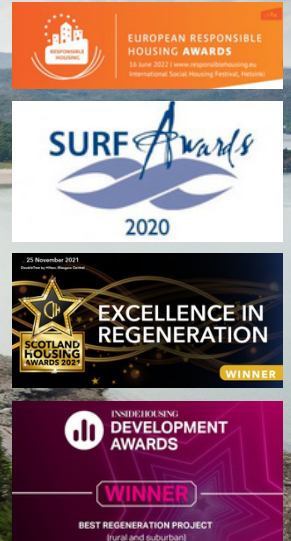


# Gairloch

## Achtercairn, Gairloch, Highland

May 2023



- > **25 affordable homes (19 social rent and 6 low-cost home ownership) with 3 housing providers providing 5 tenures**
- > **Social Enterprise hosting a Tourist Information Service, a community cafe and a shop**
- > **Farm Shop incorporating an independent 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 and other partners, 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 Society 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 was one of the first to receive funding from the Scottish Government’s Rural and Islands Housing Fund to create community-led affordable housing.

# 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 Society, 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

As the project lead, consulting with all stakeholders for their guidance on the preferred direction of the project at key milestones was essential. The benefits included: CHT purchased several sections of land to amalgamate the site; CHT's expertise in delivering affordable housing solutions facilitated the provision of rent and low-cost home ownership tenures from 3 organisations (Albyn Housing Society, The Highland Council and CHT); and a viable funding strategy attracted different funders and investors to each component of the project, which made the project deliverable. CHT utilised their tried and tested Rent to Buy model, alongside affordable rented homes to offer secure, long-term housing for local residents.

GALE are developing and expanding 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 a disused 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 an influential European award, UK award and several 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.