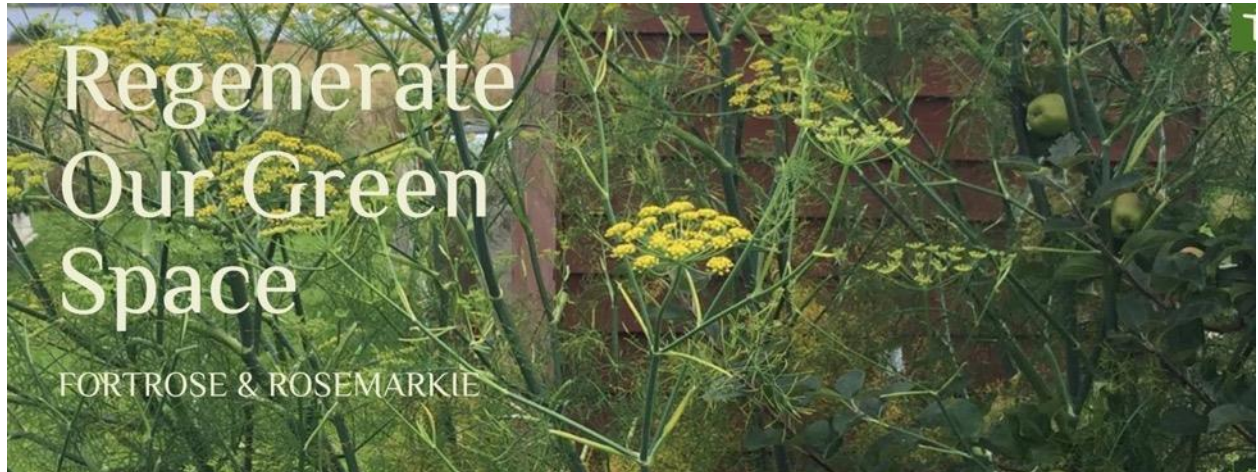




REGENERATE OUR GREEN SPACE

NESS COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT

FEASIBILITY RESEARCH REPORT

JULY 2024

Produced for Regenerate Our Green Space (ROGS) Ltd, by
Helen Barton Consulting
(Housing and Community Resources)
E: helenbarton602@gmail.com
W: www.hbarton.co.uk

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INTRODUCTION

Regenerate Our Green Space Ltd (ROGS) is a Company Limited by Guarantee, operating on a social enterprise model with a voluntary Board of Directors, in the Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council area.

Their vision is:

“to create places which are useful and beautiful green spaces that are inclusive for people and wildlife, while encouraging a cohesive and strong community spirit.”

ROGS have identified an area of currently unused land in Fortrose that is available to purchase for community use. They aim to develop the land as an amenity greenspace for the benefit of the local community. The site will be owned and controlled by community members, to:

- Create a community garden area,
- Create new allotments for individual and community use, and
- Support nature by protecting and improving areas for wildlife and increased biodiversity.

Following an invitation to quote in July 2023, the Directors of Regenerate our Greenspace Ltd (ROGS) commissioned Helen Barton Consulting as lead consultant, working with Horner and MacLennan Landscape Architects to deliver the following:

- Support the group to undertake stakeholder and community engagement.
- Liaise with the group members, key stakeholders and other consultants to collect and collate the information required for the feasibility study.
- Produce a landscape plan and provisional costings.
- Scope and identify potential funding options.
- Review regulatory and operational requirements, organisational structure, risk assessment and risk management.
- Synthesise the information into a Feasibility Report.
- Prepare a three-year Business/Project Plan for the project.

Ecological surveys have been carried out by ecologist Phil James with assistance from ornithologist Alister Clunas. A topographical survey has been completed by Geodata surveyors. A site valuation has been provided by Shepherd's surveyors.

This report summarises the consultation and additional research undertaken to support ROGS plan for community allotments, growing space and community greenspace in Fortrose. It includes survey and engagement feedback, a community profile, market research and learning from other projects and research. Funding options have been scoped and early-stage financial projections and analysis have been provided.

The findings are presented to the Directors of ROGS to inform the development of their plans and a three-year business plan.

BACKGROUND

REGENERATE OUR GREEN SPACE LTD

Regenerate Our Green Space Ltd (ROGS) is a voluntary organisation formed in 2022. It was initially inspired by the Highland Good Food Conference in 2021, which provided inspiration for communities in the Highlands to seriously consider community food growing as a way to reduce “food miles” and increase local knowledge and experience of a more sustainable way of living.

Recent world events and their economic and social consequences have led to changes in the way people want to work and live, with more people locally working from home, and a surge in demand for the only existing local growing space at the Rosemarkie Allotments. ROGS therefore plans to take advantage of current government policy directions that support communities to become more sustainable and resilient through community ownership and management of land and buildings to deliver better economic, environmental and social outcomes for local communities. There is also a desire to build in greater resilience and food security through increasing local knowledge in the production of sustainable and locally grown food.

They have also identified that since the completion of new housing developments, the population of Fortrose has grown considerably, with new households moving in, and increasing number of residents commuting to work. Consequently, people know and meet each other less, and the town has lost some of the community coherence it once had. The new housing estates are physically disconnected from the town centre, exacerbating the social disconnect, with little opportunity for informal meeting. A community-run café at Rosemarkie beach is very popular with locals and visitors, but operates on limited hours during the winter. A popular local sit-in café in Fortrose closed during 2023, leaving Fortrose with one exclusive “high-end” eatery, and a hotel and pub that are not open during the day. There is no existing community hub for informal daytime use by the community. A paucity of accessible greenspace combined with a post-pandemic surge in demand for allotments at nearby Rosemarkie, has added impetus to the ROGS Directors’ most ambitious project to create new allotments, community food growing and a community garden in Fortrose.

The ROGS Directors believe that a community garden in an accessible central location with allotments and spaces for community food growing would provide a focal point for people in Fortrose to meet and work together. They have identified a need in the community for space where local people can work together and learn how to grow food sustainably, and to provide an attractive open space where residents and visitors can meet and relax. They aim to create a community owned space that will have a garden, orchard, wildlife space, allotments and community growing space.

ROGS have secured Stage 1 funding from the Scottish Land Fund to demonstrate broad support for the project in the local community and to better understand potential community benefit of the project. Site investigations and outline plans are being developed in parallel with further community consultation and stakeholder engagement.

ORGANISATION AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Regenerate our Green Space (ROGS) was first formed as a constituted community group in April 2022, and became a Company Limited by Guarantee in June 2023. It has been formed for the public benefit of the communities of Fortrose and Rosemarkie as defined by the community council boundary, following the purposes of sustainable development.

ROGS aims to regenerate local green spaces for the benefit of the community. Positive community action is at its heart, which will be delivered through community consultation, and the identification and management of sustainable projects that enhance, improve and restore the natural environment. The organisation aims to inspire, empower and support members of the community to take positive action to develop, lead and participate in projects, learning and activities that are beneficial to both the natural environment and members of the Fortrose and Rosemarkie communities.

Since ROGS was formed in 2022, the founding members have supported and assisted Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council's hedge planting at Easter Greengates, and Rosemarkie Amenities Association's hedge-planting near the community-run beach cafe in Rosemarkie. They have successfully lobbied Historic Environment Scotland to plant two large areas of the grounds at Fortrose Cathedral with wild flowers (planting began in autumn 2023). They have also worked with local residents to clear blocked paths at Feddon Hill, and organised community Spring Cleans around the Cathedral and at Rosemarkie beach.

They hope to partner with the Rosemarkie Amenities Association again to create wild flower patches throughout Rosemarkie village, and plan to lobby more widely for a reduction in the use of pesticides and herbicides in both Rosemarkie and Fortrose. They have also recently been asked by a local landowner to provide support for a nature restoration project at the Hill of Fortrose.



Photo: Community volunteers help to plant a new native hedge in Fortrose (Photo courtesy of Mr Jefferson and Fortrose & Rosemarkie Community Council).

The Directors of ROGS aim to make more land available to the communities of Fortrose and Rosemarkie for:

- Allotments,
- Community food growing,
- Community garden/s,
- Wildlife corridors,
- Protection of the natural environment,
- Restoration of habitats for nature,
- Improved pathways, and
- Empowerment of the local communities to embrace sustainable development.

Regenerate Our Green Space have signed the Highland Charter for Climate, Nature and Health.¹ They are members of several local and national networks and organisations that can provide support and advice for community land ownership and use. They currently include:

- Highlands and Islands Climate Hub,
- Highland Good Food Project,
- Highland Environment Forum,
- Community Land Scotland, and
- Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO).

ROGS also have a close and co-operative working relationship with the existing Rosemarkie Allotments and Garden Society (RAGS). RAGS have been established for several years for the specific purpose of managing the lease of private land and only to provide allotments. ROGS has been established since with a broader remit and to cover both Rosemarkie and Fortrose, which are geographically separate settlements on either side of the Ness peninsula.

The immediate need of this project is for amenity space in Fortrose, which cannot be delivered by RAGS. There is, however, scope for future synchronicity in terms of shared overheads such as annual insurance costs, and membership of relevant organisations such as the *Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society* and the *Federation of City Farms and Allotments*, for example. This ROGS project will supplement the existing allotment provision and will help to ease some demand for allotments that cannot be met in Rosemarkie. The market overlaps of the current and proposed allotment sites are explored in further detail later in this report. There may also be further scope for the organisations to merge into ROGS in the future. This is not currently being actively pursued by either group due to capacity of volunteer Directors being limited by the needs of their current projects, but will be considered by both organisations in due course.

¹ Highland Charter for Climate, Nature and Health, <https://www.highlandcnh-charter.com>, accessed July 2024.

THE BOARD

The current Board has six Directors and a Co-opted Director, drawn from the founder members of the organisation. Details of their individual experience and interests are provided at *Appendix 1*. Several of the Directors are existing allotment holders and/or have interests, qualifications or professional expertise in horticulture, agriculture, conservation and land management. They are highly experienced in running voluntary Boards and committees, with wide connections and networks across the communities of Fortrose and Rosemarkie through membership of other groups.



Photo: Board members gather support for ROGS as a beneficiary of the Fortrose Cooperative Local Community Fund, December '23.

The office bearers are Chair and Secretary. An ordinary member with qualified book-keeping skills provides a treasurer function for the group on a voluntary basis. An ordinary member with many years of similar volunteering experience and professional experience as a Manager in the voluntary sector liaises with the Chair to ensure proper corporate governance.

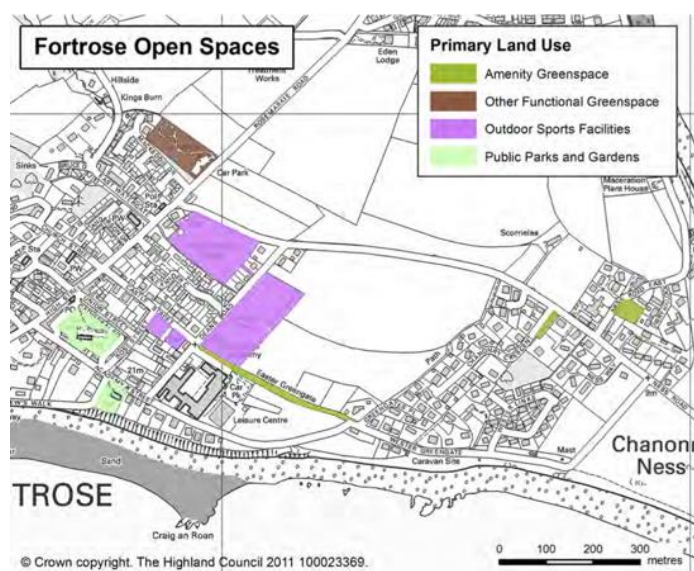
Directors of the Company will subsequently be elected by the Ordinary members at an annual general meeting. Ordinary membership is open to all individuals aged 16 or over who are resident in the community, entitled to vote and who support the purposes of the company. Individuals age between 12 and 15, or who are otherwise not eligible for Ordinary membership can apply for Junior or Associate membership with no voting rights, providing at least three quarters of members are members of the community at any time.

SITE OPTIONS

EXISTING GREENSPACE

A Greenspace Audit carried out by The Highland Council in 2010 mapped the existing availability of publicly available greenspace in Fortrose and Rosemarkie. The settlements are surrounded by greenspace, but most of it is actively managed and fenced off farmland, or has a designated use such as the golf course and campsites.

Away from the coastline, there is very little public greenspace at either settlement, other than the grounds of the Cathedral (owned and managed by Historic Environment Scotland) and small amenity areas within housing developments. Other greenspace is generally designated for sport or other functional use. The report noted a deficiency in provision for children and teenagers and other functional uses such as allotments, and poor overall accessibility to open, amenity greenspace.² There were, at the time of the study, no green corridors, and no natural or semi-natural public greenspaces.



Map: Extract from Highland Council Greenspace Audit, 2010

Since the audit was completed 14 years ago, amenity land at Ness Road East is now a large housing estate, and the land identified at Chanonry Crescent is now covered by scrubby pine, and not listed as greenspace in the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan. Public greenspace that does not have a designated function is therefore almost non-existent.

² The Highland Council, *Highland Greenspace Audit: Fortrose, 2010*, <https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/2989/fortrose>, accessed May 2024.

POTENTIAL SITES

The Board of ROGS have identified that any site needs to meet the following requirements:

Essential	Important	Desirable
• Accessible for Vehicles • Complies with local development plan • Uncontaminated land • Available	• Large enough for food growing and public amenity • Affordable • Parking available / potential • Access to water supply	• Close to town centre

With these criteria in mind, ROGs have scoped land in and around Fortrose that may be suitable, and have identified the following potential sites:

1. Tullochs Ness Gap Estate (0.69 acres)

A triangular parcel of land (shaded green/brown on the map at Figure 2) is owned by Tulloch Homes (now part of The Springfield Group). It is surplus to their needs following completion of the adjacent Ness Gap housing development with Albyn Housing Society in 2017. Tullochs have agreed in principle to sell or gift the land to ROGS.³ The land has been unused for many years, and is maintained only along the verges outwith the field that face the houses on Ross Crescent.

2. Field behind 19 Deans Road (approx. 2.3 acres)

This large area of land is next to the Tullochs plot above (shown as rough ground/shaded brown in the diagram at Figure 2). It has recently been sold in a private sale to the neighbouring owners at number 18 Deans Road. The land is not currently available for this project. The new owners are aware of our ROGs' potential projects and there may be scope for some collaborative rewilding/nature restoration project/s at a later date.

3. Highland Council Land, Black Isle Leisure centre (0.36 acre)

A small area of land at the Leisure Centre has previously been identified as a potential site for a Black Isle swimming pool, for which considerable local support and funds have been raised.⁴ The campaign for a pool has been active over several decades. The Foundation has recently taken a controversial decision to disburse its funds to the Puffin Pool in Dingwall.⁵ The land identified is currently maintained as amenity ground with no specific use. There is potential for it to be used

³ Correspondence 4th May 2023 confirms in principle agreement to sell to a suitable community group with two conditions of purchase. Email of 14 March 2024 grants permission to conduct topographical surveys.

⁴ Report to Scottish Parliament Pathways into Sport Inquiry, November 2008.

