



Dundreggan Rewilding Centre Community Consultation 2019-2020

A summary of community consultation conducted between February 2019 and June 2020 for the purpose of informing local people and the wider community about the proposed Rewilding Centre development at Dundreggan, and collecting feedback and ideas to inform the development plans.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the consultation.

Kat Murphy
Community Engagement Officer
June 2020

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Methodology: 2019-2020

From February to April 2019 Trees for Life underwent a period of consultation with people from the communities of Glenmoriston, Invermoriston, Fort Augustus and Glengarry, all within a 30 minute drive of Dundreggan and who can be considered local to the project.

Drop-in sessions were held in four local village halls, with communities notified and invited via social media, posters, and flyers delivered to houses and in pupil school bags. Attendees were presented with information about the development proposals and invited to give feedback in a number of ways. Staff were on hand to discuss ideas and answer questions. Trees for Life staff also attended local community group meetings and ran workshops in local schools.

Feedback was mostly positive, with people feeling that there would be more training and job opportunities, and suggesting lots of brilliant activities which are already in our plans. The inclusion of a Gaelic resource centre/archive, wildlife hide and natural play area were also advocated, and these have been incorporated into our plans as a result.

A community engagement officer, based at Dundreggan, was employed in July 2019. Various events have been run since their appointment, including summer and winter family days, guided nature walks, and more consultation events, including three evenings in local halls in November around the Dundreggan 5 year management plan, and a walk and talk about the Rewilding Centre at Dundreggan in March 2020.





Methodology: Consultation during the COVID-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that work activity at Trees for Life has had to change significantly. Consultation was planned to involve more public events, school sessions, and visits to local community groups, businesses and organisations. Plans have had to be cancelled and so other means of consultation have been used.

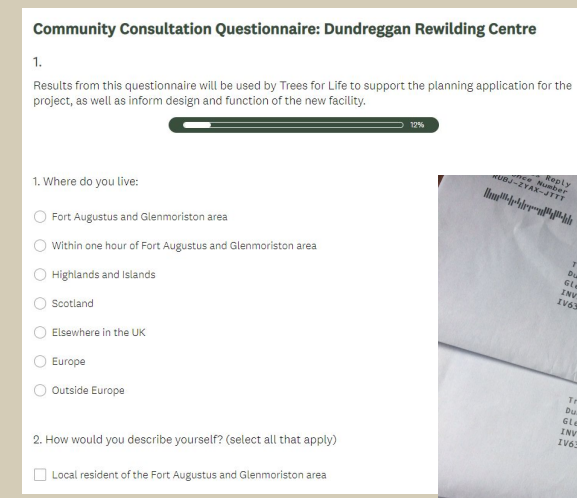
An online questionnaire was produced using SurveyMonkey to accompany an information pack which was shared through the Tfl website, the Caledonia Wild newsletter, supporter e-mail list of around 10,000 individuals, contacts local to Dundreggan, and the Tfl Facebook and Twitter accounts. The questionnaire was live from 22nd May to 4th June.

As not everyone has internet access, and to ensure that we reached local people, paper copies of the questionnaire were posted to 700 households locally with a delayed deadline of 11th June, to ensure that local people be in receipt of relevant information and be able to feed back their ideas and concerns.

