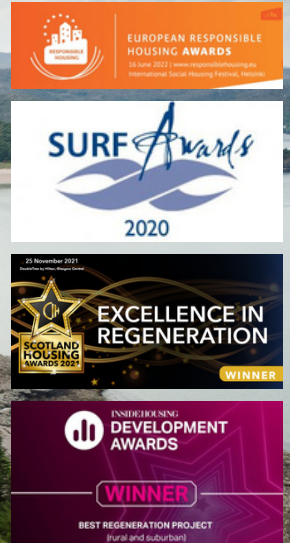


# Gairloch

## Achtercairn, Gairloch, Highland

May 2023



- > **25 affordable homes (19 social rent and 6 low-cost home ownership) with 3 housing providers providing 5 tenures**
- > **40,000 visitors per year at GALE Centre, Scotland's first public building awarded 'passive house' status**
- > **New University of the Highlands and Islands learning centre; community shop and café; Farm Shop, with vet clinic**
- > **New Air Training Corps purpose built training facility**
- > **Local construction firms employed**
- > **Opportunities for future expansion**
- > **An excellent example of a multi-partner development to attract investment**
- > **Wide social, environmental and economic benefits to the area**

In the Wester Ross village of Gairloch sits the award-winning development of Achtercairn.

Communities Housing Trust (CHT) led the project, and together with the community, transformed the former derelict site in the centre of the village into a mixed development. The site now incorporates 25 homes which have been delivered in two phases by CHT, Albyn Housing Association and the Highland Council. The home tenures include social rent, low cost home ownership, and Rent To Buy.

The GALE Centre is a timber building – Scotland's first public passive house building – run by Gairloch & Loch Ewe Action forum (GALE), a social enterprise now able to expand operations. The building helps create a focal point, encouraging visitors to stop.

The development also includes facilities for learning and skills development, which would otherwise not be available, helping reduce education inequalities in rural areas.

# Gairloch

## Community involvement

The community was determined to find a solution to developing the derelict site. CHT led the project, and together with the community, formed the Achtercairn Development Group (ADG) which CHT chaired in order to regenerate the site. The ADG invited around 50 partners including business association, community groups, neighbouring landowners, the local authority, councillors and Albyn Housing Association, to be involved in developing a new focal point for the village.

The ADG influenced the masterplan layout: instead of housing at the front of the development, this area now accommodates local businesses including the GALE Centre Tourist Hub, which encourages visitors to stop and attracts around 40,000 visitors a year. Social enterprise GALE opened their sustainable timber building in May 2012, becoming the first public building in Scotland to be awarded passive house status.



## Successes

CHT led the project and chaired the ADG, consulting with all stakeholders for their guidance on the preferred direction of the project. This had many benefits: as there was no community company in existence, CHT were the vehicle used to purchase several sections of land to amalgamate the site; CHT's expertise in delivering housing helped find a solution of mixed tenures suitable for the community; local businesses attracted funding to their own projects which otherwise may not have been possible if the funding requirements were presented as one package. The community took ownership of many aspects of the development, such as providing street names acknowledging one of the main local contributors.

GALE are continuing to develop and expand their social enterprise, employing more staff year-round in order to tackle instability of seasonal work. The community shop and cafe stocks produce from over 40 local producers, with on-site growing space contributing to zero waste and low food miles. The success of the GALE Centre inspired the Gairloch Heritage Museum to relocate and regenerate their own building into another showstopper for Gairloch, which won the Art Fund Museum of the Year 2020.

The mixed development represents a great model of what's possible for communities across Scotland, and has been the recipient of European award, UK award and Scottish awards.

## Challenges

New developments can divide opinions and existing businesses can feel threatened or displaced. While this was a factor in the early stages of the ADG, this was carefully worked through with the community and the partners involved. The ADG steering group was a strength in negotiating through any difficulties which arose and gave everyone a platform to voice any concerns.

## Future

The site provides access to Estate land for possible future housing and potential for a development opposite for a neighbouring landowner.