

# DADCA

New Build Project  
- Big Lottery Bid -

**Planning & Design Drawings**

October 2013

**DORNOCH & DISTRICT COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION**

Scottish Charity No. SC013716 - Company Limited by Guarantee registered in Scotland No. 375856 - Registered Office: Rubhan Beag, Hilton, Dornoch, Sutherland, IV25 3PW

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The DADCA Board have worked hard to try and clear all the obstacles to building a new Community Centre on our preferred site at Meadows Park.

In this document we outline the specific consultation that we have undertaken with interested third parties, detail the site itself and the reason behind our choice of preferred location within the site. We then look at the reasoning behind the design of the building and its internal layout, and then finally look at the requirement to provide a new community storage facility alongside the new building.

The work done on consulting with the community to identify needs, business planning, project feasibility and options appraisals is listed in other documents accompanying this one, as follows :

<b>Document</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Feasibility Study</b>	<b>Phillips Aitchison Consultants</b>	<b>2009</b>
<b>Feasibility Study (Update)</b>	<b>DADCA Board</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Options Appraisal</b>	<b>DADCA Board</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Building Surveys</b>	<b>Various</b>	<b>2008-12</b>
<b>Consultation Document</b>	<b>DADCA Board</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Business Plan</b>	<b>DADCA Board</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Planning &amp; Design</b>	<b>DADCA Board</b> ( <i>this document</i> )	<b>2013</b>

The documents are all available in electronic format if required.

## **2. MEADOWS PARK SITE**

Meadows Park was identified in the 2009 Feasibility Study as the preferred option for a new Community Centre.

Following the publication of the Feasibility Study a representation was made by DADCA to get the land zoned for Community Use in the 2010 Highland Council Local Plan for Dornoch. This was accepted by the Council and the current Local Plan, adopted in June 2010, contains the following note pertaining to the area :

*'Site maintained for community and associated uses. Potential for development of community centre subject to suitable access, landscaping, siting and design.'*

### **2.1 History**

The Meadows Park was originally gifted to the people of Dornoch by Sutherland Estates. The gift was processed under the Feudal Tenure Act and a group of Trustees was established to look after the Park.

### **2.2 Ownership**

There were six nominated Trustees : Town Clerk, Provost, Minister of the Dornoch Cathedral, Rector of Dornoch Academy, President of the Highland Gathering and President of the Football Club. The last two representatives reflected the intended (and indeed future) use of the land, namely as a football pitch and as the Highland Games field.

### **2.3 Existing Users**

Meadows Park is often referred to locally as the 'Games Field', and once a year on the first Friday in August the whole Park is transformed by the Dornoch Highland Gathering Committee into a first class Highland Games field, attracting competitors (amateur and professional) and spectators (over 5,000 in 2013) from all around the world.

Whilst the annual Highland Gathering is the most high-profile use of the field, the rest of the year the park is used regularly by Dornoch City Football Club, who compete in the Ross - Sutherland Amateur Football Association summer league and Cup competitions. In 2013 a new team, Sutherland United, was formed to compete in the North Caledonian Football League system over the winter.



In addition to the Highland Games and football, since 2008 Meadows Park has been the venue for the annual Bonfire Night & Fireworks Display organised by the Dornoch Festival Week, a sub-committee of DADCA.

The Festival Week team also part-funded the purchase of a Community Marquee (along with the Highland Gathering, Community Council and Sutherland Agricultural Show) and for the past 2 years the Festival Week events have been largely based at the Meadows, which has proved to be very popular with both residents and visitors alike.

Meadows Park was also the home of the now defunct Dornoch Cricket Club, although the artificial wicket is still in place and cricket was again played at Meadows Park in 2013 for the first time in over 10 years. There are a number of local youngsters who have expressed an interest and it is hoped to arrange more games in 2014.

Finally, Meadows Park is a wide open, well tended grass area just off Dornoch's main thoroughfare, Castle Street, and is used regularly by local people and visitors for all manner of recreational purposes, from families flying kites and having picnics, to model car enthusiast meetings!

## **2.4 Consultations**

The DADCA Board has been keen to engage with as many people and groups as possible in an attempt to clear a path towards our goal of a new Community Centre without adversely affecting any existing users. In addition to the Public Consultation process we have met with and undertaken exploratory discussions with a number of groups and agencies concerned with permitting development on Meadows Park.