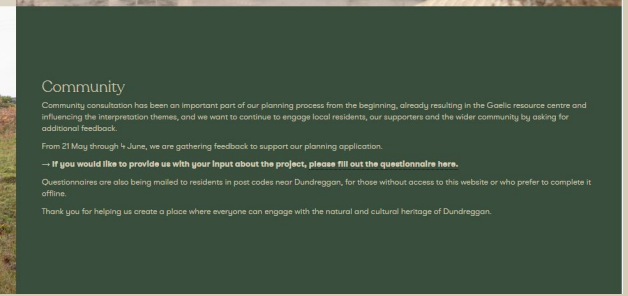
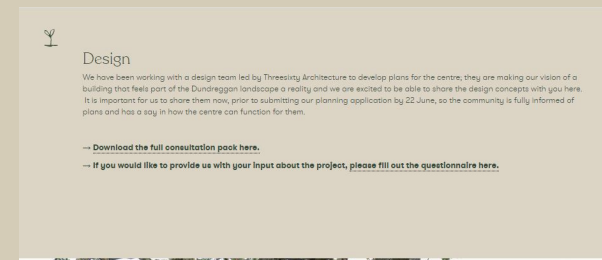
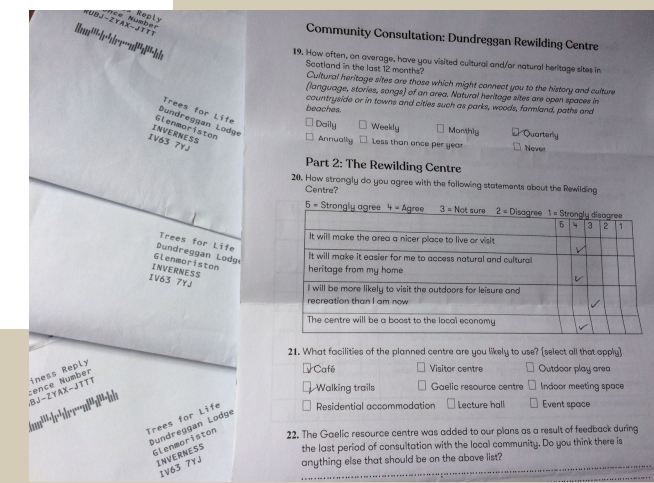
Return envelopes with postage paid were included with the questionnaires to make responding as easy as possible, along with a letter (also containing a link to the online questionnaire) and architect renderings of the development for further information.

Responses from the paper questionnaires returned to Dundreggan were manually added to the online questionnaire dataset.

A report commissioned from the Sensory Trust has also provided invaluable feedback about how the centre can be made as inclusive as possible for all..



Online and paper questionnaires (above, right); the Tfl Rewilding Centre web page with consultation information and links (below)





Demographics of respondents

535 people responded to the questionnaire in total, of which 72 were from the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston area (FAGM). 62 local people returned their questionnaires through the post. 55% of total respondents were from Scotland and 37% from elsewhere in the UK. 52% have some involvement with the FAGM area, whether visitors, property or business owners, employed or resident.

The largest proportion of respondents were in the 55-64 age bracket. In all, 73% of respondents were of working age, and 25% were of retirement age.

When asked “Is your ability to participate in outdoor recreational activities limited because of a long-term illness, health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?”, one quarter of all respondents and one third of respondents from the FAGM area indicated that they were limited a little or a lot.

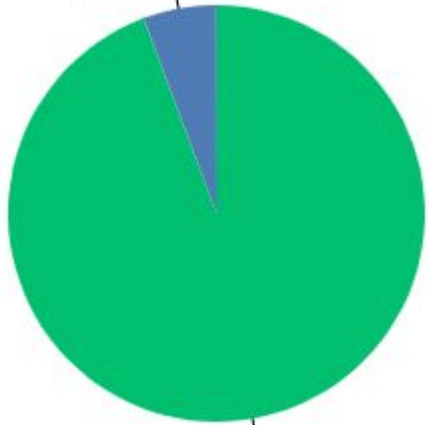
Overall there was an even number of responses from males and females, though significantly more females from the local area responded than males.

96% of respondents indicated that their ethnic group is white; 38% were white Scottish. Only 3% indicated being from minority ethnic backgrounds. 4% preferred not to disclose their ethnic group (note: respondents could select more than one option).



Summary of Responses 1

I do not support
this development



I support this
development

More than 94% of respondents (92% of local respondents) to the question “Can you confirm if you are in support of the Rewilding Centre and Accommodation Building development at Dundreggan?” replied that they are in favour of the development.

6% were not in favour of the development. Their reasons are explored on pages 11-15.

88% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the centre would boost the local economy (80% locally) and 82% (76%) agreed or strongly agreed that the centre would make the area a nicer place to visit.