<https://archive.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/hs/inquiries/pathwaysintosport/PS39TheBlackIsleSwimmingPoolFoundation.pdf>

⁵ Puffin Pool Dingwall and ISPF, joint press release, 5th July 2024. <https://www.puffinpool.co.uk/post/press-release-funds-from-black-isle-swimming-pool-foundation>, accessed July 2024.

as a Stalled Space type project until such time as any permanent plans progress.⁶ An informal expression of interest in this or other unused land owned by the Council has been indicated to the Ward Manager. At the time of this study, no further response is available.

4. Christophersen Land (1.2 acre)

A strip of land that runs adjacent to the green path running down from the Academy/Leisure Centre car park is in private ownership by an overseas relative of the previous owner. The site is smaller than other preferred plots and potentially more exposed. However, it may still be suitable to deliver a number of ROGS objectives such as micro growing plots, areas suitable for wildlife, an orchard and wildlife corridors. Combined with the land owned by The Highland Council above, the combined plots also link to green footpaths between the Academy, leisure centre and housing developments.

The owner has been approached to ascertain whether they may be interested in selling or leasing the land to ROGS. They currently have no active plans for the land and are considering all options. They will respond to ROGS as due course, but at the time of this study the land is not available for sale or lease.

5. Fraser's Field at Greengates (approx. 1.8 Acres)

This privately owned field is currently unused and was previously agricultural. It is fertile, relatively sheltered, and mostly in the sun. It is easily accessible by foot / bike from nearby housing developments and easy walking distance from the town centre.

The site currently has outline planning permission for a small development of 12 houses, supported in the revised draft Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan (permitted development site FR02).⁷ The owners are keen to sell the field as a development site, and plans are well advanced for this. Access for vehicles or a future hub building may be restrained by a ransom strip owned by Tullochs along the boundary with Dolphin Drive, and the planning in principle application (23/01034/PIP) is currently stalled until a solution can be negotiated.⁸

The family have been approached informally and are sympathetic to ROGS's objectives. They may be prepared to negotiate an arrangement to sell or lease the field if the housing proposals do not eventually proceed. However, timescales for a clear outcome here are very uncertain and likely to be lengthy. At the time of this study, the land is not available for sale or lease.

⁶ Stalled Spaces Scotland was a Legacy 2014 programme commissioned by the Scottish Government and delivered by Architecture and Design Scotland (A&DS) to facilitate the temporary use of under-used green spaces, stalled development sites or vacant and derelict land in town centres throughout Scotland. The programme is no longer active, but case studies and practical guidance remain available at the website archive. <https://www.ads.org.uk/resource/stalled-spaces-scotland>, accessed January 2024

⁷ The Highland Council, Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan (Draft) 2023 pps 165-7; sourced at https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/development_plans/202/inner_moray_firth_local_development_plan, September 2023

⁸ The Highland Council, Planning Applications portal, Application 23/01034/PIP, sourced February 2024. <https://wam.highland.gov.uk/wam/caseDetails.do?caseType=Application&keyVal=RQSR6DIH500>

6. Field North East of the Eilean Dubh Care Home (2 acres)

This field is very accessible to the town, bordered by Ness Road and the main Fortrose / Rosemarkie Road/A832. This land has recently been subject to a protracted 3-year planning application by the Co-operative for the development of a larger store. The application (21/03142/FUL) was decided in January 2024 and has been refused.⁹ Amongst the eight reasons for refusal of the planning application are:

- Unplanned development of a greenfield site,
- Encroachment and erosion of the green wedge protecting the distinct identities of Fortrose and Rosemarkie,
- Detrimental impact on the landscape and visual character of the area, and
- Unplanned development of prime agricultural land resulting in loss of valued soils and biodiversity.

The planning decision may still be subject to appeal by the developers. No approach has been made to the current site owners and the land is not currently available for sale or lease.

7. Field by 'Scorrilea', adjacent to Ness Road (3 acres)

This is a sizeable, open field on the East side of Ness Road. It borders existing housing developments at Ness Road East and Chanonry Crescent. It is also at the edge of what is considered locally as a protected green belt buffer between Fortrose and Rosemarkie. The land is currently used for horse grazing. Current ownership has not been identified, and there are no known plans for the sale or lease of any part of the site.

8. Former Market Garden, Precincts Road (2 acres)

This is a moderate size site to the west of the town centre, formerly used as a small garden centre, and sometimes for grazing horses. It is within walking distance of the High Street, but the furthest site from newer housing developments. It is sheltered and has sun for part of the day but also partly overshadowed by mature trees. Access is difficult along a very narrow road. Parking could be difficult, and it is not visible to the community. Current ownership has not been identified, and there are no known plans for the sale or lease of any part of the site.

⁹ The Highland Council, Planning Applications portal, Application 21/03142/FUL, sourced February 2024.
<https://wam.highland.gov.uk/wam/caseDetails.do?caseType=Application&keyVal=QV9NBCIHLKA00>

SITE OPTIONS SUMMARY

A summary of how the identified sites meet the criteria identified by the ROGS Board is provided in the table below:

Site	Essential Criteria	Important Criteria	Desirable Criteria	Rank
1. Tullochs, Ness Gap	Meets all	Likely to meet. Size manageable	Yes	High
2. 19 Deans Road	Meets most Not currently available	May meet Size large	Yes	Med
3. Christopherson land	Meets some (availability tbc)	May meet Size OK, esp if combined with site 4	Yes	Med
4. Leisure Centre	Meets some (availability tbc, planning compliance tbc, interim use)	Likely to meet Size small	Yes	Med
5. Fraser's field	Not currently available	Likely to meet	Yes	Med/low
6. NE Ness Road site	Not currently available	Likely to meet	Yes	Med / low
7. Scorrielea site	Not currently available, less accessible to town	Not known	No	Low
8. Canonbury site	Not currently available, not accessible	Not known	No	Low



Figure 1: Approximate location of all sites considered.

There are no existing local landscape designations such as SSSI (Sites of Special Scientific Interest), AONB (Ares of Outstanding Natural Beauty) or SEPA (flood risk) restrictions on any of the sites identified in the above options that may otherwise restrict use as proposed.¹⁰

ROGS hope to secure other parcels of land that allow for development of other potential projects aligned to their objectives in due course. Positive letters of support from other organisations operating

¹⁰ NatureScot SiteLink map search, <https://sitelink.nature.scot/map> , conducted 14 February 2024; and SEPA floodrisk map search, <https://map.sepa.org.uk/floodmap/map.htm> ,conducted 14 February 2024.

in Fortrose and Rosemarkie show there is scope for significant synchronicity between the various voluntary groups in the community that will help to sustain local support, and will help ROGS to develop their projects and respond to future opportunities incrementally as volunteer capacity, local interest and community needs evolve.

PREFERRED SITE

The preferred site is Site 1 at Ness Gap.

Figure 2 Location of Site 1 at Ness Road/Deans Road, Fortrose.¹¹

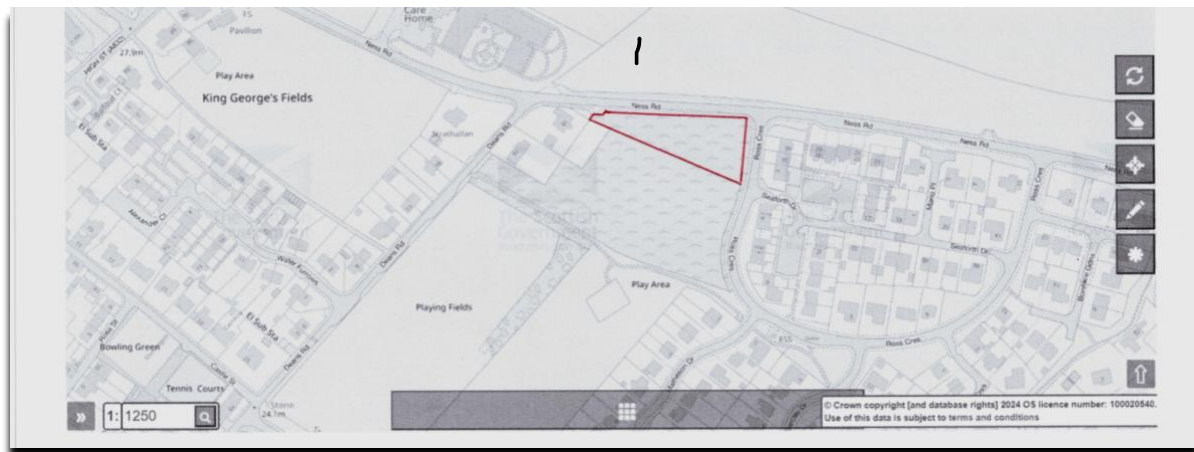


Photo: Site 1 as viewed from the Ness Road access gate, August '23.



SITE OPPORTUNITIES

At the time of this study, only the 0.69-acre triangular area of land (Site 1) owned by Tulloch Homes is known to be available. ROGS have identified that the site would be the most suitable location for various aspects of their project, including the provision of some allotment plots and for community

¹¹ Scotland's Land Information Service (ScotLIS) Title Deeds online search <https://scotlis.ros.gov.uk/map-search/273181/856665>, September 2023.

growing space. There is sufficient space on the site for ROGS to deliver their immediate aims of providing community and growing space in Fortrose on a small and manageable scale.

The site is an unshaded sunny field, bordering Ness Road and Ross Crescent. The field slopes gently South East towards the Moray Firth. The prevailing wind is south-westerly, though cold north and east winds coming off the sea can also affect the land. It sits within easy walking or cycling distance from adjoining residential areas, Fortrose Academy, Eilean Dubh Care Home and from the centre of the town. It is elevated above the Ness Gap housing development, with attractive views over the Moray Firth. (Further details provided at Site Survey below).

The land is currently unused and untended, and the whole site is overgrown. It has not been in any productive use for a considerable time, and has not been maintained since the housing developments were completed. It is currently in a neglected and unused state. Bringing it into community ownership and management would immediately improve local outlooks, providing both amenity and environmental benefits to the local community. A positive agreement in principle to sell or gift the land has been made by Tullochs, subject to some conditions noted below.

Allotment holders and site users are expected to be local to the community and will be encouraged to walk or cycle or take a bus to the site wherever possible. However, there is an identified need for a limited amount of parking space for cars and bikes. Roadside parking, already used for matches at the nearly football field, is available adjacent to the site without disturbing neighbouring residents. The site is accessible from Ness Road and/or Deans Road on foot and by vehicle for initial site preparations, via existing ungated access.

POTENTIAL CONSTRAINTS

The Tulloch site is smaller than the original site that the group had hoped to acquire. Plans have therefore been revised or adapted to make use of the land available.

An early masterplan for the Ness Road housing development shows the combined sites 1 and 2 as a potential location earmarked for a newbuild Primary school.¹² (Primary school provision for Fortrose and Rosemarkie is currently at Avoch Primary). However, no plans have been progressed, and no new primary schools in the Black Isle are identified for newbuild investment.¹³ The most recent Highland Investment Plan includes provision for a partial rebuild of Fortrose Academy, but no new addition to the school estate within the next ten years.¹⁴ In addition, site 2 is now in recently changed private ownership and is not available for development.

¹² https://wam.highland.gov.uk/wam/files/FBCBAD8556B083ED7528BC8586518497/pdf/19_04974_RCC-NEIGHBOUR_NOTIFICATION_LAYOUT_PLAN-1964673.pdf

¹³ The Highland Council, *Major schools projects progress report*, August 2023
https://www.highland.gov.uk/news/article/15468/major_school_projects_progress_report, accessed February 2024.

¹⁴ The Highland Council, *Establishing the Highland Investment Plan and Mechanisms to Fund It*, 9th May 2024,
https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/83230/item_9_establishing_the_highland_investment_plan_and_mechanisms_to_fund_and_deliver_it, accessed May 2024.

The Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (IMFLDP2) has now been examined by Scottish Ministers and was adopted in June 2024.¹⁵ The site is not earmarked for housing or other development in the revised plan. The only proposed development sites in Fortrose are two small sites with existing outline planning permissions at Ness Gap/Wester Greengates (FR02) and Greenside Farm (FR01).

The draft revised plan states:

- “The Ness Gap land not already earmarked for housing development could be suitable for either community or relocated retail use”. (Section 4, Places, p.154), and
- Identifies a priority to “safeguard and secure enhancements to local Green Networks to improve active travel and habitat connectivity” (Section 4, Places, p.155, Placemaking Priority 5).

Communications and an in-person meeting with Tulloch Homes have confirmed that they are willing in principle to sell or gift the land to ROGS subject to the likely following conditions:

- Transfer subject to ROGS obtaining any planning permission for the proposed use, with a right to review the planning application to ensure that the use will not be detrimental to the amenity of their adjoining development,¹⁶ and
- Subject to a long-term clawback arrangement requiring payback of the market value of the land to Tullochs if it changes from community use, and commercial or residential development of the land takes place in the future.¹⁷

These conditions are still subject to further negotiation as the plans move forward. The owners have meanwhile been happy to agree access for topographical and other surveys and for valuation.

Some initial planning guidance has been obtained by ROGS from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS). PAS anticipate that planning permission will likely be required for the creation of allotment plots, and for the erection of any related structures such as sheds, polytunnels, greenhouses or parking spaces. PAS advises planning permission may also be required for change of use.¹⁸

The National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) is in favour of allotments and specifically promotes “local living”, and proposals that will have a positive impact on health, which included access to allotments in both cases.¹⁹ Overall, the information above suggests that the use of the land for community growing/allotments could be supported.

¹⁵ The Highland Council, *Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (IMFLDP2)*, June 2024; sourced at https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/development_plans/202/inner_moray_firth_local_development_plan, July 2024.

¹⁶ As Tullochs do not own adjacent land, they can be notified of a planning application if it is required, and will have the same public right to comment on proposals as the rest of the community. They will not have any additional sway on a planning decision or outcome.

¹⁷ Letter from Sandy Grant, Managing Director, Tulloch Homes to Morag Bramwell, 4th May 2023, reconfirmed by email from Jordana Young, Community Engagement Co-ordinator, Springfield Homes, 14th March 2024. In-person meeting between Morag and Steve Bramwell, ROGS Directors and Kieran Graham, new Managing Director, Tulloch Homes, 2nd August 2024.

¹⁸ Email from Planning Advice Service (PAS) 26 August 2023.

¹⁹ Scottish Government, *National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)* 2023, sourced at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/documents/>, September 2023.

