

LISMORE CHURCH, WEE MANSE AND GLEBE: OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE

Introduction

This Business Case presents a vision for the Church, Wee Manse and Glebe as an outcome from the community consultation process and indicates ballpark figures associated with community ownership with minimal input and use of the assets – the baseline option. It then outlines a proposed route map for development of the site as a multi-use space. Background information is provided in Appendices.

Background

Lismore Church requires significant expenditure to restore and maintain the historic building and this is beyond the means of the Congregation. The Church of Scotland have indicated their intention to dispose of the Church, preferably to an incorporated local group.

The community established a working group to consider the implications of the proposed disposal, which reported back at a community meeting on 13th October.

At this meeting, it was agreed that a community consultation would be held, to build consensus on the preferred use of the Church, Church House (Wee Manse) and Glebe, if these are passed to community ownership.

The Church of Scotland has declared its wish to see all formal offers for acquisition in place at the latest by December 2023.

All parties representing the Church locally (Congregation and Presbytery) and Community have agreed that ALL THREE COMPONENTS of the Church of Scotland assets on Lismore, should be disposed of AS ONE. This would give the Community the greatest degree of control of the situation, and enables all three parts: Church Building, Church House and Glebe, to contribute to the long-term vision.

Summary

The community has indicated support for community ownership of the three assets, to be managed as a multi-use space, in keeping with the site's history and spiritual and cultural connections. Continued use as a place for worship is agreed but this should be non-denominational – available to people of all faiths and none.

Initial proposals for uses of the Church – interpretation / education/ awareness of St Moluag and Lismore's archaeology and history; organised life events (weddings etc); spiritual retreats/pilgrimages and use as a performance space will all require development and time to secure budgets but funds could be secured at an early stage to provide some initial interpretation. Development of a garden of remembrance / facilities for scattering ashes could be in place relatively quickly with modest resource requirements. Similarly, the Wee Manse can be prepared for let for a 3-5 year period to bring income and allow time for business planning and fundraising; part of the building could be retained for church use.

Funds will be required for acquisitions (transfer, legal costs etc.); repair costs are estimated at £500k - £1M - both will require grants, donations and general fundraising. This is achievable, based on the experiences of other similar types of organisations and projects. Other potential uses can be developed over time, in a phased approach.

Once the basic repairs have been completed, annual costs for maintaining the assets and continued weekly worship, with minimal input, would be about £20-25,000, based on experiences on Lismore and elsewhere. Funds for this would be raised by donations, grants, fundraising, farming rent for the Glebe and letting the Wee Manse. This is also achievable, based on the experiences of other communities and organisations.

A Business Plan should be funded and commissioned at an early stage, the first phase being a feasibility study, followed by detailed business planning for the suite of uses as proposed.

Vision and proposals

The Vision is for a multi-use space that is used by the community and visitors and is managed for the long-term benefit of the island and its community. The Church building is the focus of the offer and will be used in ways that celebrate, promote, educate and raise awareness of Lismore's history, culture and environment and provide opportunities for people to explore and connect with the spiritual nature of this place. Use of the Church house and Glebe land will complement the purpose of the Church building in ways that support the long term viability of the three linked assets.

St Moluag's Centre:

A Centre for interpretation, exploration and celebration of St Moluag; Lismore's history as an ancient spiritual place and its culture and environment. Islanders and visitors can learn, explore and discover our history from pre bronze age to Lismore's importance in early Christianity in Scotland and its history as the burial place of the Kings of Dalriada. Get involved in the archaeology; see traditional farming in action; learn traditional crafts and skills; find out about Lismore's wealth of wildlife, its species and habitats of national and international importance and how the environment has been influenced by humans over many hundreds of years.

Visit Lismore as a deeply spiritual place: appreciate the opportunity for quiet reflection or participate in one of the spiritual retreats or pilgrimages that the Centre offers. Attend performances in the wonderful acoustics of the old Church building or take part in an island festival.