Fewer respondents were in agreement with the statements “it will make it easier for me to access cultural and natural heritage from my home” (48% of all / 62% locally) and “I will be more likely to visit the outdoors for leisure and recreation than I am now” (44% / 40%), likely reflecting the fact that many already regularly access cultural and natural heritage regularly (50% quarterly or more / 72% for locals), and 18% of all respondents have not visited Dundreggan as they live too far away.

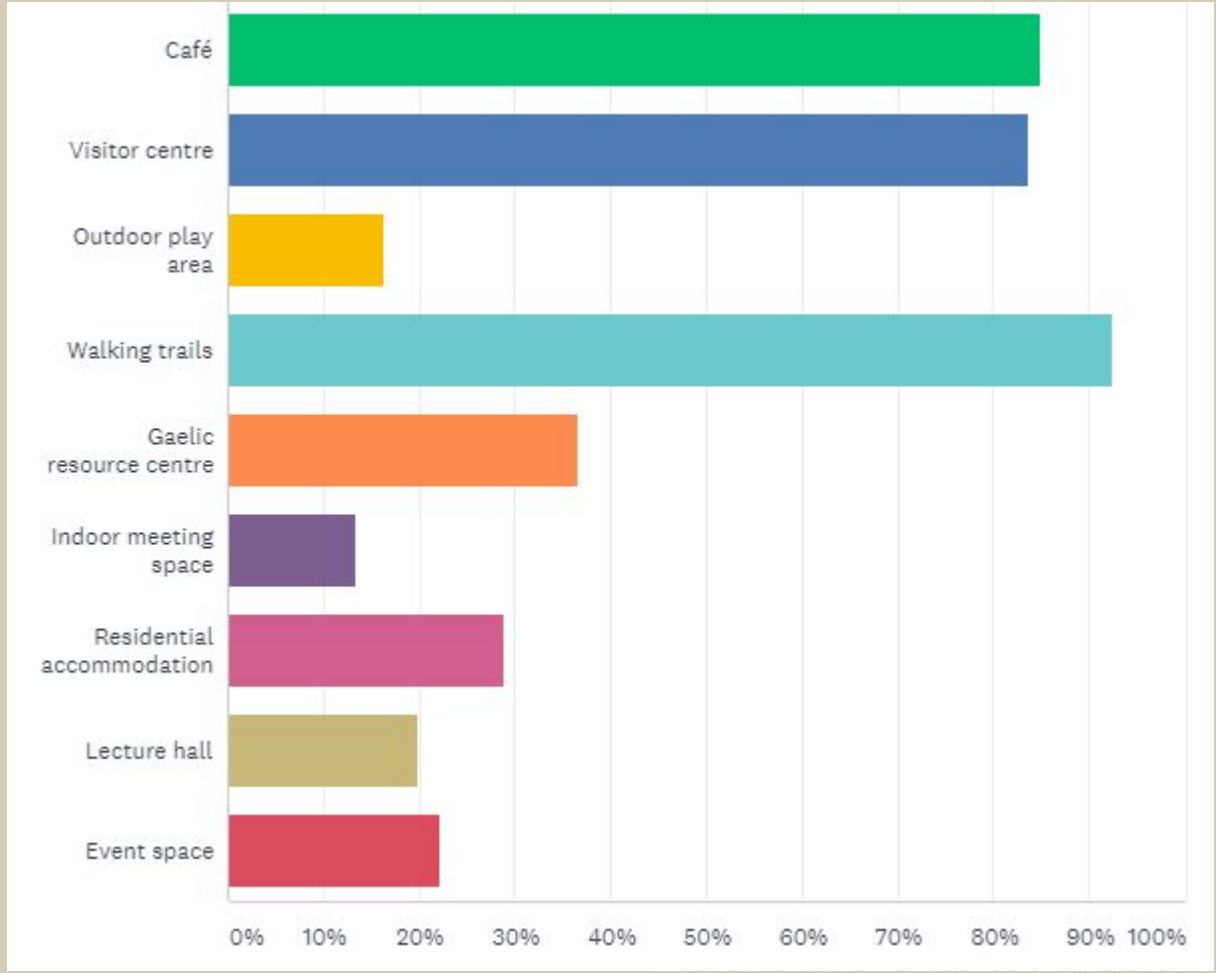


Summary of Responses 2

The cafe, visitor centre and walking trails are the most popular planned facilities of the centre, with 84% or more of respondents stating that they are likely to use them. 37% have indicated interest in using the Gaelic resource centre and 29% in using the residential accommodation.

