

Dail Mhor Site Redevelopment & West Lochaber Adult Care Re-Design



Background

Following on from the recent community consultation where you told us what sort of care you would like to see delivered in the area, Urram (previously the Dail Mhor Working Group) have been working on developing the idea of a new community Hub on the Dail Mhor site in Strontian. With a derelict primary school, and the rest of the existing Dail Mhor buildings reaching their end of life (with a suggested lifespan of 3-5 years left at best), the redevelopment of this site seems to be a natural conclusion. The proposal is also based on indications from local community action plans for a health hub to support care services across the area and ongoing discussions with NHS Highland on projected care needs.

Proposal

Urram are proposing a community-led, long-term, phased re-development of the whole Dail Mhor site, roughly in line with the enclosed Architect drawings. This redevelopment would include:

- A newly built care hub to provide a base for delivering care services across the area
- A new GP surgery for Strontian
- A large, bright new Village Hall
- Public spaces for meetings and / or events
- Six flexible housing units

Please note that the drawings enclosed only show an example of what our community could build and the types of services that could be provided. For example, Urram are aware that there isn't enough parking and the access to the flexi homes needs to be improved, but it's a starting point. At this stage, nothing is ruled out and nothing in, and the number of rooms, care suites, public spaces etc, as well as the wider layout including car parking, access etc. is very much open for discussion. Please see the appendix for more details.

Why is this needed?

With no specific statistics for the areas of Sunart, Morvern, West Ardnamurchan, Acharacle and Ardgour, available, we have to use the wider Lochaber statistics. The National Records of Scotland (NRS) estimate that by 2035, people aged 65+ will account for almost 1 in 3 of the Lochaber population and 1 in 10 people living in the area will be over the age of 80. This ageing population will obviously put a strain on an already pressurised NHS.

In addition, NHS Scotland's 2020 ambition is that "Everyone is able to live longer at home or in a homely setting." As our population ages, more people need care and more people will live alone. And as there will be fewer people of working age to provide paid care, we need to explore different ways to provide both day and overnight care, as well as support within the community.

By providing a health hub in West Lochaber, with attached flexible housing and space for respite and day care services, we hope to avoid hospital admissions and reduce lengths of stay in the new Belford Hospital.

The two respite and two flexible suites in our proposal are based on discussions with NHS Highland about current and projected need within the area. Over the past year Dail Mhor has been providing respite care only. 60% of users have come in from other parts of Lochaber or other parts of Highland. As there is an expectation that the hub will provide care for people in the West Lochaber area only, it is envisaged that the provision of the flexi homes and improved day care will limit the need for a larger number of respite and flexi care beds.

Dementia care is also huge issue for remote and rural areas as nursing care is required for people living with severe dementia. Dail Mhor has never been registered to provide nursing care, and in the past most people from our area with severe dementia have been looked after in Moss Park in Fort William or other residential homes with specialised nursing provision. As such, the proposal does not include nursing care as this requires a commitment from NHS Highland that is unlikely to be forthcoming. The Flexi homes will help people with early onset dementia and the day care and respite beds will support local families, but dementia care does remain an issue to be looked at in the longer term. We will endeavour to work with NHS Highland to make sure that the best possible care option is provided locally.

Building a care hub that is sympathetic and suitable for people living with dementia is a must. The Highland Dementia Strategy 2018-2022 estimates that there are currently around 4,500 known people living with dementia in Highland, both sufferers and carers, and that by 2035 it's predicted this number of people will almost double to an estimated 8000. With the current Covid crisis still in full flow, Urram must also consider designing and planning for future pandemics and viruses as part of the design.

Phased Development

This proposal is a long-term undertaking, which we anticipate could be anything from 4-7 years. As any development evolves, our priority will always be the continuity of care and keeping people in jobs. It's hugely important that we make sure there is no disruption to the delivery of a formalised care service. As such, we would want there to be a phased development, which could look something like this -

Phase One

- Full community consultation.
- Flexi homes agreed with Highland Council.
- Secure funding for feasibility study and work with consultants to carry this out.
- Work with HC to demolish primary school and part-clear site.

Phase Two

- Secure funding for community build.
- Agree new architect plans taking all views into account.
- Work with HC to provide Flexi homes development on brownfield site.
- Development of initial small care facility to support the flexi homes.

Phase Three

- Redevelopment of whole site in line with agreed plans.
- Demolish village hall, doctor surgery and care home and build a new village hall, reception and care wing.

What's next?

It's obviously very early days and this proposal still needs the backing of Highland Council as owners of the site, as well as local Councillors, and NHS Highland as long term 'anchor' tenants. However, those conversations have started to take place and are looking positive.

Community support

Due to Covid, we are unable to hold open days to talk to you face to face, so the bulk of our consultation will have to be done online, by post and by other socially distanced measures. We want to receive your thoughts and ideas on the initial ideas and design concepts enclosed, as well as any other ideas that you may have and want to share. We are here to listen. What do you think of the ideas being put forward? What else do we need to consider? In an ideal world, what else would you like to see included in the redevelopment?