Go through life events here – celebrate weddings or christenings in what was once an ancient cathedral, enjoy a package of services and facilities provided by island businesses. Or celebrate a life well-lived and scatter a loved-ones ashes in the Garden of Remembrance.

Current status

The site is registered as being of National, and even International importance as a centre for religious and cultural renewal for over 1500 years; the community recognise that celebrating the history of this special place and taking on responsibility for its long-term well-being, comes with very significant challenges, specifically in resource terms (i.e. people and financial) – which the next phase of community work would need to test carefully.

Rationale

The concept

The proposed community ownership of the Church, Wee Manse and Glebe and the potential uses for these assets have been arrived at following a comprehensive consultation with the community, conceived and delivered from the ground-up. Details of the consultation process are presented separately.

The suggested uses are mutually compatible and the concept of a multi-use space allows flexibility to change or add to these uses in future, in a way that is appropriate to the building, its history and setting. Although a commercial aspect is necessary, to cover the costs of restoring and maintaining the assets, the key themes and proposed focus of spirituality; ancient and ecclesiastical history; community and environment all chime with the spirit of the place and its history. There are opportunities also, to raise awareness of current issues, such as climate change, biodiversity, belonging and global citizenship in the context of Lismore's place in the world.

Many of these aspects have potential to generate significant income in future as well as contributing to awareness and understanding of important issues, while also potentially, supporting other island organisations and local businesses – promoting the island's social and economic sustainability.

The Church building can support a variety of uses that are complementary, but the main focus must be on uses that generate revenue income. Suitable uses include an interpretation and education centre on Lismore's ancient history and the story of St. Moluag, delivered in collaboration with the heritage centre – and interpreting how this helped shape today's culture and environment. In keeping with this focus, spiritual retreats, courses and pilgrimages (for all faiths/ denominations) can be offered, appealing to Lismore's diaspora. Continued worship in the Church is important to most islanders, whether they attend regularly or not but there will be opportunities for all denominations to worship in the space if they wish. Life events will continue to be celebrated in the Church and this will be developed to offer packages of services and facilities, for example as a destination wedding venue, offering opportunities to build new island businesses and support existing ones. All these uses have the potential to generate income as well as allowing an element of continued free or low cost use by residents.

While the Church house may be offered as a long let for a period, while the Church project is developed, eventually, the building will be used in a way that supports the Church facilities and activities – such as back-office and catering; also providing some accommodation for people linked to the Church activities. The Glebe land is sufficiently extensive to allow space for on-site interpretation and further archaeological excavations, alongside quiet space in a garden of remembrance for scattering ashes. Farming can continue across some of the land, with a focus on traditional farming practices and interpreting these for visitors. Alongside sheep grazing, a solar array might generate income and produce energy for local use or export to the grid.

The context

Thriving markets exist for the range of activities that have been proposed for the three assets. A challenge will be to promote these effectively, to draw potential users in a way that protects the island's special qualities and is sustainable.

The tourism market for history and cultural attractions and activities remains strong in Scotland. The Scotland Visitor Survey 2015 and 2016 (*Jump Research for VisitScotland*) indicated scenery and landscape were a key motivation to visit in 50% of all respondents; history and culture 33% and

ancestry 9%. History and culture were important for 51% of visitors from Europe; 52% of long haul visitors and 26% of UK visitors. “My Scottish Ancestry” was important to 23% of long haul visitors. In fact, 21% of visitors to Argyll and Bute had ancestry from Scotland. In 2018, there were around 24 million visits to cultural and heritage-related sites in Scotland.

Argyll remains popular with tourists. Between 2017 and 2019 there were an estimated 6,531,000 visits to Argyll and Bute, with an average of 3,959,000 night stays at spend of £443 million – just over one million overnight trips per year (*Argyll and the Isles Factsheet 2019, published Jan 2021, VisitScotland: Insights*). Visitors were most commonly from elsewhere in Scotland (50% of all overnight stays and 33% of total overnight spend) the next most prevalent being the rest of Britain and then North America. A high proportion of visits were day trips (5.5 million) spending £182 million; 0.4 million day trips were to visit a castle or other historic site.