Of local residents, over 72% will use the visitor centre, 78% the cafe, 91% the walking trails, and more than a quarter will use the outdoor play area and Gaelic resource centre.

- Several respondents indicated that they thought the plans would benefit from the addition of:
- Renewable energy generation (6)
 - Education at varying levels (20)
 - A hands-on workshop/training facility with practical rewilding advice (7)
 - Information and education on the cultural history of the area (15)
 - Garden centre/shop (6)
 - Quiet area/meditation space (6)
 - Wildlife hides (4)
 - A gift shop with local crafts and TfL products (4)



Design



Around two fifths of respondents left responses in the “Any other comments” section of the questionnaire. A handful were openly critical of the design, with several believing that the plans look too modern and not in keeping with the area’s heritage. However, there were many very positive comments left in this section, and though none explicitly mentioned the design, they were very supportive of the plans based on the information given in the consultation pack - a good deal of which was regarding the centre design. Comments included:

We wish you all the best; the facility is sorely needed and we are sure this lovely new facility will be well supported

The centre is the embodied logical progression for TFL and I wish you all well.

I think this scheme is a very good idea. Any activity which encourages people - particularly young people - to visit the countryside is excellent.

The majority of suggestions and critical comments about the buildings were around sustainability (65) and the use of green design features - natural materials, passive solar design, biodegradable, no plastic. Many were keen to suggest that the centre be powered by renewable energy (7) - solar panels and geothermal energy being highlighted. Several references were made to having a green roof (5), water harvesting (4) and compost toilets (3).

Five comments explicitly asked for consideration to be given to accessibility, including ramps, parking spaces, a Changing Places toilet, and accessible rooms in the accommodation. A comment also requested that there be facilities for baby changing and nursing mothers.

Many of these ideas have already been incorporated (including renewable energy, passive design, accessibility), and still others (such as rainwater harvesting and toilet types) will be considered further into the design process.

When asked what features could be included in the natural play area, the most popular responses were climbing (including tree climbing) and all-natural materials.



Visitor Experience

Respondents indicated that they would be most likely to visit for events around natural history (93%), cultural history (64%), guided walks (62%), and talks (58%). Events around Gaelic culture and language, and live music had 37% and 40% respectively. Family fun days were selected by only 18% of respondents.

Local residents are also most interested in events around natural history (86%), followed by cultural history (65%), live music (54%) and talks (54%). Events around Gaelic culture and language and family fun days were the least popular (37% and 26%). However, 28% of local respondents indicated that they would use the Gaelic resource centre, 95% indicated interest in the cultural and natural history of the area, and 43% are interested in taking part in Gaelic classes at the centre, indicating a strong, long-term local interest in Gaelic language and culture. 27% of all respondents (37% locally) know at least a few words or phrases of Gaelic, and 31% are interested in taking part in Gaelic language lessons at the centre.

Comments suggested several other types of events people would like to see:

- Arts and crafts workshops
- Short courses
- Volunteer opportunities
- Art exhibitions/installations
- Tree planting
- Education
- Sustainability
- Poetry
- Conferences
- Show and tell with animals for children
- Nature connection
- Licensed events/folk nights





Fort Augustus & Glenmoriston Community Council Action Plan

The FAGCC Community Action Plan was drawn up in 2018 with input from local residents. In response to residents' comments, the organisation drew up a list of priorities.