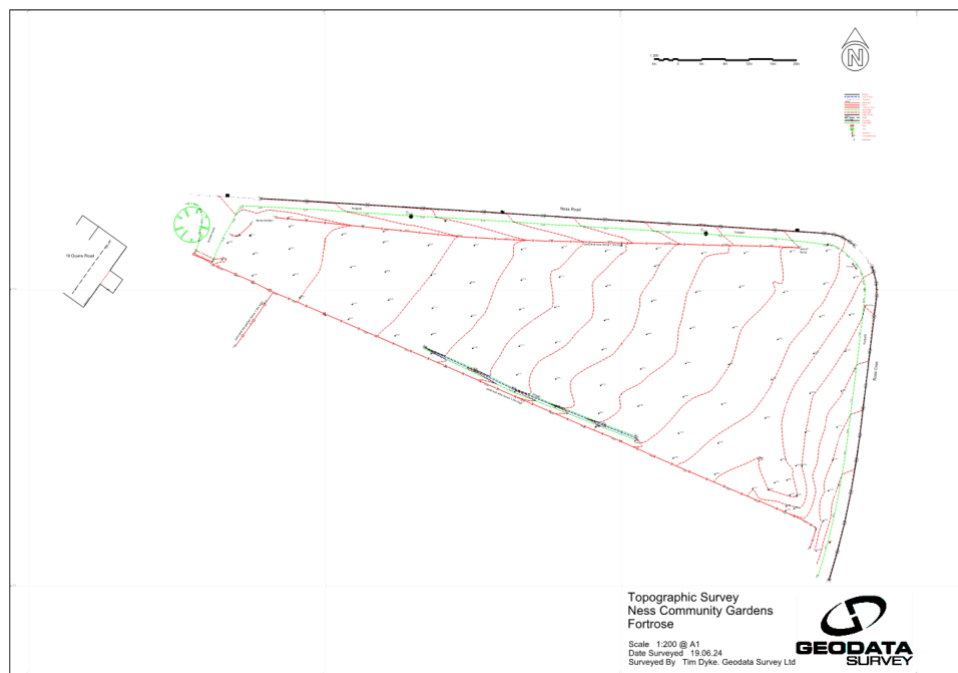
Pre-application advice is available from the Highland Council Planning Authority free of charge for non-profit organisations and community groups.²⁰ A preplanning application has been made before the site is purchased, to ensure that there are not likely to be any unreasonable constraints to the intended use.

The owners of the neighbouring property at Deans Road currently make informal use of the access from Ness Road to the rear of their property. ROGS are happy to negotiate continuation of this access, to maintain the existing positive neighbourly relationship, and to protect the neighbours from undue disturbance as far as practicable.

A detailed legal check of title conditions, wayleaves and public rights of way that may affect the property will be made before purchase. ROGS are not currently aware of any issues that might impact either acquisition or proposed use of the site.

SITE SURVEYS

The **topographical** survey carried out by Geodata Survey Ltd in June 2024 has mapped the site area and gradients. The survey has not identified any issues of significance.



Policy 15 of NPF4 promotes local living, and development proposals should consider local access to a variety of things including allotments. Policy 23 states that development proposals that will have positive effects on health should be supported including allotments.

²⁰ The Highland Council, Pre-Application Advice [Planning], .

https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/205/planning_-_policies_advice_and_service_levels/785/pre-application_advice/2, accessed May 2024.

Phil James has undertaken two **ecological surveys** of the site over a three-month period between May and June 2024.²¹ The surveyor has identified that the land was split from the field immediately to the south between 2004 and 2009, and has probably been out of use since at least that period. It appears to have been ungrazed for many years.

The overall site appearance is poor semi-improved grassland, with insufficient species available to assign the vegetation to a recognised NVC plant community.²² Nineteen perennial or annual plants were identified over two visits, although the predominant vegetation is coarse grass. At the second visit in June, only the herbaceous species were vigorous enough to rise above the grasses and flower. All of the species are common, both nationally and locally, and none are of conservation interest.

Ornithologist Alister Clunas carried out a series of 9 **bird surveys** between April and July 2024. Seven bird species were observed landing in the area proposed as community greenspace (Pheasant, Whitethroat, House Sparrow, Dunnock, Meadow Pipit, Reed Bunting and Linnet). All were feeding and five potentially breeding in the area. Three of the species (Whitethroat, Meadow Pipit and Reed Bunting) are Amber listed and one of the species (House Sparrow) is Red listed.²³ No species of national or regional significance were identified during the surveys.

ROGS recognise that the development of the site as proposed will cause some temporary destruction of habitat and displacement of species. Site works will be carried out during winter months and outwith bird breeding season, at times that will cause minimal disruption. As the space develops, input from expert advice available within the Board will ensure that habitats are provided to support a much wider range of biodiversity of plants, insects, birds and animals, and to support a much broader range of species than are found there now.

As no significant groundworks or permanent changes to land are anticipated, no **archaeological survey** has been commissioned. However, an earlier survey was commissioned by Tullochs on neighbouring land before permanent redevelopment for housing. This indicates that the Ness Gap peninsula has been in at least intermittent use for human habitation, agriculture and burials since Neolithic times.²⁴ The ecology survey further identified from historical Ordnance Survey sheets that the site has not been developed since at least the middle of the nineteenth century.

There are no existing local landscape designations such as SSSI (Sites of Special Scientific Interest), AONB (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) or SEPA (flood risk) restrictions on the sites that may

²¹ P. James, *Tulloch Triangle Vegetation Survey 2004*.

²² The British National Vegetation Classification, or NVC, is a system of classifying natural habitat types according to the vegetation they contain. <https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/a407ebfc-2859-49cf-9710-1bde9c8e28c7/JNCC-NVC-UsersHandbook-2006.pdf>

²³ A. Clunas, *Report of Bird Survey, Ness Road, 2024*. Birds were assessed using the BTO Breeding Status codes. <https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/u36/downloads/breedingcodes.pdf>, Conservation status is defined by the Birds of Conservation 5 report, <https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/publications/bocc-5-a5-4pp-single-pages.pdf>, accessed July 2024.

²⁴ Woodley, N C, Lochrie, J, Sheridan, A, Cowie, T & Christie, C 2020 'The Excavation of Neolithic Pits and a Bronze Age Burial Site at Ness Gap, Fortrose', *Scottish Archaeological Internet Reports* 91. <https://doi.org/10.9750/issn.2056-7421.2020.91>, accessed July 2024.

otherwise restrict use as proposed. There is no knowledge or evidence of there ever having been industrial or other use in the area that might present contamination issues or compromise the proposed land use.

DESIGN OPTIONS

A design brief informed by community feedback has been provided to landscape architects Horner and Maclellan, along with the details from site surveys above. The landscape architects have produced outline design options based on the information available to them, as outlined below:

Brief for Landscape Design

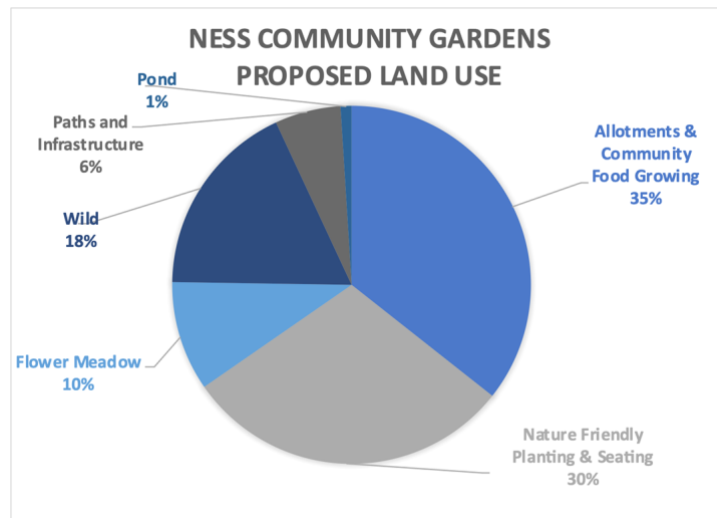
Regenerate Our Green Space strives for: healthy soil, elimination of pesticides herbicides and artificial fertilisers, hard surfaces which have minimal environmental impact, biodiversity, encouraging all forms of wildlife, re-use and repair, using local sources and suppliers, accessibility for disabilities and all ages. The project has an emphasis on food growing for health, community and the environment.

The design brief has been adapted during the course of this research to accommodate the known area of land available, and to take account of the outcomes of the ecological and topographical surveys carried out, as detailed above. It has also been heavily influenced by early feedback and community preferences from community consultations outlined in the next section of this report. Interim results of the community survey suggest three main priorities for the residents who responded:

- Regeneration of space for nature where people can connect with nature,
- Allotments and communal food growing space, and
- A community garden with meeting space.

Whilst the initial focus of the project was to secure land for allotments and community food growing, ROGS have also taken cognisance of community feedback and strong demand for regeneration of nature, wildflower planting, and for quiet social / seating spaces. The design brief has therefore been adapted to reflect a balance of project ambitions, community priorities and available land during the course of the project.

ROGS have therefore provisionally suggested the land be split up in these proportions;



ALLOTMENTS

Initial community feedback and unmet demand from the Rosemarkie allotments indicates a demand for allotments in Fortrose higher than can be provided at this site alone. However, feedback also shows there is a relatively high demand for smaller or shared plots, and for community food growing. At community information events, people who are not already keen gardeners have expressed some uncertainty about what might be involved or whether they have the time around work and family commitments to manage a whole allotment plot. ROGS have therefore proposed a design that meets the needs of experienced gardeners looking for plots, alongside 'new' or less experienced gardeners and community plots.

An initial design gives room for eight quarter plots (60m²), at least one of which will be set aside for community growing, ideally with raised beds accessible for wheelchair users. This may change depending on actual demand as use of the site evolves, and the design allows flexibility for plots to be split or extended if required. The sharing of plots with friends or other family members will also be encouraged, and has been found to work well amongst allotment holders at Rosemarkie.

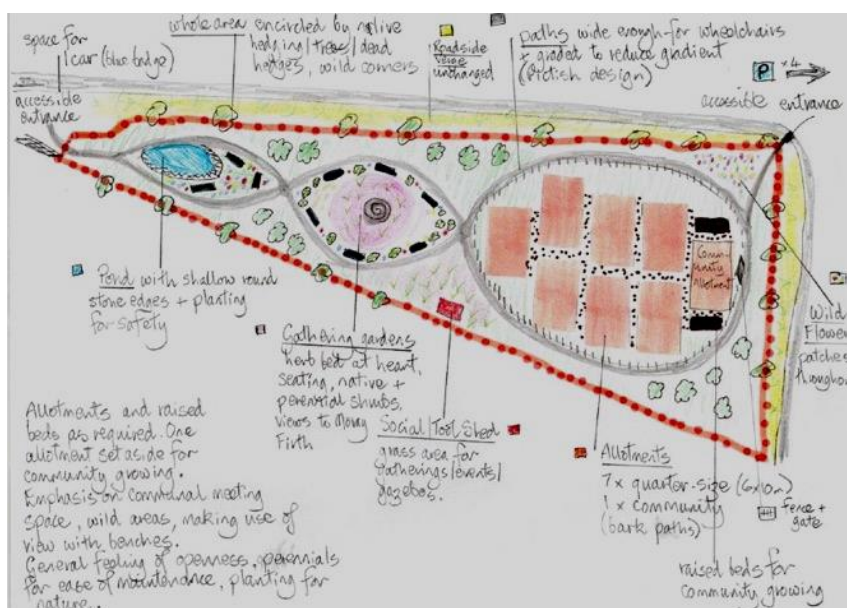


Photo: Indicative landscape design example by ROGS directors.

A “shelter belt” of native hedging and trees is proposed on both the North East (Ness Road) to protect from the two most frequent wind directions. Shelter may also be required along the South East boundary if it does not compromise any future availability of the land connected to 19 Deans Road.



Photo: Communal shed space at Ullapool allotments (author's own).

A small footprint has also been allowed for one communal shed initially for both the community growing space and the allotments. (As found, for example, at Ullapool and Cromarty, where plot holders share one larger shed for their own or communal tools).

Water will be collected from butts connected to the shed roof for horticultural use only. Options for connecting to a mains supply are being explored as a future option.

It is expected that the plot holders will have their own composting arrangements in the first instance. The need for and practicality of communal composting will be reviewed by the allotment members as use of the site develops.

COMMUNITY GARDEN

A recreational community garden will have access to Ross Crescent and Ness Road, as this would provide a wider “circular” walk through. The Eilean Dubh Care Home is nearby on the other side of Ness Road and will be encouraged to bring residents across to enjoy the garden space accessible growing beds.

The garden will have areas of quiet seating so that local residents can enjoy nature or meet friends. Planting will preferably be mostly into the ground rather than in pots (which need a lot of attention in dry spells and regular maintenance), with flowering shrubs and trees for wind shelter. Trees with edible fruit and nuts can be planted here in addition to any future orchard areas. Space for colour through annuals may be included, but will be mostly perennials to keep maintenance easier.

A small shallow pond feature may be a potential to support wildlife and biodiversity.



Photo: Public access duckpond at Drumsittal Road housing development, North Kessock (Picture Credit Catherine Lindsay, 2020).

Pictish influence design elements have also been incorporated throughout the design of the public space to reflect the known ancient heritage of the area around the site.

VERY WILD SPACE

The primary focus of this project has been to develop space within the community for food growing



Photo: Hi-Life Highland Wildflower Mosaics

However, ROGS recognise that in reclaiming a piece of currently unused land, some wildlife will be disturbed. To balance this impact and to improve overall biodiversity, they therefore also aim for at least a third of the space to be available for nature friendly planting - including a flower meadow, a small pond and seating areas - and for around a fifth to be left wild.

Across the neighbouring land to the south-west there is an area of grass and scrub which is currently untended and recently purchased privately with an ambition of further rewilding. ROGS' initial aims were to create a "wildlife corridor" through tree planting across this land. This may now be difficult to achieve, but hedge planting will be organised in such a way as not to compromise this in the future.

PATHS, INFRASTRUCTURE AND ACCESSIBILITY

Paths are intended to be 1 metre wide, well laid, low maintenance, as ecologically made as possible. They will ideally be suitable for wheelchair or mobility scooter, but will initially be grass paths until sufficient funding is available to develop them and/or additional land space becomes available.

Wheelchair accessible raised planters will be included in the communal garden area so that less mobile members of the community are also able to participate in gardening activities and/or enjoy sensory planting. These will be built by the Black Isle Men's Shed using local timber supplies.



Photo source courtesy of <https://www.instructables.com/Wheelchair-Accessible-Planter>

Able-bodied garden-users will be encouraged to cycle or walk locally rather than use cars wherever possible. Ness Road has existing on-road parking availability (already used during football matches at

the nearby football pitch, for example). The residential areas of Seaforth Drive and Deans Road also have some public parking spaces available during working days.

OPERATIONAL PLANS

The allotments will be run to the same principles as those used at Rosemarkie Allotments & Gardens (RAGS). A ROGS Allotment sub-committee will be set up and run by the allotment holders themselves, adopting the RAGS operational procedures. The Rosemarkie allotment site is kept very tidy, with plots reviewed regularly, using six measures (weed control, grass cutting, tidiness, neighbourliness, shed, cultivation) to provide constructive feedback to any allotment holders who need to take specific action. This ensures allotment holders keep on top of their plots and use them for the intended purpose, which includes restrictions on planting trees, and shrubs.

Initially, one main shared shed will be provided. A basic set of tools will be provided, and it is expected these will be provided by donation from the local community. Washroom and toilet facilities will not be required by local plot users, but ROGS are investigating the potential to have a water supply feeding several taps on the site joined by underground basic hose-piping for horticultural use only. Rainwater will be collected in a butt next to the main shed. There are no plans for greenhouse or polytunnel, or any anticipated need for a mains electricity supply

Allotment holders will be expected to create their own compost heaps rather than have a communal one, though this could change depending on how things go forward.

