



URRAS OIGHREACHD GHABHSAINN
GALSON ESTATE TRUST

ANNUAL REPORT AITHISG BHLIADHNAIL

OCTOBER / AN DÀMHAIR 2022



*Resilient, resourceful and responsive
Dioghrasach, dèanadach is dìcheallach*



Chairperson's Report

Aithris bhon Chathraiche

Fàilte oirbh gu aithisg bhliadhnail Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn.

Se bliadhna thrang th'air a bhith ann an iomadach dòigh, ach b' eucoltach sin ris na dùbhlain bha an lùib Covid-19. Buailidh mi air cuspair no dhà agus gheibhear tuilleadh fiosrachaidh san aithisg.

As dèidh bhith faisg air trì bliadhna gun dachaigh dhuinn fhìn, ghluais an sgioba a-steach dhan ionad ùr agus bha sinn moiteil gu robh Kate Fhoirbeis (Rùnaire an Ionmhais agus an Eaconamaidh) BPA an làthair son an fhosgladh oifigeil.

Bha e na thlachd a bhith a' coimhead obair an Urrais a' dol am meud le Fèisean, cùrsaichean agus tachartasan a' gabhail àite le àireamhan fallainn a' gabhail pàirt. Bha e na thoileachas dhuinn faicinn gu robhas a cleachdadh na goireasan ùra airson luchd turais aig Ionad an Urrais.

Tha obair rianachd agus reachdas chroitearachd aig cridhe obair an Urrais. Tha e air a bhith air leth misneachail gu bheil daoine a' tilleadh dhan oifis air ceann-gnothaich agus cuideachd mòran obrach aig sgioba an Urrais a' conaltradh ri buidhnean fa leth a tha a' cur feum air ceadan foirmeil.

Tha mi cuideachd airson ainmeachadh an obair càraidh a chaidh a dhèanamh aig Port Nis. Se obair mhòr a bha seo airson an rathad a dhèanamh sàbhailte.

Bha sinn air leth toilichte cothrom a ghabhail a' Mhaoin Coimhearsnachd fhosgladh às ùr. Tha cothrom a-nise aig muinntir na sgìre tagradh a dhèanamh airson taic airgid.

Gheibhear cunntas mionaideach air duilleag 11 mun luchd-obrach th' air fàgail no air tòiseachadh às ùr, ach tha mi airson ainmeachadh gu sònraichte Lisa NicIlleathain a th' air a dhol gu obair ùr. Tha sinn a' guidhe gach soirbheachas do Lisa agus tha mi airson fàilte bhlàth a chur air Jemma Nic a' Phiocair tha a' gabhail thairis obair a' mhanaidsear.

Tha sinn a-nise a' coimhead air adhart ri bliadhna thrang eile le sgioba dealasach, Bord cuideachail agus coimhearsnachd taiceil. Mo thaing dhuibh uile

Welcome to the first Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn annual report in this format.

It's been a busy year, but a very different challenge from the last two years of Covid challenges. In this foreword I'll touch on one or two highlights.

After nearly 3 years without a permanent base, it has been wonderful to see the team back together in the new building and we were delighted to be joined by Kate Forbes MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, for the official opening.

It's been a joy to see the Urras programme of activities grow through the year. It was also good to see visitors using the facilities at the new visitor bays at Tom na Bà.

Crofting regulation and administration is at the heart of the work of the Urras and it has been pleasing to see folk visit the office. This work is wide ranging and includes individual croft matters as well as common grazings land.

I also want to mention here the extensive re-building of Rathad a Chidhe in Port of Ness. This was mostly paid for by the Urras who were able to secure sufficient funds to ensure the re-build work was completed for the benefit of regular users.

We were also particularly pleased to re-open the Community Investment fund and we are already receiving applications from community groups.

Page 11 of the report gives a detailed account of staff who have either left or newly joined the team. We give a warm welcome to new staff and wish departing staff the best of luck for the future. I want to mention especially Lisa Maclean who has left the post of manager after nearly 11 years. We wish Lisa well and I am also very pleased to welcome Jemma Macvicar who now joins us as our new manager.

We now look forward to a bright future with a resilient staff team, a committed Board and the support of the community.

Agnes Rennie

Cathraiche UOG / UOG Chairperson

Highlights From 2021/22

Bàrr-phuingean Bho 2021/22

This was a year of recovery for the organisation. After the office fire, COVID-19 and the subsea cable failure, it was a great relief to return to a sense of normality.

In October, the Urras took handover of the replacement office at South Galson from local contractors, CalMax Construction. Completion was delayed due to material shortages as suppliers struggled with orders. The new property is slightly larger and the spaces have been remodelled to give a more flexible, open plan layout. Improvements have been made in technology and broadband to provide the facilities that have become the norm following COVID-19.

With the smell of fresh paint still in our nostrils, we were delighted to host our 2021 AGM both in person in the Business Centre in South Galson and online in late November 2021. After updates on Urras activities and projects over the previous year, guest speaker Magnus Davidson gave a thought-provoking talk on land use and repopulation in the Highlands and Islands.

It was pleasing to return to a full programme of events in 2021/22 after nearly two disrupted years. Fèis na Fairge, Plòigh and Dùthchas were all well-received and confirmed the need to continue this type of engagement into the future.



Top : Kate Forbes MSP opening the new office

Bottom : Attendees at UOG's 2021 AGM (Sradag Creative)

The Urras celebrated fifteen years of community ownership on 12th January. Then on 3rd March, we welcomed Kate Forbes MSP, Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, to mark the anniversary and officially open our business centre in South Galson.