Trees for Life anticipate that the Rewilding Centre and its facilities will help to meet the following priorities:

Developing outdoor play and sports provision - by providing a free-to-access natural play area

More activities and events - by providing activities and events for all ages, and some specifically aimed at local people

Develop visitor facilities and attractions - by promoting the rich environment and heritage of the area to locals and visitors alike all year, assisting with the goal of the area being a year-round tourist destination.

More training and job opportunities and support for new and existing businesses - by providing an estimated 15 FTE jobs in the first year alone, and more through the local supply chain. 33% of total respondents and 42% of respondents from the Highlands and Islands or closer were interested in the possibility of jobs at the centre. 37% of those in the immediate area and 40% of those within one hour were interested in jobs at the Centre - a very positive indicator for our goal of boosting job opportunities for local people. There may also be opportunities for apprenticeships, courses and training programmes at the Centre.

Going green and local - encouraging renewable energy use, recycling... local produce - by sourcing from local suppliers and craftspeople where possible, and promoting local businesses and attractions both on the website and in the centre itself. The Centre will be partly powered by renewable energy - solar panels and air source heat pumps. This will be featured in the interpretation, to inform visitors about more sustainable energy sources and demonstrate how they can work well in practice.

Develop and promote a local paths network and long distance trails - by improving existing paths and looking to connect to paths in the local area, encouraging walking and cycling between the centre and local facilities and settlements.



Concerns Raised

The main concerns from initial consultation which took place in early 2019 were:

- Impact on the nearby Redburn Cafe and other local businesses
- Impact on local environment of lots of tourists, traffic, litter
- Must fit with community needs and aspirations for the area

The first two themes came up again in the June 2020 consultation, indicating that though these concerns have been addressed, this may not have been fully communicated to local people and supporters, something we hope this document will remedy.

The main concerns which have come out of the June 2020 consultation are:

- Building design (6)
- Impact on the local area and environment (19)
- Transport (7)
- Departure from Trees for Life organisational aims and ethos (9)

These are addressed on the next pages.

Others felt that the money could be better spent on other things, like tree planting (4), were concerned about the impact on the community (1) or the effects of COVID-19 (3), wanted the area to remain as it is (3), felt that the cost may be prohibitive for people on low incomes (3), questioned the need for accommodation (3), felt the development was unnecessary (2), worried about the effect on volunteer weeks (1), or were just not interested (1).



Concerns: Building Design

The following concerns were raised regarding the design of the buildings:

- Numerous respondents made reference to the need for natural, local and sustainable construction materials to be used, and for the design to be sympathetic to the landscape, existing buildings, and heritage of the area.
- Multiple comments were made regarding sustainable/green energy use, including ideas such as off grid, passive solar, green roof, zero or negative carbon design.
- Accessibility (e.g. for wheelchairs and those with limited mobility) was noted several times as an important consideration, including accessibility of accommodation in terms of wheelchair access and flexibility of room choices.

The plans address these concerns in the following ways:

- Through the initial design process the buildings' positions on site, operational requirements and how the buildings will be used by staff and visitors have been fully considered
- The proposals strive to achieve environmental targets through passive design of the main spaces and by maximising opportunities for insulation, heating, cooling, ventilation, and natural daylight
- Careful consideration will be given to the specification of appropriate materials, reviewing their robustness and BRE environmental ratings
- Photovoltaic cells and air-source heat pumps will provide energy to the new and existing buildings, after an energy options appraisal from LocoGen
- The buildings have been designed to be low in the landscape and utilise natural topography so as not to detract from the natural views and feel of the site, and the construction and design of the original estate buildings has informed the plans
- The unique roof form helps to break down the overall mass of the design and allows the proposal to sit more comfortably within the context and heritage of Glenmoriston
- There will be easy wheelchair access throughout the car park and arrival area through the building, play area and pond, and the accessible activity trail
- The accommodation will be wheelchair accessible and includes some ensuite bedrooms designed specifically for people with accessibility needs
- A choice of bedroom types will be available and the building design (of 2 wings) allows for flexibility to meet the needs of different groups and individuals