ROGS intend to advertise allotments on the Transition Black Isle website as well as put notices in the local noticeboards and on its Facebook page and its own website. Initially those who have already expressed an interest in having a Ness Community Gardens allotment would be invited to apply, as well as those who have applied to RAGS and are on their waiting list. Preference will be given to growers in the Fortrose and Rosemarkie community council area, and to supporting a reasonable balance of new or less experienced food growers.

The annual cost of allotments would also be in line with RAGS and other community allotments across the Highlands (see Financial Planning below). Charges are anticipated to be £12.50 for a quarter plot plus a membership fee of £10 for each individual who works on the allotment, therefore its allotment income will be around £22.50 per year for a quarter plot. The community growing space will be funded either by donation or through a nominal annual subscription.

A core aim of the project is to develop and improve skills and resilience within the community, by encouraging more people to be involved in growing their own food. It is envisaged there could be communal growing sessions and learning sessions on specific days of the week at specific times, especially in the early days (e.g., 10-12 am Saturday, 6-8pm Wednesday, 5-7pm Friday), so there can be someone on hand to answer questions and help new or less experienced growers.

Young people involved in Cubs, Scouts, Brownies who want to have their own growing space will be encouraged to get involved at those times too. It is recognised from current volunteering experience amongst the ROGS Directors that youth groups may not have the capacity to maintain their own garden space long-term. However, learning sessions with the Scouts at RAGS have been stimulating and fun and could easily be reproduced at the Ness Gap site.

Fortrose Academy has a potting shed and greenhouse and a good sized garden for vegetables and flowers, as well as a mature apple tree in their own grounds. Pupils there have a gardening club once a week and teachers use the garden at other times on an ad hoc basis, often for the learning support department. ROGS will encourage Avoch primary and Fortrose secondary school groups to visit the Ness Gap site by arrangement for specific curriculum-based learning sessions, to be agreed with teaching staff. Proximity to Fortrose Academy means there will inevitably also be unscheduled visits to the gardens by pupils, and initial monitoring will be needed to understand how/if they will be used during break times/lunches, for example, to gauge how best to manage this.

The Highland Climate Hub has provided several excellent workshops for gardeners wishing to learn how to grow veg and fruit, create compost heaps, use no-dig methods. Other groups such as the Highland Good Food Project have also access to lots of good advice, and ROGS would seek support from organisations such as Incredible Edible as well as their own local growers at RAGS and the Black Isle Horticultural Society to provide advice and workshops. Four members of the ROGS committee are experienced allotment holders at RAGS, and will also be able to provide support to new or less experienced growers. Advice will also continue to be obtained from existing community growing projects to ensure the group learn from wider expertise and experience.



Photos: Existing allotment plots at Rosmearkie Allotments and Garden Society (RAGS), June 2024 (M. Bramwell).

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Various awareness raising and community engagement activities have taken place over the last year. Engagement will continue as plans for the allotments and community garden area develop and as part of the ongoing wider activities of ROGS.

AWARENESS RAISING

A Website and social media pages were created in June 2023, providing links to the organisation background, Board membership and projects (completed and proposed).

A post to *Black Isle Notice Board* Facebook page (with over 11k members) on October 2023 raised local awareness of the Co-op Community Fund support, providing an outline of ROGS' activities to date and an outline of proposals for allotments and community garden. Subsequent posts to the page have raised awareness of this project, gained a positive response, and attracted local residents to become members.

ROGS members covered two sessions outside the Fortrose Co-op store on Saturday 9th December to raise awareness and promote the support available through the Co-operative community fund support from Co-op membership. This led to over 200 individual interactions and a high level of informal feedback and positive support. A summary of ROGS and the project proposal are provided on the Co-operative local causes page from December 2023 to October 2024, and is available to all local co-operative members as background to the local causes available for them to support.²⁵

An article was included in the Spring 2024 edition of the Black Isle *Chatterbox* magazine to promote the objectives of the group and to provide updates on current activities.²⁶ Over the Spring period, ROGS have also been raising awareness of their profile with wider community activities, including a Spring Clean at the Feddon Hill path and in Cathedral Square during March, and working with local residents seeking advice on nature friendly planting.

COMMUNITY SURVEYS

Facebook Survey 2021

In 2021, the ROGS steering group advertised an initial short survey on the *Black Isle Noticeboard* Facebook page asking "Are you in favour of having Allotments and a Community Garden sited in Fortrose?". This generated 56 responses, 54 of which were positive. 4 of the people responding said they were already on a waiting list for an allotment. It should be noted that this social media site is popular across the Black Isle, and not all responses were from the Fortrose and Rosemarkie area.

²⁵ <https://membership.coop.co.uk/causes> February 2024.

²⁶ *Chatterbox* Edition 108 (Spring 2024), pp. 34-35 <https://issuu.com/chatterboxnews/docs/chbx108> .

Community Right to Buy Petition 2023

In June 2023, ROGS considered an application to register a Community Right to Buy interest in their preferred site. To support their application, they carried out a door-to-door exercise to obtain signatures for a petition of support. Signatories were asked to confirm that they are on the electoral register, and “support ROGS in registering a community interest in the land at Ness Gap for community gardens, community growing, allotments and wildlife for the benefit of the community.”²⁷

Over the course of just a week, 475 signatures of support were collected, of which 352 have been verified against the Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council area electoral roll. The number of *verified* signatures received amount to around **17%** of the eligible voting population of 2,028 for the community council area (and all signatures amount to around **23%** of the adult population). An application for registering a community right to buy has not subsequently been pursued due to an off-market change in ownership of some of the land being considered.

Community Survey 2024

Between February and May 2024, a survey targeted at residents in the ROGS area sought to identify levels of support, community views and priorities for the idea of community owned and managed green spaces in Fortrose. At the time of this survey, no specific parcel/s of land were identified (though there was already a general level of awareness about the group’s ambitions for the Ness Gap site from previous communications).

The survey was promoted on local social media, the Chatterbox newsletter article and on the ROGS website. It has received 75 responses to date, of which 71 have postcodes within the Fortrose and Rosemarkie community council area. Responses are mostly split between working age adults (31-59) and older people (60 or older). Most (55%) have lived in Fortrose and Rosemarkie of 10 years or more, 24% between 5 and 10 years, and 13% less than 5 years. (Note, not all respondents answered this question).

Of those responding, **92%** support the idea of developing allotments and a community garden in Fortrose.

The main benefits for the community identified by those responding were:

- Community cohesion
- Increased social interaction
- Wellbeing for individuals (physical or mental)
- Access to local food
- Increasing skills for growing food
- Helping nature
- Improving the local environment (physical & social)

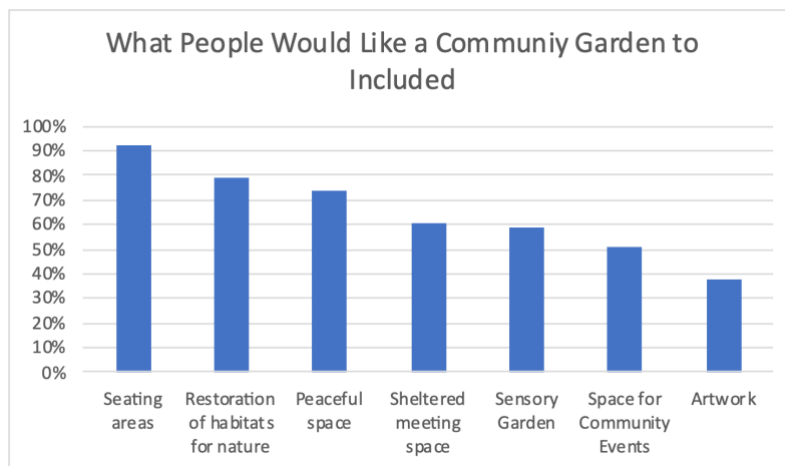
²⁷ Regenerate Our Green Space petition under Part 2 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, conducted 15th to 21st June 2023.

Respondents were asked what they would like accessible community greenspace to be used for, with a range of options provided. Most people chose more than one, with priorities being reasonably spread and none being exclusive of another. The top priorities identified are:

- Community Garden (82%)
- Space that encourages and regenerates nature and wildlife (81%)
- Wildflowers (78%)
- Community food growing / Allotments (71%)

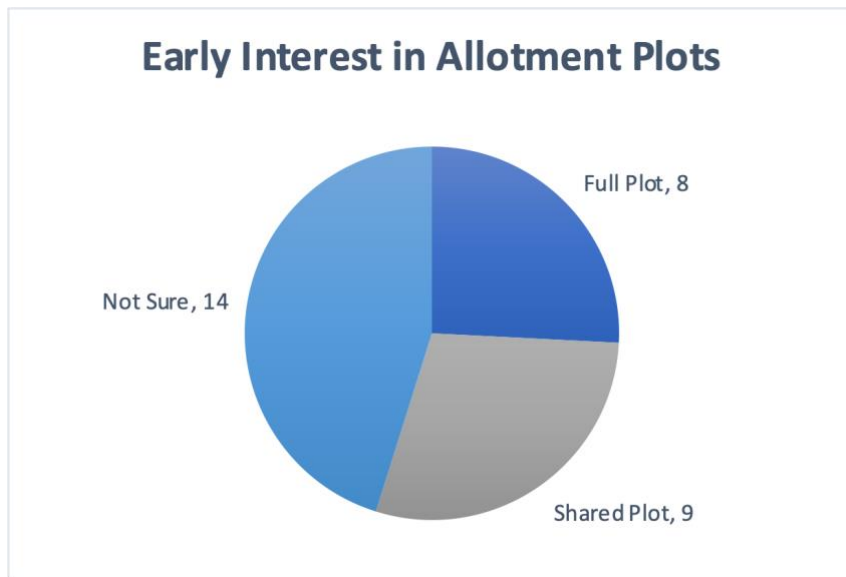
Other suggestions put forward included improved path networks around and through the town, pocket gardens, seating areas and interactive natural spaces for children.

A main priority identified by survey respondents for use of community garden is suitable spaces for seating and sheltered meeting space, reflecting a lack of such space within Fortrose now. Restoration of habitats for nature is also a high priority. (Respondents could chose multiple options). Interest in other uses was fairly evenly spread, with other suggestions including dog-free spaces, a herb garden, and shared vegetable plots.



At this early stage, most people responding supported the concepts of allotments being provided. Most said they would not want an allotment for their personal use, but supported use by others, and community growing space. Some identified saying they already had an allotment, or had the garden space to grow what they needed at home. However, 17 people have a definite interest in a full or shared allotment space, including a local food business. 14 others are unsure at this stage without details of the plots available and what might be involved.

“Great idea, definitely worthwhile. I wouldn’t have the time to commit to an allotment but happy to get involved with a community garden”



A high number of those responding (81%) indicate that they would (26) or may (33) be able to volunteer a few hours a month to help look after community green space. Others indicate they are not able to volunteer now due to other commitments but may do in the future as work or other obligations reduce. Some feel unable to make a commitment due to age or lack of ability, but would still like to be 'involved'.

"I've just been widowed and I'm not a gardener, but I would be willing to bring you tea and biscuits. I would like to join the social aspects."

The survey asked whether people had any concerns about the proposals to create allotments and a community garden. Only three people said they did not agree with the proposals and another three are unsure. Where a reason is given for concerns, it was because they believe the preferred use of the site is for a primary school, or because most homes have enough space to grow food if they wished, and that space and resources would be better directed to habitat development and protection. Some of the concerns relate to specific aspects of the proposals rather than the overall project.

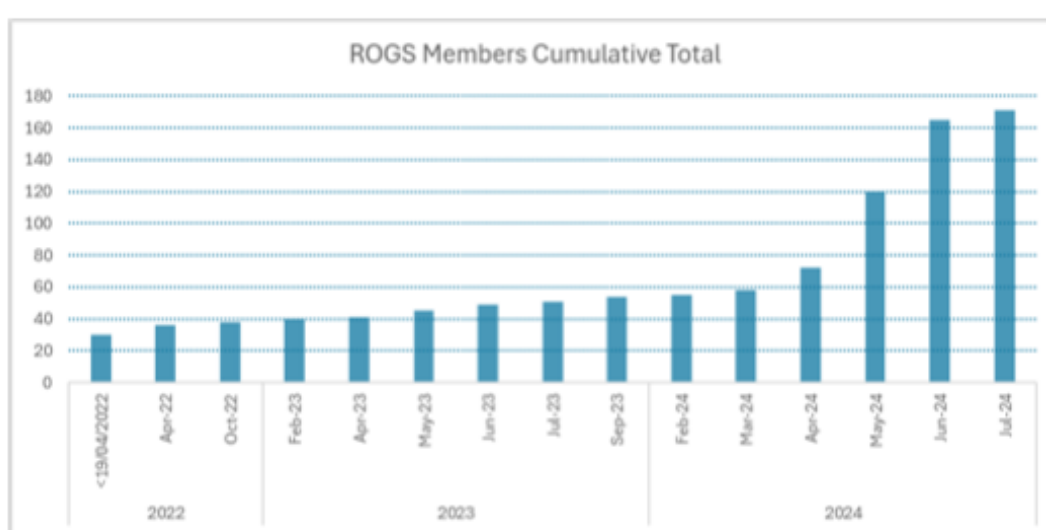
Other points raised by respondents who supported the overall idea included the need for rules to ensure the land remains organic and uncontaminated. People also raised concerns about potential vandalism or anti-social behaviour, and highlighted the need for an inclusive approach with all parts of the community to reduce this risk. Most people responding with concerns emphasised the importance of the space being properly managed to make sure plots are allocated fairly, all parts of the community included, and to ensure long term sustainability and viability if the people taking it forward now are no longer able to sustain their involvement.

The survey responses demonstrate a good level of overall support, and have helped to identify community priorities and concerns to inform the development of more detailed and site-specific plans. Around three quarters (72%) of those responding asked to join a mailing list to receive further updates, and just under half (42%) expressed an interest in volunteering opportunities with and/or becoming a member of ROGS.

MEMBERSHIP AND VOLUNTEERS

As at January 2024, ROGS had a **mailing list** of around 37 individuals from expressions of interest generated through website sign-ups or personal contacts.

During May 2024, a more proactive campaign to increase membership took place with a direct maildrop to all households within the Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council area. A leaflet delivered to every household provided a progress update on identification of a suitable site, and directly encouraged members of the community to show support by becoming members of ROGS. This has increased membership to **119** at the end of May 2024, and **194** full members (with an additional 10 associate members) at 31 July 2024.



An additional 20 people are subscribed to the email contact list. These are people who have an interest in the project but who have not become or are not eligible to become members.

In addition to the seven Directors, ROGS also has an active pool of around 20-25 people who have been or will be available to provide **volunteer** input to develop and maintain the greenspaces for community and environmental benefit.

EVENTS



A community information and consultation event was held at the site on Saturday 22nd June. The event was advertised during the preceding week through an email to members, social media posts and local posters. Several of the ROGS Directors were available throughout the event, along with the business plan consultant and one of the landscape architects. Mood boards of aspirations for the site were available along with a large-scale plan of the site and some initial design options.