There is potential to tap into these markets and attract visitors to learn about St Moluag and Lismore’s history – there is a strong and compelling story to tell. Facilities of a similar type and scale attracted 3,000 – 7,000 visitors annually in 2014 (*Moffat Centre Visitor Monitor – see Appendix 2*) but there is potential to increase these numbers significantly with careful marketing, working with the Comann Eachdraidh. Potential impacts of high visitor numbers could be managed through focusing on organised experiences, working with existing and new businesses and organisations, as well as providing island visitor transport.

Pilgrimage continues to be a driver of travel in many destinations in Scotland and around the world (*Insight: Trends 2019, VisitScotland*). The Pilgrimage route Dalriada Way runs from Tarbert to Lismore, covering 100 miles over 8-10 days. There are opportunities to build on that established connection to offer packages to individuals and groups, working with island businesses. Wider spiritualism is a particular growth area, so much that VisitScotland has revealed a Chakra map of Scotland linking possible holidays in Scotland with body energy points. One of the proposed Church uses is to offer spiritual retreats, which is popular with non-believers as well as people of different faiths - also possibly linking this to the wellness trend.

VisitScotland research has shown that protecting mental health and a need for change and connection are key motivators for holidaying in Scotland. Almost a quarter (24%) of people from the UK and Ireland took a holiday in Scotland last year to specifically protect their mental health from the impact of COVID-19. Consumer spend in Scotland on wellness is £6.6b – 3.9% of Scotland’s total economy (*The economic opportunities of the wellness economy for Scotland - Additional Research with Context Economic and Social Research May 2021*). A whole range of wellness and spa experiences can be offered. But on Lismore, ecotherapy or walk and talk therapy would fit with these interests as part of a package of activities, for locals and visitors.

According to VisitScotland, there is growing evidence of travellers searching for self, space and spirit in their holiday plans and trends include more focus on localism and the unique identity of a location, promoting authentic Scotland and the opportunity to live like a local. The Church project could offer the opportunity to educate and raise awareness – promoting local skills and craftsmanship (everything from traditional building and drystone dyking to weaving, spinning and traditional dyes) through workshops, demonstrations and retail. Also, making use of the fine acoustics to provide performances and festivals. Offering demonstrations of traditional farming techniques and the opportunity to get involved also fits with this trend. There is a market for people who would pay to participate in archaeological digs and research and other working holidays, such as farm holidays or conservation breaks, organised with local businesses and organisations.

An overall emotional experience is a powerful factor when choosing where to travel but it is also important for locals and for visitors from closer to home. Lismore's combination of nature, history and welcoming spirit provides that sense of connection and enrichment that people are looking for nowadays.

Destination weddings have risen in popularity in recent years, the global Destination Wedding market is estimated at \$16B annually. The Scottish wedding industry was worth £963M in 2018, with autumn as the most popular season to marry. Around 5000 weddings in Scotland annually involve residents from the rest of the UK. With the average cost of a wedding in Scotland being £19,719 (in 2019) and spend associated with guests attendance at weddings estimated at £233M (in 2017) there is huge scope in this market. Scotland was also a popular choice for couples from the EU and Commonwealth and opportunities exist in American markets, where destination weddings are particularly popular and where this also ties in with the motivation of ancestry. Lismore's stunning scenery is also a selling point - scenery was the main motivator for 84% of destination weddings in Argyll and Bute in 2018. (*Source: Tying the knot in Scotland: Examining Scotland as a destination wedding venue – VisitScotland Insight Dept Dec 2019*). Although providing wedding packages involves a great deal of organisation and resources and is definitely not a short – term option, other than offering a venue, this is something that could be considered longer term, working in partnership with local businesses.