### **Trustees**

Our first task was to consult the Trustees to see if they would be willing (and able) to sell us enough land to build a new community centre. We obtained a copy of the original Deed document from the local solicitors (Arthur & Carmichael) which established the 6 Trustees. Unfortunately two of the Trustees no longer existed (the Provost and Town Clerk). However, following representations to Highland Council, they took a decision and nominated our local Councillor (Jim McGillivray) and Ward Manager (Phil Tomalin) to be their nominated representatives to replace the Provost & Town Clerk.

At the same time as confirming the actual Trustees we became aware of a clause in the Deed of Covenant which expressly prohibited the sale of Meadows Park. This clause (one of six in the Deed) had been cited by a number of people as being an absolute barrier to our plans. We decided to seek legal advice on this matter, and contacted Nigel Jones of MacKenzie & Cormack in Tain who had offered to act for DADCA on a *pro bono* basis. We passed a copy of the Deeds to him and his opinion was that the clause had no legal basis following the abolition of the Feudal Tenure Act (Scotland) in 2000, unless a 'Continuation' of the clause had been registered by the Feu Landlord (Sutherland Estates). We arranged for a check of the Land Records in Edinburgh and no such continuation of the clause had been registered. This news was subsequently relayed by letter to the Trustees, who later confirmed this opinion with the Legal Department of Highland Council.

Once these matters had been resolved, the Trustees met under the Chairmanship of Willie D.M. MacKay (President of the Highland Gathering) to discuss our request. We met with some or all of the Trustees on a number of occasions, including site meetings at Meadows Park. The initial offer of two possible sites on the Park came in time for us to proceed with the Public Consultation in April 2013.

However, neither of the two options was our preferred choice and so we held further meetings with the Trustees to present our vision of developing the 'Option 3' site next to the football pitch, which we believe will result in the maximum community benefit. Further meetings ensued and on 3rd July 2013 we received written confirmation from the Trustees expressing their unanimous support for

our plans (*see Letter of Comfort - Appendix A*).

### **Planning**

Following advice received from Mr. Howard Brindley via Planning Aid Scotland, we submitted a Pre-Application Planning Enquiry to our local planning department at Highland Council in June 2013. The drawings submitted for the enquiry are enclosed (*see Appendices C to G*), and were prepared by a DADCA Board member based on information developed during our discussions and consultations.

On 28th August 2013 we received a positive response to our application, confirming that the Planners would support a Planning Application based on the information that we had supplied (*see Appendix B*).

### **Roads**

Part of the 2009 Feasibility Study work had been discussions with the Roads Department of TEC Services regarding access to the various sites under consideration. The proposed site was their preferred option at the time owing to the direct access from Castle Street. However, we wanted to check their opinion again and so Cllr. McGillivray organised a site meeting with Simon Young from TEC Services in February 2013 to look at the options and to highlight any difficulties.

Following advice from Mr. Young it was decided that the best option would be to form a new entrance to the Park in a position which would aid sight lines and visibility for all road users in the area, and this proposed new entrance formed part of the subsequent Pre-Application Enquiry.

### **Trees**

We also wanted to check that the Tree Officer had no serious objections to our plans, as the new entrance (*see above*) would require removing a number of trees. Cllr. McGillivray again assisted in organising a site meeting with Nick Richards from Highland Council which took place on 18th April 2013.

Mr. Richards subsequently confirmed by email that there were no serious issues with removing the trees in questions (in fact some of them need removing sooner rather than later in his opinion), and he was happy for us to submit a Pre-Application Enquiry, as he would be consulted on this as a matter of course.

### **Neighbours**

At the initial Public Meeting following the 2008 Consultation community response to our plans was overwhelmingly positive, and the only opposition voiced was by some (but not all) residents living in houses adjacent to Meadows Park.

When we took the decision to restart the project in 2013 we discussed at length what we could do to engage these local residents (approximately 10 houses). We decided to write to each resident individually, inviting them to the first meeting on 9th March, enclosing a Questionnaire and FAQ sheet and asking them to contact us if they had any questions.

In the event we did not receive any contact prior to the meeting, but a number of them did attend this first meeting and again voiced some concerns regarding visual impact, possible noise nuisance and increased traffic in the area.

We discussed a number of options at the meeting, pointing out that the building's visual impact was likely to be less than a 2 storey house (given that we are determined to make a new building fully accessible and thus single storey) and that it had been moved back 6m from the football pitch,

taking it out of the line of sight of the houses in Sinclair Court.