Photo: On-site Community Information Day, Ness Gap, July 2024 (author's own)

Over the course of 4 hours, over 30 local individuals, including one of the local elected members, attended to find out more about the proposals and to offer ideas and suggestions for use of the site. Feedback was unanimously positive and supportive

STAKEHOLDER CONTACT

In principle interest and support for the Ness Gap gardens and allotments project has been received from a wide range of key local groups and organisations, as summarised below:

Group	Interest
Elected Members (Arranged meeting) Cllr Sarah Atkins Cllr Lyndsey Johnson Cllr Morven-May McDonald Senior Ward Manager – Dot Ferguson Community Support & Ward Manager – Lewis Hannah	The ROGS chair made a well-received presentation to The Highland Council Black Isle Ward councillors at a meeting facilitated by the Ward Manager on 11th April 2024, to present the group's current plans and objectives. Verbal support and encouragement was received from all three ward councillors. Cllr Atkins has also supported subsequent community engagement events. Highland Council staff present also undertook to investigate areas of council land in the area that might be available for community growing or other community greenspace use.
Cllr Lyndsey Johnson (Written email of support)	Strong support for aims to help overall biodiversity and beauty of the local area, and the benefits of working with plants and green spaces for mental health.
Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council (Minuted confirmation of support)	The Community Council have already identified the need for green spaces and community growing as a priority action and have been planning some community engagement. ROGS met formally with Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council, and with local elected members in March 2023. They have been supportive and enthusiastic about the project, and informal contact and updates have continued since.
Rosemarkie Allotments and Gardens Association (RAGS)	Support for shared aims of sustainable, environment centred positive community action. They recognise of increasing (local) interest in growing fruit and vegetable from an expanding waiting list (currently 9 waiting) for plots at their own site.
Transition Black Isle (Written letter of support)	Unanimous support to help local communities to adopt and encourage local food resilience, connection to nature, and behaviour change towards sustainable living.
Black Isle Horticultural Society (Written email of support)	Recognise a significant number of shared or similar objectives. Strong support for the multiple benefits identified, including: - Alleviating poverty - Proven physical and mental health benefits - Reducing social isolation - Improving and providing habitats to support biodiversity - Reducing the environmental impacts of food miles

Black Isle Men's Shed (BIMS) (Written letter of support)	Shed members have constructed compost bins for local residents, as well as benches and bird boxes for community use. They will be able to do similar works for ROGS. They also anticipate some members may want to take an allotment for themselves. The BIMS site at Feddanhill Wood will be able to provide raw wood for construction projects. BIMS have also provided early administrative support to ROGS, initially facilitating a safe bank account, and IT training.
Black Isle Repair Cafe	Recognise similar aims of offering sustainable, environment-centred, positive community action. Community ownership of land and proposed uses are very exciting. The benefits for physical and mental health, people in the community working together for a positive aim, reducing isolation and protecting habitats all well shown. Delighted to offer support.
Fortrose and Rosemarkie Trishaws (FAR Trikes) (Written letter of support)	An accessible space will help to support inclusivity, fostering a sense of belonging and togetherness and welcoming space for people of all abilities, including those with mobility challenges and who access the trishaws services.
Eilean Dubh, Parklands Care Home (verbal)	Informal discussions with Eilean Dubh Care Home have welcomed the potential for nearby increased access to nature for residents who are frail or have limited mobility on wheelchair / mobility trike accessible footpaths. (Some paths will be wide enough to accommodate trishaws).
Black Isle Cares (Written letter of support)	Support the development of a community growing area. Promoting health and well-being were priorities raised through their own community consultation in 2015.
Fortrose Medical Practice	Fortrose Medical Practice have confirmed support for the aims of the project on the basis that it is well known that access to nature and exercise such as gardening has great benefits to health and wellbeing.
Fortrose Academy	A ROGS Director has assisted the Academy to run their garden within the school grounds for some years. Existing informal contacts are to be pursued to explore potential future opportunities for curriculum-based learning sessions at the allotments site.
Highlands & Islands Climate Hub	"We are hugely supportive of the project being carried out by Regenerate our Green Space Ltd (ROGS) and very much wish you every success with your SLF Stage Two applications for the acquirement of the land."

Neighbours	The immediate neighbours at Deans Crescent have been contacted and kept apprised of project plans and developments, particularly when access has been required for surveys. ROGS have undertaken to ensure their designs and management of the site reduce this as far as practicable. They have recently purchased the adjacent field and have some complementary rewilding aspirations. Neighbours at Ross Crescent were also contacted directly during the campaign to receive signatures to support a petition for a Community Right to Buy application. Overall support from residents facing the potential site was high.
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BLACK ISLE PLACE PLAN: OPPORTUNITY BLACK ISLE

The *Opportunity Black Isle* Place Plan has been in development during the preparation of this report, with extensive consultations taking place across the Black Isle and at community council level during 2023. At the time of producing this report, a final plan was published Summer 2024 and is now pending adoption with The Highland Council.²⁸

The overarching vision and outcomes for the Draft Plan is: ***“to become a zero-carbon, sustainable and resilient [black isle] community with opportunity and health and wellbeing for all.”***

To achieve these outcomes, the plan has four overlapping Calls for Action, including “Think Global, act local: climate-focussed action to achieve a zero-carbon, resilient and sustainable community”. Informing the wider plan, local level results from the initial Fortrose and Rosemarkie consultation events indicated:²⁹

- A demand for sustainable land development, protecting of green spaces, developing wildlife corridors, and allowing wildlife and biodiversity to flourish.
- Support regeneration of nature for public good (health, well-being, education and sustainable local food security).
- A demand for individuals to have access to space to grow their own food.
- More organic production, less use of pesticides.
- A need for communities to work better together.
- Re-establish community education services to support community capacity building, and
- A need for Fortrose to regain a community feel.

These consultations closely align with the priorities identified by ROGS and are reflected in their own community engagement outcomes.

²⁸ Black Isle Partnership, *Opportunity Black Isle (Black Isle Place Plan), Draft Plan (Full and Summary)*, January 2024, sourced at <https://black-isle.info/opportunity-black-isle-black-isle-place-plan>, February '24.

²⁹ Transcripts of the Fortrose and Rosemarkie Stage 1 Comments Boards, 28th March 2023, for *Community Facilities and Services* and for *Nature and Environment* provided by facilitator, Becky Richmond.

LEARNING FROM PEER COMPARISONS

During the Feasibility Study period, various Directors of ROGS and the feasibility consultant have taken the opportunity to explore community allotment and community growing models delivered by various other projects, both locally and further afield. This has been through a combination of desktop research, personal contact and study visits.

This research, visits and discussions have provided the group with invaluable insights, advice and experience on a number of issues. Short updates have been made available to all Directors and have been posted to the ROGS website so that they are accessible to all interested members. They have helped to inform the group's decisions around community engagement, practical operational considerations, design and layout. They have also ensured the development of strong networks of support and inter-project communications that should be a long-term benefit as plans develop and evolve. The range of projects explored has included the following:

- Rosemarkie Allotments and Garden Society*
- Cromarty Allotments and Garden Society*
- Culbokie Village Square and wildflower meadow*
- Incredible Edible, Inverness*
- Knocknagael Allotments, Inverness (in development) *
- Nairn Allotment Society*
- Evanton Community Woods*
- Lochbroom and Ullapool Growing Group*
- Applecross Community Company*
- Culbokie Community Garden and Polytunnel
- Avoch Maritime Garden
- North Kessock Coastal Garden and Community Orchard
- Moo Food, Muir of Ord
- Tornagrain Allotments
- The Unexpected Garden, The Field, Alness
- Portree Community Allotments
- Helmsdale Kitchen Garden
- Huntly Arts and Gardening Project
- Forres Friends of Woods and Fields
- Kyles Allotment Group, Argyll
- Glenfinart Walled Garden Project, Argyll
- The Hidden Gardens, Pollockshields, Glasgow
- The Croft, South Seeds, Glasgow
- New Victoria Gardens Association, Glasgow
- Roots Allotments, Somerset, England
- Skool Beanz, Somerset, England

*Projects visited or contacted directly by ROGS for more detailed advice and information. (Summary reports available on the Regenerating our Greenspace website/recent posts).

MARKET ANALYSIS

COMMUNITY PROFILE

A full demographic report, including references to sources, can be found in *Appendix 3*. Key information of relevance to the project are:

- The Community of Fortrose and Rosemarkie, as represented by one community council areas, is estimated to have a population of over 2,413.³⁰
- The population of voting age (16 or over) is estimated at around 2,028.³¹
- Fortrose is recognised in the local plan as a 'town centre' for a larger rural hinterland.
- The population of this area has grown by around 13% in the past 15 years as a result of new housing developments in both Fortrose and Rosemarkie.
- The proportion of the population age 15-64 is much lower than other areas of the Highlands and in Scotland overall.
- The proportion of people aged over 65 is higher than average for Highland.
- The proportion of retired people is a higher percentage than in other areas of the Highlands.
- There are fewer young people of working age (age 16-24) than in other areas of the Highlands.
- Unemployment within this age group is relatively low, but is proportionately higher than for the rest of the working age population.
- Around a third of all people live in one person households. This is higher than national average, but similar to patterns elsewhere in the Highlands.
- However, the percentage of *retired* people living alone is higher than both Highland and national averages.
- Overall, people in the community consider themselves healthy. However, a slightly higher than average number think their long-term health is limited 'a little' (11%). This is likely to be related to the higher age profile of the population, and can be anticipated to increase in the medium to long terms, in terms of both the proportion of the population and degree of limitation.
- There are some indications of increasing prevalence of arterial, coronary and heart related conditions, depression and dementia amongst the older patient group of Fortrose medical practice.
- The community has a highly educated population.
- Fortrose Academy serves the whole of the Black Isle, and attainment levels vary within the whole school population. Overall, attainment levels are high, the Academy ranks 95th of 340 in Scottish School League Tables and most pupils move on to positive post school destinations.
- Over half of all pupils have recognised support needs, and around 10% receive free school meals.
- Just over half the adult population are economically active, slightly lower than the Highland average.

³⁰ Population figures for the whole community council area are not easily available until detailed 2022 census figures are published. The figure used here are based on the last available census data for the Fortrose and Rosemarkie community council area, as provided by The Highland Council, available at https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/695/council_information_performance_and_statistics/165/highland_profile_-_key_facts_and_figures/2, accessed July 2024.

³¹ As above.

- A much higher proportion of people who are in work are in senior managerial or professional occupations compared to the Highland and national averages.
- Just over a third of people who work are full-time employees. This is lower than average. However, around 14% are self-employed. This is significantly higher than both Highland and Scottish averages.
- At the 2011 census, around 16% of people worked from home. This was slightly higher than the Highland average of 15%, and above the Scottish average of 11%. Since the pandemic, it may be expected that this proportion has increased.
- Combined with the high proportion of retirees, we can estimate that at least half of the overall population are ordinarily 'at home' in the community throughout the week.

MEETING COMMUNITY NEEDS

The proposals from ROGS are designed to deliver positive environmental and social benefits.

Community profiling indicates recent rapid recent growth of both communities as a result of new housing developments. In Fortrose, new housing has been built on the hillside at Feddon Hill and more recently at Ness Gap. Both are separated from the older town centre, and there is a perception that more of the 'newer' community members commute to work in Inverness, Dingwall or other settlements. There are few informal sheltered meeting spaces for the community other than a seasonal beach café at Rosemarkie or the Cathedral grounds at Fortrose. Most planned activities are hosted indoors at the Library or Leisure Centre in Fortrose, or at the Gordon Memorial Hall in Rosemarkie.

There are also a high proportion of older residents, with a higher-than-average proportion of older single households, even by Highland standards. With an ageing demographic, there is a longer-term likelihood of increased health-related issues and a risk of increased social isolation within the community.

The project targets these identified and emerging community needs by providing opportunities for individual and community activity, volunteering in outdoor space, social events, and intergenerational activity. It will provide opportunities to maintain or increase physical activity, and to support both physical and mental wellbeing.

Community feedback has also identified a community priority to retain and protect greenspace for the benefit of the community and nature. Following the loss of greenspace in and around the settlements for new housing development, there is strong support to restore and protect natural environment and wild spaces, to encourage greater biodiversity and for wildlife. These are core aims of the project, and it will make a strong contribution to supporting these locally identified community needs.

"A reasonably central space would help focus community cohesion, provide food growing opportunities and know how, and improve our natural habitat, within walking distance of the majority of houses."

"Create areas for the community with the environment and each other, promoting better physical and mental health and less social isolation."

“People meeting up, part of reducing loneliness. Physical activity. Growing useful plants flowers and veg. Fostering community cohesiveness and a sense of worth through collaborating and planning and decision making and contributing personal knowledge and expertise.”

EXISTING PROVISION AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS

There are a number of growing schemes emerging around the Black Isle. However, provision is still quite limited, and current demand outstrips availability at all sites. Details of the known existing community growing areas on the Black Isle and potential impact from this project are summarised below:

Project/Location	Impact
<i>Rosemarkie Allotments and Garden Society</i> 21 plots managed as full or half plots. Established for several years on land leased from a private landowner (lease recently renewed).	This allotment site is within the ROGS community boundary and there is overlapping interest. The allotment waiting list is currently closed as existing demand outstrips availability of plots. There are currently no vacant plots available and a waiting list of 9. Availability is infrequent. There is potential for some 'drift' of allotment holders to new plots in Fortrose. However, this would have the benefit of bringing in experienced allotment user skills to the new site, and release some availability for people living in Rosemarkie who are currently unable to access an allotment plot.
<i>Cromarty Allotments and Garden Society</i> 20 plots (5 full, 15 smaller) established in 2012 on former abandoned tennis courts leased from the local estate.	None anticipated, though there may be opportunities for collaboration through joint events/ training/ workshops etc Many of the cottages in Cromarty have no or very small gardens. Current demand for allotments within the community outstrips supply. There are currently no vacant plots available and a waiting list of three.
<i>Culbokie Community Garden and Green</i> The garden was initially set up with support from TBI on privately owned land at Netherton Farm. It is now privately managed with ad hoc access to individual growing plots and shared use of the polytunnel. More recently, Culbokie Green has been developed in the centre of the village by Culbokie Development Trust through a small housing development in partnership with Cairn Housing Association. It provides a gathering space for residents, wildflower meadows, trees shelter, and a community orchard.	None anticipated.

Avoch No existing growing space or allotments. A small community maritime garden on a previously derelict garage site next to the harbour, includes a mosaic designed by a local artist to reflect the fishing heritage of the village.	None anticipated.
North Kessock The Residents Association of North Kessock (RANK) has periodically explored the potential for allotments adjacent to the village, but there are no active plans in development. There is a small community managed open space and community orchard at Torgorm Point, and pocket orchards planted in open spaces around the newer housing developments. There is also a small coastal garden at the Community Hub (old ticket office). Both sites are managed by volunteers and well used.	None anticipated.
Munlochy No existing community growing spaces or allotments. A small market garden operates on a commercial basis at Allangrange.	None.
Tore No existing community growing spaces or allotments. A pick-your-own soft fruit farm and farm shop operate on a commercial basis at Ryefield.	None.
Raddery House A new community group in the Black Isle are developing plans a community acquisition of the former Raddery School campus from The Highland Council and develop the buildings on the site into respite accommodation, facilities to those support people living with dementia in the community, and support for young carers. These projects will be supported by other on-site revenue generating projects. The campus includes 7-acre grounds and adjoining 20-acre ancient woodland. The Raddery House Ltd group have identified that part of the grounds can be used for woodland based educational activities and growing saplings, for example, and also for food growing. Some of this will be for on-site use in their accommodation and cafe and veg boxes. At this stage, the project is still to make a Stage 2 funding application to SLF. They have identified renovation of the potential income generating buildings on the site as an immediate priority if successful.	None immediately, but may be some medium to long-term overlap of market. RHL have identified potential for community use of the grounds through the development of allotments and raised beds. They propose a mix of ground allotments, raised beds, and two polytunnels (one with hydroponics), for which modest rental charges would be raised. The Raddery campus is about a 6-minute drive from Fortrose. Rosemarkie Allotment Society and the Black Isle Mens Shed have indicated their support in principle for the overall project.