Cremation accounts for about 78% of funerals in the British Isles (*The Cremation Society*). There is a trend for scattering ashes in beauty spots and places of personal significance but many want a dedicated space where their loved one can be remembered. Many organisations offer a Garden of Remembrance where ashes can be scattered, along with natural burials, and some community organisations have been developing this model alongside other developments when land is purchased for community benefit. Options can include scattering ashes with an entry to a Book of Remembrance; ashes internment and provision of a stone, plaque and / or dedicated tree. This is an option that could be developed at relatively low cost in the Glebe, with a dedicated area fenced off and planted. This would be fairly low impact in terms of archaeological interest and ongoing costs would be largely restricted to land maintenance.

Developing community and locally owned electricity generation is key to resilience. The development of a solar array on the extensive ground above the Church would generate income and electricity for local use as well as off-setting carbon emissions from other aspects of the developments on-site.

The various options suggested by the community and explored here involve varying resource and income implications. Some could be implemented fairly quickly at relatively low cost, while others require a longer lead-in time, higher funding levels but potentially, greater returns. A phased approach is proposed, to build on successes and experience that develops. But an option remains to do the minimum to keep the Church available for community use while developing low impact activities that provide modest but reliable income streams.

Alternative options

Through the consultation process, a range of ideas were suggested by residents and people involved with Lismore. These are summarised in Appendix 1 and presented in detail in the consultation reports. Some options were not feasible, for example due to the history and archaeology of the site but most were compatible, or at least not mutually exclusive.

At the drop-in session, participants were invited to indicate their top three preferences by placing coloured dots against each idea. The ideas that received most preferences were:

Church: Life Events – weddings, funerals etc- including destination wedding venue (37 votes);

Interpretation and exhibition – in association with heritage centre on ancient history; St Moluag; ecclesiastical history etc (23 votes); Performance space (19 votes); Quiet space – contemplation, meditation, sanctuary, retreat (10 votes).

Church house: Accommodation for church events (27 votes); Long term let (21 votes); Support (back office / catering etc) function for church (18 votes).

Glebe land: Historical – archaeological interpretation and further excavation (36 votes); Burial plots / area for scattering ashes/ garden of remembrance (33 votes); Farming (19 votes).

Many other ideas were compatible with other potential uses but did not receive the largest number of votes. These could be revisited in future with a view to incorporating them into a multi-use facility. The idea of a solar array was also raised in the workshop event and this merits investigation.

Implications

- To do nothing will lead to the community losing the use of the Church building permanently
- Potentially, if the building is not maintained properly, access to the graveyard may be restricted if the building becomes unsafe
- In the long term, creating a ruin proactively might be an option but this would entail costs to remove the roof and Victorian features and to make the structure safe. It would then incur ongoing costs for basic maintenance and public liability insurance etc
- Without a Church, there will be no base in which to hold funerals, so use of the graveyard may reduce and it may be lost also
- If the community does decide to take ownership, the costs – financial, time, volunteer effort – will be huge. The capacity of the community to offer more volunteer input is limited
- The appointment of a project manager / development officer will be essential to take the project forward and this will require funds to be secured at an early stage
- Ongoing financial and legal liabilities will be placed on the community once it takes ownership.

SWOT:

<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History and archaeology – important in national context; strong story to tell • Scheduled monument; designated landscape • Cultural significance; religious significance • Scope for developing visitor experience; exhibition space; museum space • Scope for performance space; arts venue; attraction for pilgrims; retreat/ meditation etc – compatible, not mutually exclusive 	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designations / scheduled monument constrains uses of the site and degree of change allowed • Site constraints on water availability? • Potential difficulty in securing utilities on site • Challenge to find funds for ongoing management • Volunteer fatigue – need for paid employee to take forward
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide range of funding opportunities to help set up and cover repair costs • Opportunity to form a lasting visitor attraction that will employ locals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential conflict if opposing views don't agree • Potential for nuisance to neighbours? • Church needs WC facilities and a small kitchen if it loses the use of the wee manse • Archaeological restrictions on development opportunities • May be beyond limited island capacity to manage effectively • Challenge to find funds for ongoing management
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large diaspora – could secure funds from wide range of sources • Donations and crowd funding possible • Tell the unique story of Lismore's history and the significance of the church site • Grants and funds from charitable trusts available • Variety of ideas put forward, many of which are compatible and could form basis for a multi-use space • Funding opportunities to employ locals/ support local businesses in the construction, development & management phases • Long term opportunity for community to start to be in charge of some of its affairs 	<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CoS might refuse to offer wee manse and glebe as part of package • Community might not reach agreement on preferred options for use of church • Funds might not be available • Costs might become restrictive • Might not secure necessary permissions – planning consent etc. • Volunteer fatigue (with knock-on effects on other island facilities/ organisations) • Some uses might undermine viability of public hall whilst not providing adequate facilities for replacement of hall • Maintenance costs • Debt liabilities