Concerns: Impact on the Local Area and Environment

The following concerns were raised regarding the impact on the local area and environment:

- Several respondents (5) were concerned about the impact of local businesses - particular reference was made to the Redburn Cafe, situated only 1 mile west of Dundreggan
- The majority of concerns raised were around the impact on the local environment (14) - both of the site itself, and the local area. Respondents were concerned about potential noise and the impact of increased visitors numbers (litter, damage to the site)

The plans address these concerns in the following ways:

- Trees for Life and the owners of the Redburn Cafe have had conversations about the potential impact of the Rewilding Centre. We will ensure that that the Rewilding Centre cafe offering is different to the Redburn. Visitors to the Centre will be actively encouraged to make use of local businesses, including the Redburn
- The increased footfall that will result from the centre will increase footfall to local businesses
- The proposed development will cover less than 2 hectares of the 4000 hectare estate (0.05% of the land area)
- It is close to the road and current footpaths where there is already some noise from passing traffic, and the path network is already well-used by local people and passers-by
- The planned expansion of and improvement to the network of footpaths still leaves the bulk of the estate more difficult to access, leaving plenty of space for undisturbed rewilding and for quiet enjoyment of nature



Concerns: Transport

The following concerns were raised regarding transport:

- Considered biggest barrier by respondents (42%, followed by cost at 33%)
- Around one fifth of respondents will be most likely to visit the centre by means other than car, but many comments were made around the lack of public transport in the area. Many respondents noted that public transport in the area is significantly limited, and that they would be more likely to visit by public transport, or other more sustainable means, if it were possible
- Several mentions were made of a desire for facilities for bikes and electric car charge points
- The road can be busy with passing traffic travelling at speed

The plans address these concerns in the following ways:

- Providing information on the level and frequency of public transport services, and the location of existing bus stops, shelters and real-time information through the Centre website and in the Centre building
- Providing covered bike storage for cyclists at both buildings
- Making information available on walking and cycling routes linking the Centre to population centres
- Providing charge points for electric cars
- Making an overflow parking area available for busy days
- Exploring the options for the encouragement of transport planning (public transport, car sharing), staggering of booked visits and shuttle buses for visitors from local population centres
- The site entrance will be modified to allow clear sight in both directions and to allow two buses to pass each other



Concerns: Trees for Life Organisational Aims and Ethos

Nine comments were made expressing uncertainty over, or dislike for, the plans due to a view that the centre detracts from the aims and ethos of Trees for Life. These respondents felt that the centre had little to do with rewilding, that the site should be a haven for wildlife away from humans, or that the money could be better spent on planting more trees.

Trees for Life believe that people are integral to the rewilding of the landscape. Our vision is of a revitalised wild forest in the Scottish Highlands, providing space for wildlife to flourish and communities to thrive. We recognise that humans are part of the landscape and in order for the relationship between people and the landscape to be healthy, education is needed to foster the two-way care and connection.

Therefore, the Rewilding Centre is entirely within the ethos of the charity; education and awareness-raising are vitally important to ensuring the success of our rewilding projects and those of other organisations, and in making land management strategies more sustainable, ensuring a healthy future for all.

This centre will enable us to welcome a larger, more diverse audience to Dundreggan, encouraging connection with nature and the heritage of the Highlands, and inspiring them to engage with rewilding. Through the centre we want to normalise the idea that we can work with nature rather than against it



Future Consultation

Consultation has already informed the development plans, and we will continue to take into account the views of the public, and especially local people. We welcome comments and questions at any time.

Trees for Life will endeavour to keep local people informed of the progress of the development in the following ways:

- informal discussions with local people at events
- updates in local media (e.g. Ness News) and regional media
- updates via the local event email list and other email contacts
- updates on social media platforms
- continuing to publicise staff contact details for those who wish to discuss questions or ideas
- posters on local notice boards, including in the Dundreggan car park

Public events and school visits will resume as soon as practically and safely possible given the pandemic. Until they can, plans are being developed for community engagement to continue in other ways.