STRATEGIC FIT

DELIVERING NATIONAL AND LOCAL OUTCOMES

Desktop research has identified a number of national and local strategic priorities and policies that are relevant to this project. The key strategy areas are summarised in the table below. Summaries of the key objectives of each strategy and links to all the strategies and policy documents referred to in this table can be found at *Appendix 2*.

Theme	National	Local
Community and Place	- National Performance Framework, Outcomes 2, 3 and 6 (SG) - Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 - National Planning Framework 4, 2023 (SG) - Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement, 2022 (SG) - The Place Principle (SG/COSLA)	- Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HCCP) - Draft Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan, 2023 (THC) - Draft Opportunity Black Isle, Local Place Plan, 2024 (BIP)
Health and Wellbeing	- National Performance Framework, Outcomes 8 and 11 (SG) - Fairer Scotland Action Plan, 2016 (SG) - Good Food Nation Policy, interim update 2022 (SG) - Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning guidance, 2022 (SG) - Our Natural Health Service, 2023 (NatureScot) - Connected Scotland Strategy, 2018 (SG)	- Active Highland Strategy, 2017 (THC) - Think Health, Think Nature (NatureScot)
Climate and Environment	- National Performance Framework, Outcome 6 (SG) - COP26 Glasgow Food & Climate Declaration (UN) - Climate Change Plan, 2023 (SG) - Environment Strategy for Scotland, 2020 (SG) - Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022 (SG)	- Highland Nature Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-26 (HEF) - Highland Community Food Growing Strategy 2022-27 (THC) - Allotment Policy, 2024 (THC)

Notes:

UN = United Nations, SG = Scottish Government, COSLA = Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, HCCP = Highland Community Planning Partnership, THC = The Highland Council, BIP = Black Isle Partnership, HEF = Highland Environmental Forum

In October 2022, the Scottish Parliament considered a report on allotments and community growing and the impact of the Community Empowerment Act (Part 9).³² The report summarises the benefits of allotments and community growing with a quote from the evidence of Felicitas Macfie:

“The benefits of allotment provision are so numerous and far reaching that it is difficult to list them all... It allows people to have access to fresh air and exercise which they may otherwise not have. It allows young families to teach the next generation where food comes from... Food grown locally reduces the carbon footprint and make you more aware of food miles. For working people it allows them a welcome respite from the office environment... For the older generation there is social interaction, a sense of purpose, the health benefits of gentle exercise. For everyone the benefits on mental health cannot be underestimated.”

By developing community-owned and managed assets and strengthening collaborative links with other groups, various strands of the proposed project will help to deliver strategic outcomes. Depending on final project priorities, the Ness Community Garden Project will help to deliver the following outcomes:

NATIONAL OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK

The project contributes well to the following National Framework outcomes:³³

- **Communities:** We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe.
- **Poverty:** We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally.
- **Health:** We are healthy and active.
- **Environment:** We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment.

In the ‘Allotments Guidance for Local Authorities’, the Scottish Government have brought together evidence of wide and sustained benefits to the communities and individuals involved in community growing of any sort. They identify cross-cutting benefits that contribute to both National Outcomes and National Indicators and to UN Sustainable Development Goals under the national outcome themes.³⁴

A recent academic literature review has also recognised that the impact of [allotment] gardening not only positively impact wider communities through food production and physical activity, but can also benefit wider communities through: reuse of idle or neglected land, community development,

³² The Scottish Parliament: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, *Allotments and Community Growing: the impact of Part 9 of the Community Empowerment Act*, SP Paper 236, 10th Report 2022 (Session 6), accessed [online](#) July 2024.

³³ Scottish Government, *National Performance Framework: Explore our National Outcomes*, <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/national-outcomes/explore-national-outcomes>, accessed May 2024.

³⁴ Scottish Government, *Allotments guidance for local authorities consultation: Part 10 – Impacts and Benefits of Community Growing*, June 2018, sourced at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/allotments-further-guidance-local-authorities-part-9-community-empowerment-scotland/pages/25/>, July 2024.

therapeutic and psychological benefits for allotment holders and residents, and wider nutritional benefits.³⁵

Details of the contributions made are shown under the grouped themes below (recognising that whilst broad themes have been identified, many of the outcomes will overlap between them).

COMMUNITY AND PLACE OUTCOMES

The development of a community owned and managed land asset will contribute to several key Place Making principles (Natural space, Identity and Belonging, Influence and sense of control, Play and recreation, Care and Maintenance). Community ownership would bring a long-time unused site in a prominent area of Fortrose into productive use. It will safeguard and provide valuable additional greenspace for community use, encouraging people to value and enjoy nature and the environment. The Highland Council greenspace audit has already identified that natural space that is easily accessible for the enjoyment of the public within the Fortrose townscape is already very limited. This has not improved with the rapid growth of housing and population over the last decade since the audit was carried out.

Well-supported local membership of ROGS will ensure grassroots ownership and control, supporting long-term sustainability and community empowerment through local accountability and decision making about the use of the land. The project will support the potential to develop community capacity through volunteering opportunities, collaboration with other groups, peer learning and support. Individuals will also be able to develop outdoor, gardening and growing skills, including outdoor learning opportunities for local schools and youth groups. Over time and as the use of the space become established, there will be opportunities for volunteers and plot holders to learn new skills through workshop activities and peer support.

It will help to develop community resilience through local food production, active lifestyles that will have benefits to physical and mental health and support the active ageing of an increasingly older demographic. Strong potential has been identified for mutual support and alignment with other local projects, bringing potential to share resources and expertise, share volunteer pools, and to provide mutual added value through robust community networks.

The opportunities for local people to come together through shared natural space and activities will also increase community cohesion, reducing social isolation and developing strong connections to the local area for both new and established residents. The layout is being designed to allow for participation and enjoyment by people of all abilities. It will include quiet seating to enjoy nature, accessible community growing space, and small sized allotment plots to especially encourage those with less time or skills to become involved in growing in a supportive community space.

³⁵ Kwartnik-Pruc, A. & Droj, Gabriela. (2023). *The Role of Allotments and Community Gardens and the Challenges Facing Their Development in Urban Environments—A Literature Review*. Land. 12. 325. 10.3390/land12020325. Sourced [online](#), July 2024.

The project will contribute directly to the following national and local objectives for Community and Place:

- National Outcomes 2 and 11 (inclusive, empowered and resilient communities; tackling poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth (land) and power more equally).
- Community Empowerment Act Part 9 (community use of land for food production).
- NPF4 (improved open spaces to support local living).
- Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan (settlement planning priorities to safeguard and secure Green Networks).
- Opportunity Black Isle local place plan (become a zero-carbon, sustainable and resilient [Black Isle] community with opportunity and health and wellbeing for all).
- Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement (community ownership and use of land).
- Place Principle (collaboration and community involvement to achieve better outcomes).

HEALTH AND WELLBEING OUTCOMES

The potential health and wellbeing benefits are numerous.³⁶ Public Health research published in 2016 has shown, for example, that engagement with natural environments can improve self-esteem and mood, reduce stress and anxiety, and foster mental well-being. The benefits come from all types of natural environment – wild or cultivated – and from exposures of as little as 5 minutes. The research concludes that allotment gardening has the potential; to combat an increased prevalence of ill-health, with potential for savings to health services and the economy at large.³⁷

A number of studies also shown have shown that diets become healthier, with increased consumption of fruit and vegetables by households involved in community gardening. Growing activities can provide low-impact exercise to improve physical health, and also offer mental health benefits through lower stress levels and the provision of a supportive social environment.³⁸

In addition to the benefits to individual growers, the creation of greenspaces accessible to the whole community encourage outdoor recreation, and encourage greater socialisation. The location of the Ness Gap site will encourage growers and other members of the community to visit by walking or cycling, as it is easily accessible from the centre of Fortrose and other nearby amenities, including the Care Home, Academy and Leisure Centre. This especially support Public Health priorities for healthy and active ageing.

³⁶ Ellie Violet Bramley, The Guardian, *It's Official: allotments are good for you – and your mental health*, November 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/nov/08/its-official-allotments-are-good-for-you-and-for-your-mental-health>, accessed July 2024.

³⁷ Carly J. Wood, Jules Pretty, Murray Griffin, Journal of Public Health, *A case-control study of the health and well-being benefits of allotment gardening*, (Volume 38, Issue 3, 17 September 2016), pp. e336–e344, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdv146>.

³⁸ Scottish Government, *Advice to Local Authorities* ibid.

The project will contribute directly to the following national and local objectives for Health and Wellbeing:

- National Outcome 8 (healthy and active communities).
- Fairer Scotland Action Plan 2016 (access to healthy, nutritious food).
- Good Food Nation Policy 2022 (commitments to allotments and community growing).
- NatureScot – Our Natural Health Service (responding to growing pressures from an ageing population, more people with multiple conditions and chronic illness).
- Think Health, Think Nature, Highland Green Health Partnership (developing and promoting green spaces for public health benefits).
- Connected Scotland Strategy 2018 (tackling social isolation and loneliness, building stronger social connections).
- Active Highland Strategy 2017 (enabling the inactive to become active, enabling the active to stay active throughout life, maintain and improve active infrastructure, including natural spaces, support resilient communities through activity).

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT OUTCOMES

Scottish Government guidance recognises that community growing sites can provide a good source of locally grown, environmentally healthy food, and reduce food miles and waste from travelling to supermarkets.

There is additionally evidence that community growing sites can help to protect and improve soil compared to neighbouring agricultural land through a more organic approach to growing. Good ground cover can help to improve biodiversity and plants for pollinators. They can also make positive contributions to carbon reduction through the reuse and upcycling of materials, or the collection and recycling of rainwater, for example.

The low impact design of the Ness Gap site and the design emphasis on creating a balance between space for growing food and areas to support wildflowers and biodiversity will help to deliver this outcome. Continued co-operation with other local groups such as the Black Isle Men's Shed and Transition Black Isle, and established links with a local timber supplier will also ensure low impact, locally sourced materials for infrastructure and development of the site. Several Directors of the group also have ecological expertise and experience of organic growing methods, to ensure that the site is developed in the most environmentally beneficial way possible. All whilst improving the visual impact of a currently unused and neglected site within the heart of a residential area.

Individual volunteers and plot-holders at the site may also become more attuned to the environment and the impacts of climate change through regular outdoor activity. Once the project has become established, there may also be scope to work with other organisations such as the Hi-Life Highland Countryside Rangers, local schools and Transition Black Isle, for example, to develop citizen-led environmental monitoring activities and to facilitate workshops and learning events for the community.

The project will contribute directly to the following national and local objectives for Climate and Environment:

- National Outcome 6 (people value, enjoy, protect and enhance their environment).
- Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration 2022 (supporting integrated food strategies).
- Climate Change Plan (path to a low carbon economy).
- Environment Strategy for Scotland 2020 (nature protected and restored, healthy environment supports a fairer, healthy, more inclusive society).
- Good Food Nation Act 2022 (easy access to a good, healthy food system, food system good for the natural environment, supports good physical and mental health, promotes a good food culture).
- Highland Nature Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-26 (increase participation in green and blue activities, increase public engagement, improve biodiversity data gathering).
- Highland Community Food Growing Strategy 2022-27 (support access to land for community growing, build on momentum for community food growing and local food resilience).
- Highland Council Allotment Policy 2024 (support community led allotment sites as a community asset, and in response to climate change and biodiversity loss).

OTHER COMMUNITY/ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Research co-ordinated by Greenspace Scotland in 2011 explored the social return on investment (SORI) from allotment projects across Scotland. They calculated every £1 invested in a sample project could generate around £16 in social benefits.³⁹ More recent research by Brighton and Hove council calculated a contribution of at least £651 per plot (excluding food value) using a combination of reduced health costs, carbon sequestration, reduced waste and increased biodiversity for pollinators.⁴⁰

The SORI calculations vary considerably depending on geographic location, population size, relative indices of deprivation, and on whether the returns consider social and economic benefits or also include the value of increased natural capital, for example.

The site at Ness Gap is approximately two thirds of an acre, and the future SORI value is not possible to calculate at this stage. However, drawing from the Greenspace Case Studies of modest garden or health walk projects, (Ardler Village Trust, Fife Burn of Seats, Gorbals Healthy Living Project, Wood for Health Perth) for example, that a social return of between £8 - £12 per £1 of investment could be anticipated.

³⁹ Greenspace Scotland, *Capturing the Changes that Count – a review of greenspace in Scotland's SROI programmes and projects*, November 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/FAQs/sroi>, accessed July 2024.

⁴⁰ Brighton and Hove Allotment Federation, *An Outline Business Case for Allotments*, 2021. <https://www.bhaf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Value-of-Benefits-Allotments-bring-to-Brighton-and-Hove-City-Council-March2022.pdf>, accessed July 2024.

The personal economic benefits to individual plot holders will very much depend on what they choose to use their plots to grow, how they source initial tools and stock, and how they manage them. It can be possible for a well-managed allotment to produce enough food to supplement the weekly shop of a family of four over the year. This will be more limited at Ness Gap due to the limited size of the plots proposed, but could save a plot-holder up to £250 - £500 a year in food costs after around three years of establishing their plot.⁴¹

VIABILITY ASSESSMENT

MARKET DEMAND

There are currently very few growing spaces currently available to residents in the Black Isle. Where they exist, sites and the number of plots available are small, and waiting lists are generally closed due to low turnover and the lack of ability to meet existing demand.

Demand is also reported to be high in the nearby larger towns of Inverness and Nairn. Sites have reported big increases in demand nationally since the Covid-19 lockdowns.⁴² This has also been reflected in the local experience of the Rosemarkie Allotments and Garden Society. New house building at both Fortrose and Rosemarkie has seen high increases in local population, which may also be a factor in increasing demand. Overall, demand across the Highlands is variable, but is on average 46% of available capacity.⁴³

Representatives of other sites in the Black Isle and in commutable areas of the Highlands have expressed support for more allotment provision at Fortrose. Expressions of support have also come from Transition Black Isle and from the Black Isle Horticultural Society.

16 survey respondents so far have expressed an early interest in taking on either a full or a shared allotment at Fortrose. Demand is expected to increase as face-to-face engagement takes place and as the project starts to become more tangible and visible to local residents, with known demand already outstripping the capacity of the available site for plots available.

At least two existing allotment holders at Rosemarkie would be willing to take an additional plot /or relocate to an allotment at Fortrose. This would have the benefit of releasing some capacity for the

⁴¹ Allotment Garden Diary, *Allotments Save Money?* Blog February 2011, <https://www.allotment-garden.org/garden-diary/1155/allotments-save-money/>, accessed July 2024.