Resource Requirements

Estimate £500k+ (may be up to £1M) for basic remedial and repair work to the Church building – one-off capital cost to be covered by grants, donations and crowd funding; required regardless of the ongoing use of the building.

Other costs would depend on the uses and any related changes and facilities required.

For example:

Further refurbishment might cost £100-150,000, depending on the degree of change (removing some pews, putting some on casters, installing glass partition below and / or above mezzanine etc.) - also to be covered through grants and donations / fund raising.

Employment of a Development Officer / Project Manager is essential if the church and wee manse are to be used for other purposes – volunteer input won't be sufficient to make it happen – ca. £30-35k+ per year.

Annual running costs

Annual running costs are distinctly different to the substantial costs involved in repairing the Church and any repairs or upgrades required to the Wee Manse. Below are outline costs and potential income if we do the bare minimum – these suggest that the community could take ownership and cope with the costs, even if there was limited activity in terms of social enterprise for income generation. The various uses of the Church and related assets that have been discussed would incur higher costs but might generate more income. Budgets for these options would need to be investigated first in a Feasibility Study and then in a full Business Plan.

Option 1

As a minimum, the Church could continue to be used in its current form, following the basic remedial work that is required.

Indicative Costs: Based on previous costs reported by the kirk session (see appendices), annual costs are likely to be between £20-25,000. This is similar to running costs incurred for other relevant types of buildings elsewhere (see Appendices 3, 4 & 5). This is broken down to the following cost estimates:

Insurances £4,000
Heat and light £6,000
Repairs and maintenance £8,000
Basic marketing £500
Admin / Sundries £1,000

Indicative Income: In the short to medium term, these costs could be covered by grants, donations, fund raising activity and farming rent.

Option 2

Following the basic remedial work, uses that can be implemented fairly quickly would potentially attract an income to help pay for basic annual running costs with some a modest accrual of funds. Modest improvements could be made to the Wee Manse to enable it to be offered for let for a three to five year period. A garden of remembrance could be developed, with plots for scattering or interring ashes offered almost immediately – provided with a memorial stone, plaque or tree (this facility would be marketed off-island and is distinct from the existing/ extended graveyard, which is available to island residents). Simple interpretation telling the St Moluag story could be provided in the Church, inviting donations (box and QR code/ online facility) and honesty box for small leaflets or goods.

Indicative Cost estimates:

Insurances £4,000
Heat and light £6,000
Repairs and maintenance £8,000
Marketing £1000
Admin / sundries £1,000
Materials – burials £350
Part-time Officer £15,000

Interpretation boards £21,000 – capital cost
Wee Manse basic upgrade £5,000 – capital cost

Signage (£800) and 200m fence (@ £6/m) – burials £2000 – capital cost

Indicative Income:

Donations £15,000 (from visitors and off-island donations – estimate 3-4,000 visitors annually (based on visitor numbers at similar attractions – see Appendix 2). Friends of Lismore Church scheme would generate £3,000 annually if 30 people donated

Charges (church hire) £2500

House rental income £4,200 (@ £350 / month)

Burial income £1,950 (based on initial 5 clients scattering ashes @ £250, one memorial plaque @ £300 and one dedicated tree @ £400; numbers may increase with effective marketing)

Farming rent £2,000?

