



# Knocknagael: a Green Hub for our Community

Newsletter Issue 1: November 2023

[www.knocknagael.org.uk](http://www.knocknagael.org.uk)

Welcome to the first edition of our newsletter; the first of many we hope. We aim to produce a quarterly newsletter for our membership & interested parties.

The stimulus for us to produce a newsletter is two-fold. Firstly to ensure that you are all kept up with developments following the momentous news that the review of the decision *not* to agree to the transfer of the Smiddy Field resulted in a Ministerial direction in our favour. And secondly to ensure that we are as accessible as possible to all current members, prospective new members, partner organisations and any interested parties. To this end, we attach on the following page a list of the current Knocknagael directors, and would be really keen to hear comments, suggestions, and, in particular, any interest that you may have in becoming involved in the initiative. We'd love to hear from you!

To recap, in early September we heard the result of a review that we had requested into the decision to refuse our request to transfer ownership of the Smiddy Field at Knocknagael to community ownership through the provisions of the Community Empowerment Act. An independent panel recommended that the original decision to refuse the asset transfer be overturned, subject to a number of conditions, and

Scottish Government ministers accepted this recommendation.

Our task over the coming months is to negotiate the necessary hurdles and bureaucracy, but we hope to be able soon to make a start on our plans to create a Green Hub for the local community, including allotment provision, an orchard, amenity and recreational areas, and a community local food growing area.



## Eco hub charity wins eight-year farm fight

Community group's bid to buy land succeeds despite crofters fears



This development was quite a milestone in what has, to date, been a challenging eight-year journey, and the Minister's decision attracted some significant local press interest, as illustrated in these examples from the P&J, the Inverness Courier and the West Highland Free Press.

At the time the decision was made public, our Chairman, Maria was keen to ensure that there is a shared understanding that:

*'We still have quite a way to go before finalising matters, such as securing funding and agreeing specific conditions of transfer. We want to thank everyone who supported us and helped us get this far. We look forward to a good working relationship with all partners and neighbours including the farm at Knocknagael. We would not have got to this stage without the support of members and partner organisations'*

And finally, some may be wondering about the significance of the logo on the top left of this newsletter. It is a representation of the Knocknagael Boar Stone, which is a pictish carving dating from 400-600AD that was moved from a field in Knocknagael Farm to its current home in the Highland Regional Council headquarters (see [Knocknagael Boar Stone - Highland Pictish Trail](#)). There are neither Boars nor Picts in Knocknagael any longer, but a careful archeological survey to uncover any other important relics will be undertaken as part of our plans for the Smiddy Field

# Knocknagael Directors with contact details



**Maria de la Torre** is our Chairman. She is an environmental lawyer with a PhD in environmental habitat protection from Aberdeen University. She works for Nature Scot and has 20 years' experience in the public sector, working as an advisor on agricultural policy, environmental farming practices and agri-environmental funding schemes. She has significant experience of working with communities and members of the public. She has been a member of the local Community Council since 2014 and Chair for the last five years



**Steve Rowan** is our Company Secretary. He comes from the north of England and has lived in the Inverness area for nearly 40 years. Originally employed in local government social work, he left to establish a second career as a director of an IT consultancy. Steve has been interested in environmental issues and community land use for many years and was a trustee of Aultnaskiach Dell SCIO – a small woodland in the centre of Inverness. Steve is also a trustee and director of Citizens Advice Scotland and chair of Inverness, Badenoch & Strathspey CAB.

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**Sandie Craig** is joint owner and manager of Oil and Vinegar Inverness, an established franchise retail business in the city centre. She has experience of customer service, running the physical shop and the online mail order business, marketing and working together as a small team. Although no longer practising, Sandie spent 10 years with the Valuation Office as a Chartered Surveyor before taking an extended break to look after family. She lives in the local community, is involved with the church and is interested in gardening, food, walking and cycling.



**Alastair Simmons** has been living in the Highlands for over 16 years working on a wide variety of horticultural, green space and local environmental projects. His experience over 25 years range from working with inner city communities in: London & Sheffield, and with people with learning disabilities and a landscape survey of Cairngorms National Park. He has worked all over Scotland from Solway to Shetland for Nature Scot. He has a MA in Landscape Architecture and a BSc in Environmental Management. He has just started working on greenspace development at Raigmore Hospital.



**Gordon Macdonald** is originally from the Highlands. His work experience includes a variety of accounting roles in various parts of the UK, returning to the Highlands in 2002 as Head of Finance in a public sector organisation. He took early retirement in 2015 to look after his father. Personally, he loves just being outdoors – is self-sufficient in fruit & vegetables and enjoys cycling in the wonderful local scenery. He sees Knocknagael Ltd as an opportunity to work with a team of people of many backgrounds for the community and strongly believes this is a practical, achievable project.



**Ronald MacVicar** is originally from the Isle of Skye, and has lived and worked in Inverness since the early 1980s. Now retired, he had a 30-year career as a local GP at the Cairn Medical Practice, and a 15-year career in medical education. From his twin-track career in medicine and education, he brings to Knocknagael Limited an interest in and focus on the potential wellbeing and training/learning benefits of the initiative. He is a keen gardener, carrying on a longstanding family tradition of productive use of available land.