- Inclusion of a hydro-therapy pool?
- Flexi homes, supported by this hub, in Kilchoan, Lochaline?
- An extended men's shed with craft club?
- Offices for rental / shop space or other means of bringing in some income?

Please tell us what you think on the enclosed questionnaire. Alternatively, please contact the following email address for more information. lara@sunartcommunitycompany.co.uk

APPENDIX

Further details of the proposal

The vision for the Care and Community hub includes a wing for care services, incorporating respite suites*, flexible care beds*, a GP surgery, rooms for clinics, district nurses, the Care at Home team, Ambulance Service etc.

Also envisaged is a large, purpose-built, new community hall (capacity 100 people) to provide a suitable space for ceilidhs, weddings, community use, the Wee Show and other events etc. Also included, there would be an attached café that could be used to cook for events, but also provide daily meals for the care hub, including staff lunches, day care lunches, lunch clubs etc. The plan includes space for additional public rooms which could be used for things like a mother and baby group, or as rentable meeting rooms, office spaces etc.

A major element of the development would be Flexible Housing units*, which you may have heard referred to as FIT homes. These Highland Council units are specifically designed for older people and people with particular care needs. On the concept plans, these houses are positioned adjacent to the care hub and the residents of these homes would be supported by this care staff at the hub.

We also envisage a large day care* facility which could be accessed by older people from across West Lochaber and an additional day care room for small scale groups.

*Respite suites – These are rooms that can be given to people who need ongoing daily support and are usually cared for by a relative or care provider. Respite care provides a break for the care giver, and the patient gets to spend time with other people.

*Flexible care suites – These are rooms that can be used for a range of different care needs eg. GP referrals, step up/down hospital beds, longer term or palliative care.

*Flexible homes are a type of supported housing. Homes are adapted to individual needs and residents are supported by healthcare technology and localised care services. As well as supporting the people living in these units, the care hub could also be the base for coordinating support services to Flexi homes in Kilchoan, Lochaline or other villages.

*Day care - Day care offers personal care during the day for those who are assessed as needing it.

Why can't NHS Highland or Highland Council do this?

The current Dail Mhor buildings, which are owned by Highland Council, have a very limited life span. NHS Highland lease the care home and the GP's surgery, the village hall is run by local volunteers under an agreement with Highland Council and the empty primary school is fast becoming derelict. Maintaining the current buildings is costing Highland Council and NHS Highland a huge amount and this is not sustainable. We have been advised that it would cost more to re-roof the buildings and renovate the ancient heating system than to knock the whole lot down and start again.



NHSH are also moving away from providing residential care in rural areas. This is because of the significant challenges associated with providing care in small, local residential establishments and the need to move from institution-based care, to care in the community. They have told us, categorically, that they will not be reintroducing residential care at Dail Mhor as a result. We have also been advised that they currently don't have any plans to redevelop Dail Mhor and have no money to invest in a new building. NHS funding for new buildings comes from applications to Scottish Government for Capital Investment and in fact they are looking towards a model of not owning any buildings.

NHSH are also committing to care models that help sustain localised Care at Home services and enable people to live in their own homes for as long as possible. Working in partnership with Highland Council to build Flexible homes, around an NHS supported care facility, is the only way we will ensure long-term care for older people in this area. By providing these units, Urram will also be able to offer people living with dementia an option to continue to live in their own community for as long as possible.

How can we make it happen?

Urram has been set up as a charity so that it can work more easily with local groups and organisations and act as the lead partner in any redevelopment, helping pull together the money required from a range of public, private and charitable sources. 'Partnership Funding' is the way many such developments are resourced these days. Urram aims to do exactly that. It will take time, but we must start now, and we welcome your views at this early stage.

Urram has a Board made up of local people from across all five community council areas, ensuring that views from across the area are taken into account. Anyone can apply to join the Urram Board, in fact, we are actively looking for new people with relevant skills and interests, both resident in the area or further afield. Minutes are public, to provide transparency and there are regular discussions with NHSH, Highland Council and other parties about developing the Dail Mhor site. With community backing, Urram will be in a strong position to move this forward.

Most importantly, no one else will take the lead on this. NHSH has no funding allocated to make this happen – we need to make the case for investment. Highland Council will not redevelop the site. Rather than see all the Dail Mhor buildings decline to the point they are not useable and need to be demolished, Urram want the communities of Acharacle, Ardgour, Morvern, Sunart and West Ardnamurchan to take matters into their own hands and take an active role in redeveloping the site.

This development provides the reassurance of long-term care in the area, particularly for older people, and it also provides much needed supported housing and bright, new public spaces. It will help to make this community thrive - providing the continuation of current jobs and create new long-term jobs, as well as encouraging families and younger people to stay in the area.

We can make this happen!