We also noted that the Main Hall had been moved to the side of the building furthest away from any houses, again in an attempt to minimise noise levels. It was also pointed out at the meeting that with the experience of running the Social Club for over 5 years, the vast majority (i.e. over 99.5%) of the lets we have are finished before 10 p.m. and have no 'loud' music content.

Everyone was encouraged to complete Questionnaires with the assurance that all comments would be recorded and any questions or suggestions for improving the building would be welcome at any time.

In a small community where many people know each other it is not difficult to engage people in conversation, and over the following weeks a number of the Board members (in particular Secretary Judi Sutherland and Chair Jerry Bishop) spent time chatting to a number of the people resident in the area of Meadows Park, and it became clear that many of the reservations revolved around a problem which had occurred at a Festival Week dance the previous year, to which the Police had been called.

This somewhat disturbing news was indeed 'news' to the Board, and so we held a meeting with the Festival Week organisers to see what changes might be made. It transpired that there had indeed been a considerable amount of disorder at this particular event, to the point where they were not minded to repeat it!

We wrote again to the residents to remind them of the second meeting and to confirm the news that the troublesome event of 2012 would not be repeated. We again received no specific replies from the residents in the area, and the few adverse comments we did receive were noted (see *Pages 32 -35 of the Consultation Document*). The second meeting and exhibition were very well attended and the plans received unanimous support from those present!

The Board remain convinced that Meadows Park is the best site for a new Community Centre and are committed to working with all interested parties to develop and deliver a solution for the benefit of, and acceptable to, as many people as possible.

### **3. PROPOSED BUILDINGS**

The new Community Centre must be better than the Social Club in all respects, and specifically it must address all the issues which have been highlighted by the various consultations, namely:

- ◆ better (and more) toilets accessible from all spaces at all times;
- ◆ adequate parking on a level site;
- ◆ eco-friendly heating system powered by renewable energy;
- ◆ fully accessibility (inside and outside) for all ages and abilities;
- ◆ flexible spaces designed to meet a variety of needs;
- ◆ larger main hall wide enough for 3 indoor bowls mats and Scottish Ceilidh Dancing;
- ◆ enough accessible storage space for all users.

In addition to improving on the Social Club, a new building must also provide the following additional facilities:

- ◆ a Fitness Suite with changing facilities large enough for team sports;
- ◆ retractable seating in the Main Hall to create a Cinema easily;
- ◆ a replacement viewing stand for the Highland Games and football pitch;
- ◆ able to integrate with the community marquee for larger events;
- ◆ industrial-standard kitchen suitable for weddings, etc..

#### **3.1 Design Philosophy**

The overall philosophy should be to create a simple, functional building designed in such a way as to be capable of future expansion as and when required. The building must be accessible by people of all abilities and ages, and a single storey design is envisaged.

The building must be ecologically sustainable. We hope that locally produced wood pellets will be suitable for the heating system, allied to solar panels for hot water and passive solar gain to reduce costs.

The building should use the latest technology to ensure that it can be easily used by all local people - for example use of swipe card type devices for door entrances and an automated heating system linked into the booking system to minimise costs.

The building should be finished in durable materials requiring little or no maintenance, and the lighting should be designed to be suitable for people with impaired vision or hearing (e.g. diffused uplighters rather than bright, central 'point' lights, good acoustics, etc.).

#### **3.2 Spaces**

**Main Hall.** The Main Hall in the Social Club (110m<sup>2</sup>) is large enough for many events, but the Indoor Bowls group have enough members to use 3 mats at the same time and the Hall is simply not wide enough for this. Also, the Scottish Country Dance Group do not use the Social Club at the moment, again because at 7m the Hall is not wide enough for them to complete all their dances. A wider Hall would attract more usage.

Some regular events have become so popular that additional space is required. The Car Boot Sales in August and September both attracted 19 tables in addition to the Farmers Market, which is the absolute limit of the Main Hall. Also, the Dornoch Cinema has been an outstanding success to the point that at some showings (e.g. The Angel's Share) the Hall is simply not big enough, even with the new staged seating in place.

Taking all this into consideration the DADCA Board have concluded that we need a Hall about 50% larger than the one we have at around 180 m<sup>2</sup>.

A Hall of this size would also allow us to seat c. 150 people at a meal, which in turn would allow us to cater for more wedding functions. Dornoch is a popular location for weddings, both at the Cathedral (with the Madonna influence) and with Civil Weddings - there are over 60 per year in total. With the loss of the Burghfield House Hotel's function room the only option now available in Dornoch for a larger wedding is a Marquee in the grounds of the Castle Hotel.