Allotment Book.com, *Does an Allotment Save Money*, <https://www.allotmentbook.co.uk/contents/does-working-an-allotment-save-money>, accessed July 2024.

This is Money .co.uk, *How to win the battle of the allotments - and save up to £2,000 a year on getting fitter: Should you cancel the gym and take up growing instead?*, <https://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/savemoneymakemoney/article-11368197/How-win-battle-allotments-save-2-000-year.html>, accessed July 2024.

⁴² STV News: *Growing challenge of 15-year wait for allotment*, May 2022 <https://news.stv.tv/east-central/scottish-parliament-to-launch-explore-growing-challenge-of-getting-and-allotment-as-wait-times-surge>

⁴³ The Highland Council: *Highland Allotments Report, 2023* https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/28018/allotments_report_2023.pdf, accessed March 2024. The total number of people on waiting lists for Highland Council owned allotments is 138. The total number of plots is 300.

already oversubscribed plots at Rosemarkie, and also mean that plot holders with experienced growing skills would be included from the start of the project, and able to support less experienced of new growers on the site. However, there is also a commitment by ROGS to prioritise local demand and to support the development of new food growing skills across the community.

MARKET RATES

Charges by other Allotment providers within the wider Highland area for membership and for plot leases are provided below. To our knowledge, no concessionary rates are currently available at any of these sites.

Location	Annual Membership	No. Plots	Full Plot	Half Plot	Quarter / small bed	Polytunnel bed
Rosemarkie	£10	21	£50	£25	n/a	
Cromarty	£5	20		£15		
Nairn	£10	122	£38		27.5p/m2	
Hawthorn, Inverness		69	£55	£40		
Knocknagael, Inverness (proposed)		180	£50	£25	£12.50	
Ullapool		60	n/a	£25	£6.50	£20

FUNDABILITY

Financial sustainability of the project will be essential to ensure its success. It will ensure that the available land can be developed incrementally to meet local community needs and aspirations in the long term. It will also ensure that the site is properly set up, maintained and managed so that it is an attractive place for the people that use it, for the wider community and visitors to the area. It is important that the site is an asset, and not a detriment to the community.

A desktop scoping exercise has been carried out to identify potential sources of grant funding for initial phases of the project, which is summarised below. This identifies potential sources for funding for the initial site development and subsequent project delivery. Funds that are currently closed to new applications have been included where they are likely to reopen within the project timescale. A summary of the best match funding sources identified to date is included below:

SET UP: CAPITAL COSTS

The main costs for the project will come in the first year from site acquisition, site preparation, capital infrastructure and initial planting of wildflower and community garden space. The cost headings and potential fund to date include:

Item	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Comments/ Potential funding source/s
Acquisition - Site purchase - Legal & Title Fees	£20,000 (valuation) £ 3,355 (est)			15%-25% Discount to be negotiated <i>Up to 85% Grant from SLF / HIE</i>
ACQUISITION COSTS	£23,500			
Site Preparation & Infrastructure - Water supply - Groundworks for: Hedging Path network Pond Growing plots	£6,000 est			Water supply from butts or via neighbour in first instance. May include metering. Groundworks by local contractor <i>Grant potential from Community Regeneration Funds, Nature Restoration Fund, N.Highland Initiative, H&I Climate Hub, People's Postcode Trust, Mushroom Trust, Cruach Trust, Pebble Trust, Landfill Communities Fund.</i>
Allotments Set-up - Shed - 2 x Water but sets (230l)	£2,037 (Fettes) £80 (B&Q)			10% discount likely available from local sawmill <i>Funds as above</i>
Communal Spaces - Rustic Benches - Accessible raised beds	£900 £600		£300	At cost wood supply & work with BIMS should reduce costs of all timber items. <i>Local sponsorship, Fit for Life Foundation</i>
Tools & Equipment - Shared hand-tools / mower etc	By donations	Donations / repair shed	Donations / repair shed	Free supplies <i>Local donations, B&Q Foundation, Wickes Community Programme</i>
Initial Plant Stock - Hedging & trees - Wildflower seeds - Garden plants	Free £500 est £1,000 est	£500	£500	Free supplies <i>Tree Council, Branching Out, Woodland Trust, H&I</i>

			Future years self-generating	<i>Climate Hub, Local donations</i> May also be able to get donation / discount on plants from local supplier/s
INFRASTRUCTURE & SET-UP TOTALS	£11,037	£ 500	£ 800	Target: 80% from grants 10% discounts 10% donations / goodwill

INCOME FROM GRANTS

ROGS have been awarded a Stage 1 Scottish Land Fund grant to cover initial feasibility, business planning, site surveys (including valuation survey) and landscape design. They intend to proceed to a Stage 2 application to meet land acquisition and legal costs.

Grant funding, donations, in-kind contributions and sponsorship (for benches or tree planting, for example) will be sought for the initial infrastructure and site development costs. In the short term, these will be focussed on establishing the allotment plots and site infrastructure in the first year. Cost will also be kept low through a local source of timber at cost price, and through collaborative working with the Black Isle Men's Shed.

ROGS is partway through a year in which it benefits from the Co-op Community grant scheme, based on profits from sales to supporters of the Project, and also a general share of profits.

The Board of Directors already have extensive experience in successful small grant applications through their various professional and voluntary roles.

POTENTIAL GRANT SOURCES

Initial desk-top scoping and existing experience within the ROGS Board has identified a number of potential funding sources for various elements of the project, as summarised below. As detailed design plans and costs are becoming clearer, the Directors have scrutinised the conditions of grant funding, and identified a shortlist of potential funders to make initial contact with (red ink below). They will be progressing this as a priority action over the next three months. Several of these grant sources have already been used by our funding team for other successful projects carried out by community groups in the Black Isle.

Funder	Criteria / Conditions / Limitations	Amount available	Potential fit
Capital: Infrastructure & Site Development			
<u>Scottish Land Fund</u>	To help communities become more resilient through the ownership and management of land and land assets. Open to geographic community-led organisations in Scotland.		Good Already in progress.

<u>HIE Support for Communities framework.</u>	The framework (2022-26) provides community-led organisations and social enterprises to access expert help and practical support to deliver local projects. The support is flexible and can be tailored to the needs of individual projects to support project development and sustainability, including in-kind assistance and advice and revenue funding up to 2 years		Moderate to Good. Already in contact.
<u>National Lottery Awards for All</u>	Broad funding programme with a focus on community resilience Includes improving places and spaces that matter to communities Must involve the community and be connected to existing skills and experience. Previous awards have included site preparation, start-up costs and equipment for allotments projects. Planning permissions required at application.	£300 to £20k	Moderate to Good
<u>The Highland Council Community Regeneration Funding</u>	A mix of revenue and capital funding financed from the Community Led Local Development Fund, made up of the following funding streams administered by The Highland Council: - Highland Coastal Communities Fund - Place Based Investment Programme - Community-Led Local Development Fund - UK Shared Prosperity Fund Potential for groundworks and equipment funding. Current round closes mid-July but OK for 2025.	Variable	Good. Already in contact.
<u>The Highland Council Nature Restoration Fund</u>	A capital fund established the Scottish Government and administered by The Highland Council, to support project that will deliver nature restoration, safeguard wildlife, and tackle the causes of biodiversity loss due to climate change. Recent approved community led projects have included wildflower meadow sites, local tree planting initiatives, creation of wetlands and wildlife ponds, and projects to remove non-native or invasive species.	Variable From £2k to £17k to date.	Good
<u>North Highland Initiative</u>	The Community Infrastructure Support Fund supports projects across the sectors of Community, Food and Farming, or Tourism. They actively seek to support community well-being and economic resilience, food, carbon and climate led projects. Priorities include: - Community well-being services that make communities better places to live and work. - Community centers and spaces that bring communities together - Sustainability and environmental Improvements & the encouragement of biodiversity or green spaces	Up to £2k	Good. Rosemarkie Allotments have already benefitted, already have contact.

<u>Highlands & Islands Climate Hub</u>	Climate Action Fund supports projects across H&I. 31 or 46 applications supported in 2024 including growing projects. 2025 applications will open shortly. Supports community led climate action with seed-corn funding, also practical support in finding and making applications to grant funding bodies. Funding Finder updated regularly	£500	Good. Already in contact
<u>People's Postcode Trust</u>	Priorities include: - improve biodiversity and green spaces, - increase community access to outdoor space 3 x Funding rounds per year. Favours registered charities with higher awards.	Up to £2.5k, Capital costs only.	Good
<u>The Mushroom Trust</u>	Funder specialising in green space projects. Interested in creating more managed green spaces through horticulture, including therapeutic green space. Interested in projects that can demonstrate public involvement and community-based fundraising, and those unable to source funding from other sources. Applications assessed annually in the summer	Up to £5k Main focus Lothians but will also fund projects elsewhere.	Good
<u>Cruach Trust</u>	A small Scottish charity providing grants for local projects related to the natural environment & community, including gardens. A preference for small and local organisations in Scotland	Up to £2k	Good
<u>The Pebble Trust</u>	A Highlands based charity with a focus on projects that reduce dependency on fossil fuels and finite resources, that support their vision of a sustainable, fair and low carbon society. Grassroots projects within the Highlands a priority.	Up to £10k	Good. Have already contacted.
<u>Gordon and Ena Baxter Foundation</u>	Support for community projects in the north east & highlands & islands that demonstrate a positive and lasting impact for people living locally. Registered charities or constituted community groups. Works in areas including conservation and environment, to promote the conservation and preservation of the natural environment. Health, including healthy living & nutrition	£100 to £25k Substantial match funding of up to 50% may be required	Good source of significant funding for other Black Isle projects. Already have contact.
<u>Scottish Landfill Communities Fund</u>	Objectives include: - Reclamation, remediation or restoration of land for social or environmental use - Community based waste prevention - Provide or maintain public park or amenity - Conserve or promote biological diversity Will cover capital and contractor fees. ROGS fit eligibility criteria.	Up to £50k Capital costs only Min 11.5% match funding required	Borderline. Must be within 10 miles of a landfill or transfer site (Inverness or E Ross)

<u>NatureScot Nature Restoration Fund</u>	Grants available to a wide range of organisations working in partnership to restore wildlife and habitats on land and at sea, to address the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.	Up to £25k	Moderate
<u>Coop Local Community Fund</u>	Nominated local causes receive a share of the local fund, based on member preferences and local spend	c. £2k	Active now to October '24
<u>Asda Foundation</u>	Investing in Places and Spaces Grant supports not-for-profit community groups to transform spaces at the heart of a local community to bring people together. Creation of community gardens included. Applications currently closed, new opportunities to be announced later in the year.	£10k to £25k	Good Already have contact through funding for other local projects.
<u>Morrisons Foundation</u>	Supports registered charities improving people's lives. Objectives include enhancing community spaces, and improving health and wellbeing. (ROGS may not be eligible)	Up to £10k capital spend	Low as ROGS not a SCIO
<u>Tesco Community Grants (Stronger Starts)</u>	Local good causes are selected every three months to be in the blue token customer vote in stores throughout the UK. Current priority is for projects that support children's' food security and health. More likely for equipment for projects with children.	Up to £1.5k	Low to moderate (High competition,)
<u>Wickes Community Programme</u>	Supports local initiatives to maintain and renovate community areas. Source of free materials. Enquiries via local stores (Inverness store future uncertain).		Moderate
<u>B&Q Foundation</u>	Helping local charities to create better, safer places for people in need.		Low
<u>Community Reuse</u>	Donate unsaleable products and waste materials for re-use by recognised community groups.		Moderate
<u>Aviva Community Fund</u>	Supports climate action: promoting healthy, thriving communities by preventing, preparing for and protecting against the impacts of climate change. Potential to double the effect of local donations under £25k	Up to £50k Match funding for donations	Good
<u>Finnis Scott Foundation</u>	Funder with interest in gardens and horticultural training. Must be a charity. Preference for smaller charities with an existing track record that can show they are 'making a difference'. ROGS is not a SCIO and may not therefore be eligible.	Up to £10k, currently capped at £5k Capital and revenue, but not salaries.	Low

<u>Schroder Charity Trust</u>	Grants to small UK charities towards core and project costs for work under the following categories: - Arts, culture & heritage - Education, training and employment - Environment and conservation - Health & wellbeing - Strengthening communities Especially interest on high VFM return on investment, replicable projects, high volunteer input, supporting older people, supporting marginalised younger people.	Up to £5k	Moderate
<u>Parks4Life Community Fund</u>	An endowment fund supporting community groups to bring parks and greenspaces to life for all to enjoy. Pilot round closed due to demand, will open again in 2025. Includes Scottish only grants.	£5k to £25k	Good
<u>King Charles III Charitable Fund – small grants programme</u>	Programme focuses on projects that contribute to the environment, countryside, social inclusion, health and wellbeing, education, heritage and conservation. Must be community based and have 2 years or more of activity. Very high level of applications.	Up to £500	Low initially. May be a good prospect for later project expansion.
Capital: Supporting volunteer input from specific groups within the population.			
<u>Tree Council Branching Out Fund</u>	For tree and orchard planting, especially projects involving young people (under 21) or part of wider environmental initiatives & sourcing local nurseries Yearly November/December.	Up to £500	Good
<u>The Woodland Trust</u> – tree Packs	Various packs of tree seedlings available for planting by community groups. Must be publicly accessible.	Free	Good Already used for another project
<u>Fit for Life Foundation</u>	Annual awards programme with a focus on pioneering projects that promote healthy, active ageing. The organisation must directly address healthy ageing for groups age 45+ or 65+ with outcomes including physical fitness, mental health, nutrition & community support.	Up to €100k Closed until 2025	Moderate

<u>Paths for All</u> <u>– Community</u> <u>Path Grants</u>	Projects which provide opportunities for people to be more physically active outdoors and in contact with nature. Can be used to create and maintain paths eg tools, materials, contractor hire, signage, promotional materials, planting. Particular focus on engaging with people with poor mental or physical health who are experiencing exclusion. (Potential link to <u>Partnership for Wellbeing</u> health walks in Fortrose?)	Up to £1,5k Two stage process. Must be matched with 'in-kind' contribution from at least 8 volunteers. All grant streams currently closed.	Likely Low unless linking to wider paths networks
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Other sources of grant funding are available that support educational and horticultural training activities or volunteer development. These are not relevant to the start-up phase of the project.

In addition to the larger grant providers outlined above, it is likely that the ROGS Board will be able to make use of their extensive local networks and contacts and local goodwill to secure in-kind donations and / or sponsorship from a range of local businesses and individuals. A successful application to the Aviva fund could potentially double local donations. A local landowner has already offered at costs supply of timber from local forestry, for example, and a local baker has offered to help with refreshments for community events. Close connections and partnership working with the Black Isle Men's Shed will also help to reduce ongoing construction and maintenance costs. Small grants are also occasionally available for one-off costs for local projects that benefit the community from The Highland Council Ward Discretionary Fund and from local developers and social housing providers, such as the [Albyn Housing Society](#) community fund.

