrates, with accuracy, the feeling of the community toward this proposed CAT. Further, I would encourage THC to disregard any participants in other surveys/petitions, showing support or objection, relating to this proposed CAT where they are not residents of the community, as this would not be indicative of the community's true feeling toward the matter.

I have copied in the Community Council for their information, as well as Councillor Adam who concocted this transfer and who at a recent Community Council meeting intimated that this transfer was an almost certainty, seemingly with no regard to due process. I hope this might provide a well-needed lesson for Councillor Adam: putting democratic process before one's own views.

## Representation 9 - Rosemarkie Amenities Association

### **OBJECTION to proposed CAT Request**

Reference: Community Asset Transfer Request, Mill Cottage, 17 Bridge St, Rosemarkie - Groam House Museum

I am writing to you on behalf of Rosemarkie Amenities Association (RAA) in relation to the reference detailed above.

RAA was contacted by email in 2021 by Doug Maclean, Groam House Museum (GHM), for our views on the proposed Community Asset Transfer of 17 Bridge Street, Rosemarkie.

It is understood that 17 Bridge Street is currently held as social housing, although it is currently vacant and requires renovation. We understand that the objectives of the CAT would be for GHM to convert this property away from housing in favour of office, general purpose and storage space.

RAA contacted, via email, all registered members on 03 January 2022 to seek their views on the proposal. Of the total respondents, the breakdown of views given were:

- 16% **support** the proposal
- 84% **object** to the proposal

Further detail on respondents and their reasons given may be provided to THC on request. Following this, the Directors of RAA met on the 12 January 2022 where directors voted unanimously to object to the proposal.

While RAA supports GHM in their endeavour to find suitable space in which to house their collections and provide a better working environment for volunteers, we cannot accept that this should come at the cost of local housing, particularly housing that the Highland Council urgently needs. This need is evidenced by the recently announced drive by The Highland Council to purchase properties from private sellers in order to meet social housing demands [see 'Council to purchase houses from owners who would like to help make a difference in their community' on THC website, dated 12 Jan 2022].

We do not accept that the renovation costs (approximately £20k) are prohibitive to THC retaining this property in housing, as a recent FOI [FS-Case-392550197] shows that THC spent £41k + VAT renovating 7 Millers Arch, Rosemarkie, in 2021.

Further, a quick search reveals that there are currently (as of 12/01/2022) **282** people on the housing register having chosen one-bed bungalows on the Black Isle as their preference, only **27** one-bed bungalows are available in the same area, and in the year 01 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, **ZERO** one-bed properties were let.

We believe these figures speak volumes of the current housing issue on the Black Isle, and therefore implore The Highland Council to reject this CAT and instead retain the property as housing, as is so desperately needed.

RAA directors would be happy to assist the members of GHM in scoping a more appropriate local venue for their requirements.

Yours Sincerely,

Gareth Phillips

RAA Director

For and on behalf of Rosemarkie Amenities Association.