We would like the Main Hall to be fitted with a room divider with a 60:40 split to allow the flexibility of hiring a Hall the size of the existing Social Club (110 m<sup>2</sup>) or one 2/3rds the size (70 m<sup>2</sup>) or the full hall.

**Meeting Rooms.** We currently let out the Struie Room for meetings, and although this is large enough for most events the acoustics are appalling, to the point where we have decided to hold our own Board meetings in the Kitchen as one of our directors has a hearing problem and finds it impossible to follow the conversations in the Struie Room.

We don't need a space much bigger than the Struie Room, but do need flexibility in a 50 m<sup>2</sup> room to be able to divide it 60:40 again using a room divider.

Such a room would also be offered as a meeting / conference room during the day with the aim of satisfying more of the commercial bookings that we current have to turn away. Such a room could also be used as a small exhibition space for Arts & Craft shows.

**Activity Room.** We have a regular demand for an Activity Room which would be primarily shared by the Art Group and the Youth Group. We require a spacious room fitted with large full-height cupboards to allow storage by both groups - one of the cupboards will need to be fitted with running water and a sink to allow people to wash brushes and mix paints.

**Storage.** At the moment the Storage capacity at the Social Club is limited to 2 small cupboards off the Main Hall of less than 20 m<sup>2</sup> total floor area. In these we store all our tables & chairs as well as 3 bowling mats, assorted ladders, signs, and most of our janitorial supplies. Additional space has been found in a loft (which now houses our stock of second-hand books) and also in rooms upstairs where Dornoch Allsorts After School Club store their toys, Festival Week keep all their things (including 1000 plastics ducks for the annual duck race) and where the overflow of the DADCA merchandise is kept.

Storage has been identified as an issue by many of our existing users and sub-committees, and we have calculated that we need more than 3 times the space offered by our present store cupboards inside the building. This excludes the external storage requirements detailed below.

**Kitchen.** The current kitchen has been renovated on a budget thanks to £3,500 as part of an Awards for All grant in 2010. The size of the current kitchen is fine at about 20 m<sup>2</sup>, but we need industrial standard equipment in a new kitchen to allow preparation and cooking of complete meals for large wedding parties. Ideally the kitchen should be on an outside wall with an external door (to aid loading and unloading) and a refuse bin store located close by.

A larger servery than at present, opening to a lounge or foyer, is essential for coffee mornings and car boot sales, etc.. Ideally the Kitchen will also connect directly to the Main Hall for ease of serving.

**Toilets.** The toilets in the existing building are a constant cause for complaint.

They are functional but fail current building standards in that there is no mechanical ventilation - the only ventilation is provided by open slats on the windows! Also, they are only heated by an exposed panel heater (again contrary to current regulations) and despite this they are extremely cold in winter.

Of more concern is that there are not strictly enough WC's in either the Ladies or Gents toilets to meet our Public Entertainment Licence obligations. Also, whilst there are nominally 'disabled' cubicles in both toilets, they are not accessible due to the restricted width entrances into the toilets and the design of the 'double-door' entrances (*see Building Surveys document - Appendix B*).

However, the worst feature of the existing toilets is that they can only be accessed via the Main Hall, and we have received complaints from older members of the Art Group, amongst others, that it is most inconvenient having to walk outside and through the Coffee Lounge to use the toilets when in the Struie Room if there is another event on in the Main Hall (Tai Chi is at the same time on a Wednesday morning) - particularly in wintery weather.

We think our new building will need 6 Ladies WC's and 3 Gents WC's plus urinals. There should be a separate fully accessible disabled toilet large enough to support a carer and which can also be fitted out as a baby changing room. These facilities would be particularly useful to the Highland Games committee for use on Games day.

**Office.** Central to the plan of making a new Community Centre sustainable is the creation of at least one full time (equivalent) job for a person to manage the Hall, take bookings, oversee the Fitness Suite, etc. This will require a small administration office off a reception area near the main entrance. We would like this space to be large enough to hold a display of Arts & Crafts as we know from our experience of the Dornoch Gallery that we have enough potential exhibitors locally and enough demand from locals and tourists to both generate income and help our local craft workers.