Grant/ fundraising (interpretation) £21,000

Grant / fundraising (wee manse) £5,000

Grant / fundraising (fence/signage) £2,000

Grant / fundraising (staff) £15,000

Option 3

Develop the preferred uses identified in the consultation process, implemented in phases.

Additional uses will incur higher costs but the package should attract suitable income and feasibility must be tested prior to developing each use.

Church:

Interactive interpretation and charged-for facilities, in collaboration with heritage centre

Delivery of education workshops and sessions

Development of spiritual retreats and pilgrimages

Wedding packages

Development of schedule of performances / festival, in collaboration with hall and heritage centre

Manse:

Long let, followed by development of office / shop facilities

Glebe:

Farming rent

Working holidays / day sessions (charged-for) related to archaeological excavations

Expansion of natural burial business

Solar array

Potential income – longer term options

A wide range of potential sources of grant funding exist for all aspects of the proposals, including asset purchase and restoration / refurbishment; interpretation facilities and equipment; garden establishment and materials and so on, as well as organisation, planning and design costs. These include: Scottish Land Fund; Heritage Lottery Fund; The National Churches Trust; The Robertson Trust; Garfield Weston Foundation; Architectural Heritage Fund; Community Led Local Development (CLLD); HIE; Scottish Government; The Community Ownership Support Scheme; Community Enterprise; National Lottery Community Fund; Adapt and Thrive Programme (Scottish Government); Arnold Clark Community Fund; Foundation Scotland; The Land Trust; The William Syson Foundation; Local Authority grants; Scottish Government Regeneration Fund; Hugh Fraser Trust; CARS; Islands Green Recovery Programme; Sir Boyd Tunnock; Historic Environment Scotland; The Wolfson

Foundation; Fraser Foundation; AHF Transforming Heritage; CC Communities Foundation; EB Scotland; Scottish Landfill Communities Fund; The Hunter Foundation; Big Lottery; Corra Foundation; Crown Estate; Foyle Foundation; Tom Farmer Foundation; Esmee Fairbairn Trust.

Income levels will vary over the first few years as grant is secured for repair and restoration works and then for specific developments. The accounts from other organisations managing similar types of buildings and projects suggest that grants will remain a key income stream in the long term. Income from sales etc often depends on the presence of a shop / café and on entry to a museum / visitor centre - and is related to visitor numbers but income is also generated from events, venue hire and delivery of workshops, courses, experiences and talks. Many organisations rely on donations, which are an essential part of the income package.

Donations vary from year to year and may be associated with specific activities or campaigns and in the examples of relevant organisations outlined in Appendices 3 & 6, this can vary from £1,000 to £70,000. Large grants are associated with building works and other significant projects but information on the organisations looked at suggests that annual grants towards running costs or small scale projects range between £30-60,000. It can be extremely difficult to secure grant for items that are not project related so the trick is to frame projects in a way that can also support the basic functioning of the organisation and its assets in acceptable ways. Sales and entry tickets for similar scaled projects around the Highlands and Islands are around £14-28,000. See Appendices for examples of income generated by other centres.

Recommendations

1. Engage with CoS on the conditions of a disposal – seeking transfer of all three assets at minimal cost
2. Depending on progress made in discussions with CoS, secure funds for initial transfer/ purchase, Business Plan and Project Officer costs
3. Commission Business Plan to be delivered in phases: Feasibility study – Confirmation of initial package of multi-space uses – Development of detailed Business Plan
4. If the transfer of assets progresses satisfactorily, then:
 - a. Seek donations, grants and fundraising for required repairs and initial refurbishment
 - b. Develop Garden of Remembrance and initial interpretation in Church and offer Wee Manse for let for 3 – 5 years (securing grant to help make it happen). Retain part of building for ongoing Church use
 - c. Work with partner organisations and local businesses to develop package of activities and facilities associated with the preferred uses