NON-GRANT INCOME GENERATION AND REVENUE

After the first year, costs will mainly be routine administration of the site, repair and replacement costs. ROGS aim is to be self-financing to meet ongoing costs within three years, through the rental of growing space and through member subscriptions and local fundraising activities. Using experience from the Rosemarkie allotment site, costs are anticipated to be around £200 to £350 each year, with no lease payments required. These are outlined in the table below:

Revenue Cost Item	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Comments
Administration and running costs, including: Hall hire for AGM Sundry Postage Website fees Membership & community engagement	£75	£75	£80	Most administration will be electronic or absorbed within overall ROGS overheads. Most general maintenance, strimming etc will be carried out by volunteers.
Insurance (Public liability)	£120	£132	£145	Based on equivalent costs for RAGS and allowing for inflation. Some savings may be achieved if policies can be combined with other sites.
Maintenance or repair of infrastructure and communal equipment	£0	£50	£100	
New or replacement planting	£0	£150	£150	Costs expected to reduce as project evolves and able to generate own seeds, plant-stock and local donations.
TOTALS	£ 195	£407	£475	

Development of a community garden, planting for wildlife corridors, fencing or footpath upgrades will be developed incrementally. It is anticipated that community use may develop or changes over the first years of use. Funds for these projects will be raised through a combination of fundraising, in-kind donations and small grants, specific to each project, supported by in-kind contributions and targeted fundraising or local sponsorship.

Individual Allotment fees (assuming full occupancy after year 1)

The allotments will generate sufficient income to cover administrative and routine maintenance costs. Fees will be payable depending on the number of allotments available to rent. The following is an estimate based on draft site designs and rental rates at comparable sites.

Plot Size	Number	Annual Fee	Total
Full Plot	0	£50.00	£ 0.00
Half Plot	0	£25.00	£ 0.00
Quarter plot	7	£12.50	£ 87.50
Annual membership (allotment plot)	9 min	£10.00	£ 90.00
Annual subscriptions (community garden/ plots)	10 est	£ 5.00	£ 50.00
Total income from plot fees and subscriptions			£207.50

The annual fee for an allotment growing plot is based on equivalent local rates of £25 for a half plot at the Rosemarkie and the Cromarty allotment sites. Both of these locations are currently fully used and have good demand for any vacancies. Based on known demand in Fortrose, this is considered a reasonable rate.

An allotment membership fee will also be charged for each individual who works an allotment (initial assumptions are 1 person per plot, though some plots may also be between two or more individuals. The income assumed here is therefore a minimum and may be higher).

Use of a community growing space will initially be funded either by donation or by an annual subscription of a nominal amount e.g. £5.00 to cover use of tools and informal membership of a growers' forum to discuss and decide on use of the communal space. The nominal charge will make it accessible and affordable to as many people in the community as possible. Once the project is established, it may be possible to provide access to the community growing space at no charge. A 'membership' commitment may still be required, however, to both manage numbers using the facility and provide a continuing forum for about how the space should be used, plants to be grown and so forth.

LOCAL FUNDRAISING OPPORTUNITIES

To supplement income from plot fees, ROGS will also develop a fundraising plan raise additional income towards the ongoing development and maintenance of the site. Initial fundraising and donations will be used to grant funding applications along with in-kind contributions. The group aim to raise £2,000 to support the initial acquisition and development costs, and to cover first year costs when plot rental fees will be very limited.

A modest target of £500 per year is then proposed for Years 2 and 3, to avoid stretching capacity of the Directors in the first two years whilst the site is being developed and established. This can be increased from Year 3 onwards to create a reasonable sinking fund for ongoing repairs, maintenance and renewal of the site and infrastructure. Any surpluses will be available to support future projects and the wider objectives of ROGS within the Fortrose and Rosemarkie communities.

Once costs and income are more firmly established, ROGS may also consider whether a proportion of the plots and growing spaces can be made available at low or no cost for households on restricted incomes. Fundraising opportunities include but will not be limited to the following:

Activity	Type	Period	Target Amount	Comments
Co-operative Community Fund (Current participants)	One-off	Now	£900 - £1,500	
Sponsorship opportunities (Memorial benches, trees etc)	One-off	Year 1	£500 +	
Total Target (Pre-Development)			£2,000	Will establish early fund to cover fixed revenue costs; to support ongoing community engagement, and initial purchases of seeds and plants etc.
Plant donations	Ongoing	Years 1 - 3	£150	In-kind contribution value
'Friends of Ness Community Gardens' or similar	Ongoing	Years 1 - 3	£720 (based on 20% current membership @ £20 pa)	Potential for member or other supporters who are not allotment plot holders or community garden growers to support through an annual 'friends' payment.
Local market refreshments (using produce)	Ongoing	Years 1-3	£200 (based on 2 x per annum)	TBI are often looking for groups to provide refreshments at monthly Black Isle community markets.

grown on-site).			– nearest locations Culbokie or Cromarty)	
Local events	Ongoing	Years 1-5	£1,000 (based on 1 x per annum)	Based on an offer from local Golf Club to host 'race nights' or similar, which can typically raise up to £1k
Seasonal sales of surplus produce or plants	Ongoing	Years 2-3	£100 (based on 2 x sales per annum)	There is not currently a community market at Fortrose or Rosemarkie. Occasional sales may be possible through the other TBI markets, or through supporting organisations such as the beach café, or at community engagement events on-site. There is no longer a green-grocer selling locally grown fresh produce in Fortrose. Nearest local supplier is Black Isle Berries farm shop at Tore (8 miles)
Target Annual Fundraising Potential (Post-acquisition)			Up to £2, 020	(Excluding in-kind donations)

This initial scoping indicates that there will be a balance between ongoing revenue costs and income from fees and subscriptions for growing plots / community garden based on moderate levels of interest. However, to ensure a small surplus and to protect the longer-term project viability, this income will be supplemented by local fundraising activities or higher membership/use. The community survey shows there is a good pool of members who support the project but may not want to be involved in growing activities. A small group of member volunteers should be able to assist in delivering a small fundraising plan without placing undue stress on the capacity of Directors, and preventing an over-reliance on continuous grant funding.

SWOT ANALYSIS

A SWOT analysis has been carried out in liaison with the Board to assess the proposals in terms of strengths and weaknesses (internal) and opportunities and threats (external). This has been used to inform the development of plans and a business case by identifying strengths can help to maximize opportunities and minimize threats; and through learning from others to identify steps that can be taken Board take to mitigate exposure to risks.

STRENGTHS (internal) - Constituted group has already developed a track record. - Good range of skills and expertise within the group. - Existing allotments expertise (users and administration of). - Known unmet demand for allotments and publicly available greenspace. - Low ongoing revenue costs once initial capital infrastructure in place. - Opportunity to test support, demand and group capacity on a smaller site and to grow the project incrementally as further land becomes available.	OPPORTUNITIES (external) - Better social cohesion. - Intergenerational work. - Develop local partnerships. - Potential for growth / expansion. - Delivers multiple national and local policy priorities (resilient communities, place building, environmental protection/improvement, local food production, reduce social isolation, improve health and wellbeing etc). - Volunteering opportunities – local skills and community capacity building. Improved ecology / biodiversity. - Improve neglected greenspace.
WEAKNESSES (internal) - Heavy reliance on / lack of volunteers / volunteer fatigue to sustain the project long term. - Lack of demand / skills - growing spaces not maintained & become neglected and/or subject to vandalism. - Pace of expansion / new projects / keeping up skills, motivation and capacity.	THREATS (external) - Planning objections / onerous planning constraints - Very competitive funding environment, not a priority community (not an area of deprivation etc). - Ensuring site security/ maintenance. - Poor local reputation develops if project is delayed or lacks clear direction and outputs. - Potential conflict between open wildlife corridors/biodiversity and food growing.

RISK ASSESSMENT, MITIGATION AND MANAGEMENT

All risks identified fall within acceptable to tolerable ranges with control measures in place.

Risk No.	Identified Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Unmanaged Risk Score	Mitigation	Managed Risk Score
1	Gaps in committee skills	Low	Medium	Medium	High levels of existing expertise. Proactive ongoing review, increase membership, co-opt skills as required.	Low
2	Lack of demand for growing plots	Low	Medium (£)	Low	Strong market research indicators. Incremental growth will test demand. Revert to other low-resource use if demand fails.	Low
3	Lack of community support	Low	High	Medium	Strong community research indicators. Mixed use of space reflects community priorities & feedback. Revert to general amenity land as a long-term option if support fails. Can revert to wild state.	Low
4	Lack of volunteers / Volunteer fatigue	Low	Medium	Medium	A good proportion of the members and non-members have already volunteered. Proactive community engagement. Provide a variety of inclusive one-off and regular/weekly volunteering opportunities. Adapt plans to community needs & feedback. Regular reports back to the community via social media and email on achievements and positive volunteering experiences. Site maintains flexibility to adjust to less volunteer intensive use, eg more wild-space or allotments.	Low
5	Poor management of site/ Vandalism / damage Reputation fails	Low/ Medium	Medium	Medium	Site visible by neighbours and adjoining roads. Maintain good relationship with neighbours and other land owners. Proactive site management /watch, and respond quickly to any issues. Good community and Community Council engagement and involvement in actively resolving issues.	Low

					Continue synergy with other local groups. Welcome all parts of the community and proactive partnership with less engaged groups within the community. High levels of existing expertise and working operational models that can be adopted from RAGS. Experienced Board members. Constitution gives Members powers to replace Board.	
6	Unable to secure funds	Low	Low	Low	Good range of potential funding sources identified, and relatively low initial capital costs. Very low ongoing revenue costs. Incremental development so not constantly dependent on grant funding. Maintain good local links. Continue good links with Men's Shed and Feddanhill Wood owner. Encourage regular giving by community. Develop local income & fundraising strategy – tied to community engagement & support.	Low
7	Planning objections/ conditions of use (Pre-planning advice suggests change of use permission may be required).	Medium	High	Medium / High	Early identification of concerns through community engagement. Proactive in building good relationships with immediate neighbours. Continued contact and advice from PAS	Low Medium
8	Adverse environmental impact	Low	Low	Low	Initial site surveys Good management plans Ongoing monitoring Prompt action on any identified threats	Low

SUMMARY FINDINGS

High levels of community and stakeholder support

Throughout development of the project, there have been consistent and strong levels of support from people living in Rosemarkie and Fortrose for the overall aims of the project.

Community support has been demonstrated through high response rates to the Community Right to Buy petition, good engagement with community activities, and positive responses to surveys and consultation sessions.

Stakeholder support has been demonstrated by high degrees of interaction between local organisations, and positive informal feedback to outline proposals, backed up by written letters and emails of support. Stakeholders have identified many mutual benefits, shared objectives, and the potential for the project to contribute to both local and national strategic objectives.

High demand for/limited existing provision to growing and amenity space

Fortrose and Rosemarkie have experienced rapid growth in housing over the last decade. This has not been matched by development of communal spaces and amenity greenspace, which was already in short supply.

The community survey and feedback at engagement events indicates a strong appetite and support across the local community for additional greenspace in Fortrose where people can meet together socially and enjoy nature. There is very strong support for the protection and restoration of areas to support wildlife, wildflowers and biodiversity.

There is an evidenced need and demand for more food growing land in the Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community. Existing provision is limited to the allotment plots at Rosemarkie, which are already oversubscribed.

High match to strategic priorities

The settlement of Fortrose in particular currently lacks community cohesion due to rapid increase in housing with a physical disconnect from the town centre and older residential areas around the High Street. The addition of a place for all generations to meet socially and informally in nature would benefit physical and mental health and enable various existing groups to work together to bring more social cohesion and will enhance and develop community resilience.

There will also be potentially significant public health benefits by supporting active ageing of a predominantly older demographic, and by supporting and improving physical and mental health for the overall population.

The small scale of the project makes it feasible to manage through volunteer input, with the potential to create positive change for both individuals and the wider community through a range of volunteering opportunities.

The project also supports both national and local priorities to develop and improve greenspaces for community use, to support access to healthily locally produced food, and to protect and improve nature and biodiversity.

Manageable Risks

A SWOT analysis and risk assessment has identified potential risk areas. This has identified that the overall project has a low risk profile, with no areas of high risk. The main areas of potential concern are lack of community support, lack of volunteers to sustain the project, planning restrictions and lack of funding availability. All the risks identified can be managed to a low impact score.

The Board of Directors have high level of skills and experience in managing similar projects. They have good, established networks and connections to a wide range of community-based groups in the area, with good potential for synchronicity and future joint projects. ROGS are quickly establishing a track record of regenerating greenspace areas and footpaths within their area of operation and have a good base of local support, which continues to grow as they become more established and known in the area. New members have also expressed an interest in becoming more involved to bringing new skills and expertise to the group and to increase the pool of potential volunteers to sustain the project.

There is known demand and support for all aspects of the project, evidenced by the community survey and growth in membership.

Pre-application advice from The Highland Council planning department has been applied for with expert support from PAS. If planning permission is required for change of use to community amenity space, it is anticipated that it will be possible to comply with all requirements, although additional costs may be incurred and site establishment delayed.

Flexibility within the design and balance of use of the land will allow for elements of the project to be developed incrementally or adapted as required and as community needs and use evolve.

Funding opportunities

The current grant funding environment is tight and very competitive. Many funds specifically target areas of higher deprivation or larger scale projects. However, a number of potential funding matches have been identified. The site also allows for phased development and flexibility between potential uses at all or part of the site (including existing) if funding streams are not immediately available.

The most significant costs will be at acquisition and for the initial development of site infrastructure. Once established, ongoing costs are low, and there is strong potential for the project as planned to be self-sustaining within three years, with capacity for further development alongside other ROGS projects as funding and volunteer capacity allow.

The Ness Gap Site has the feasible potential to provide:

- Recreational community garden space
- Improved areas for wildlife through hedging / wildflowers and natural planting
- At least 8 x quarter-size allotments
- Community food growing space for all abilities

NEXT STEPS

The following actions have been identified for the ROGS Directors to pursue on the completion of this feasibility study:

Pre-Acquisition

- Continue negotiations with the site owners (Tullochs / Springfield) to aim and achieve discounted sale / gifting of land.
- Follow up pre-planning advice from Highland Council with support and advice from PAS as required.
- Approach the Highland Council Planning team once initial design available for pre-planning advice to clarify any permissions required and likely conditions to be applied, with further support and advice from PAS as required.
- Continue to scope out initial capital costs and to explore funding opportunities – grants, crowdfunding, donations, income generation.
- Continue to pursue meetings / letters of support from, and ongoing engagement with, key stakeholders.
- Grow membership and volunteer bank.
- Start a register of interest in allotment plots / growing space.

Post-Acquisition and Ongoing

- Continue to develop networks with and learning from other growing projects as part of market analysis (income, costs, risks, general advice).
- Explore contact with /membership of organisations that can provide support with the acquisition and development and ongoing management of community assets, including but not limited to:
 - Community Land Advisory Service at HIE,
 - Community Ownership Support Services at Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS),
 - National Allotments Society (NAS),
 - Social Farms and Gardens,
 - Nourish,
 - Think Health Think Nature,
 - Highland Climate Action Hub, and
 - High Life Highland (youth work team and rangers).
- Develop a site management plan and adopt operational procedures with support from RAGS, NAS and the Highland Council Allotments Officer.
- Develop an ongoing community engagement / volunteer engagement plan.
- Develop a fundraising plan and form a volunteer sub-group to implement it.