### **3.3 Fitness Suite**

The recent public consultation questionnaire revealed a significant demand for a fitness suite in Dornoch. This confirmed the support that we received from the public for our failed attempt to create one by purchasing a vacant Industrial Unit in August 2011. The latest survey showed that at least 148 people are currently travelling out of Dornoch to use a fitness suite and 300 out of 580 respondents said they would use one if we had one.

We have to deliver a Fitness Suite as part of any new building. In consultation with one of our existing users (Julie Brown), who is a professional Fitness instructor, the DADCA Board have determined that an area of approximately 50 m<sup>2</sup> will be enough area to provide 8-10 machines and a free weights area. This room needs to be capable of extension if demand requires it, so should be on the end of the building.

There will need to be changing facilities adjacent to the Fitness Suite, and provision will need to be made for Ladies, Gents and a fully accessible Disabled changing room. Given the proximity of the football pitch (although there is currently a separate Football changing room) it would make sense to make these changing rooms large enough for team sports (e.g. football, shinty or cricket) and the disabled room could then also be used as an Officials changing room on match days. The changing rooms would be used by competitors on Games Day - facilities which are not currently available.

This whole Fitness Suite / Changing Room area will need to be accessed by a separate door to allow suitably inducted members access to the facilities at all times via an electronic keypad. There are similar existing 'unsupervised' fitness suites in the Highlands which we will use as our model.

### **3.4 Viewing Gallery**

One of the benefits of developing our preferred 'Option 3' site is that it requires the demolition of the existing viewing gallery/stand (which is only used once a year on Games day). This construction would be replaced by a new permanent stand aligned with the football/games field and use an extension of the roof of the new building as its cover (*see Appendix G*).

The Highland Gathering spend a great deal of time each year fitting planks for the seats and roping on tarpaulins for a roof of this temporary stand. The proposed replacement stand would greatly enhance the Games field, significantly reduce their setup time (and cost) and give them the opportunity of selling more seats, thus creating more revenue. In addition, the stand would be in place all year round and could be used to improve the spectator experience at football matches, and would also open up new revenue streams by possibly attracting larger spectator events such as Pipe Band championships, etc. to Dornoch.

The initial plan would be to create simple steps from concrete, but this 'terrace' would be designed in such a way that tip-up stadium seats could be added as and when finance allowed.

## **4. EXTERNAL STORAGE FACILITY**

Developing the 'Option 3' site will also require the demolition and removal of three existing buildings which the Highland Gathering Committee use to store various pieces of equipment. The plan is to create a separate Storage Shed which can be accessed from the new car park and which is large enough to securely store all the items identified.

### **4.1 Highland Gathering requirements**

The Highland Gathering Committee have estimated that they require in the region of 50 m<sup>2</sup> storage space to replace their existing sheds. This equipment is typically only used once a year, and consists of tables, trestles, chairs, posts, ropes, staging, huts, cabers, hammers, weights, etc..

### **4.2 DADCA requirements**

In addition to our own tables and chairs (which we would envisage keeping in the Main Hall) the community own 75 plastic trestle tables which would ideally be stored centrally, rather than at the school as at present.

We currently have two small rooms upstairs in our current building which store items from Allsorts After School Club (mainly toys which they rotate) and Festival Week (various items such as ducks, ropes, megaphone, P.A., flags, bunting, gazebos, etc., etc.). These could all be stored in the new external storage shed.

The new Community Marquee (which is shared between various voluntary groups in Dornoch) would also be stored in the new external storage facility, which should be equipped with doors large enough for a forklift to access to make handling of the marquee safe and efficient.

Finally, our Flowers & Fairs sub-committee own a small car and bowser which are used in the summer by a band of volunteers to water the flower boxes around town. This is currently stored outside in the local builder's yard over the winter, which adversely affects its depreciation and increases the maintenance costs. The new storage shed should be large enough to store the car and bowser over the winter.

### **4.3 Other Requirements**

All the equipment and materials for the Dornoch Christmas Lights have traditionally been stored in the local roofing contractor's yard (A. Banks & Sons) when not in use. The contractor is in the process of retiring and there is no obvious alternative location for the lights. The new storage shed should be large enough to accommodate the 2 m<sup>3</sup> container in which they are kept.

Another suggested use for the building is to use one of the side walls as a climbing wall. There is also the option to create an additional room to house an indoor soft play area, which is often requested by tourists and locals on rainy days. There was a such a business in Dornoch a few years ago which was very popular, but when the owner retired it was never replaced.