We were delighted to re-open the Community Investment Fund on 1st June. The new look Fund has been streamlined in line with feedback received from previous applicants. The main products are now a Small Grant and Development Grant, plus a Support for Growth package for strategic initiatives.

A queue of applicants appeared very rapidly after the starting gun was fired and it was pleasing to be able to award a total of £33,000 towards projects with clear local benefits. These applications once again demonstrated excellent leverage achieved through the Community Investment Fund and we look forward to seeing the projects progressing.



Marie Gillies, UOG Community Investment Officer, pictured delivering a cheque to Donald MacSween, Manager of Ness Football Club.

Care & Wellbeing Cùram is Sòirbheas

The Urras' health and wellbeing programme 'Sunnd' ran successfully between January and March with a range of activities to help keep our community active and healthy. Events included salsa dancing, cookery demonstrations, photography workshops, first aid courses, art sessions and even sea swimming. Informative workshops also took place at Young at Heart and the CEN day club with departments from the NHS, Ability Net and the Fire Service.

One-to-one gym sessions were also run by Spòrsnis to tailor a fitness plan to your needs. This block was followed by a 6-week block of Release Method classes, mat-based gentle exercise which helped strength and balance.

Thanks are due to all our partners and participants who provided, attended and hosted sessions as part of Sunnd.

"There was something for everyone, from cookery demonstrations where we learned about new recipes, handy tips and tricks, to learning about local historical events, plus the advantages and disadvantages of the internet. The physical activity sessions like dance routines were engaging and fun and, before we knew it, we were getting an energetic workout while having a great time."
Elenor



Sea swimming group at Stoth Beach

"I love the fact that the Urras offers health walks! It's a lovely way to get to know the local area and other locals. It's also helpful that it's during school hours so we can get some adult interaction." Ariana

"What we enjoy about the health walks is the company of other people; we have walked in places we have never been before; and we use other muscles than we use in normal daily activity like gardening." Ivo & Laura

Our walks are a safe and sociable way for anyone of any ability to get some exercise and meet people on the Estate. Mondays were days for Buggy and Toddler Walks, and on Fridays there was the option of a Health Walk.



Left : Health Walk



Right: Sunnd session at UOG Business Centre



School children participating in the JMT Transition Programme

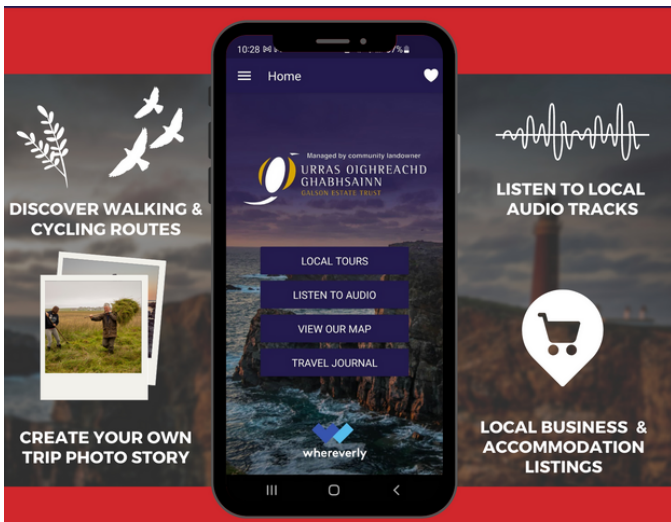
Outputs - Toraidhean

76 Sunnd sessions/438 attendances
26 buggy walks/284 attendances
32 health walks/110 attendances
23 Primary 7 transition pupils engaged
9 JMT transition activities

The Urras and Urras Oighreachd Chàrlabhaigh jointly co-ordinated a schools transition programme during the early summer period. Primary 7 pupils from Sgoil an Taobh Siar, Shawbost, Lionel and Breasclete schools worked hard to attain their John Muir Discovery Award by completing a number of different land-based activities. While doing so, the pupils made many new friends prior to the move to first year in the Nicolson Institute.

Tourism Turasachd

A brand-new tourism app, 'Visit Galson Estate', was launched and can be downloaded via the Android and Apple platforms. It offers audio tracks, an interactive 3D map and business listings.



Tourism app - search on Apple & Android

New waymarkers were installed along the Tolsta-Ness walking route. These are flexible markers that can be moved over time if necessary, for example to avoid important sites or habitats. Signage was also ordered for each end of the route and should be in place by the end of the calendar year.

We were delighted to receive a grant of £31,400 from Foundation Scotland and Crown Estate Scotland, via the Community Capacity Grants Programme, in early 2022. With tourism and its associated facilities being a key focus of our 20-year Strategic Plan, the funding is being used to cover a much-needed feasibility study for the Butt of Lewis Lighthouse complex. Discussions have been held with Northern Lighthouse Board over redevelopment and leasing.

New campervan bays, public toilets and shower facilities were opened at South Galson in spring 2022. They became busy over the summer season as more visitors discovered the site. Additional features have been added over recent months, such as a noticeboard for posters and leaflets to promote local businesses.



New visitor facilities at South Galson

Outputs - Toraidhean

- Visitor website and app created
- 4 campervan bays plus public toilet/ shower delivered
- Waymarkers installed on Ness-Tolsta route
- Technical proposals completed for Butt of Lewis Lighthouse redevelopment
- 48 visitor surveys completed

Technical surveys have been completed at the site and initial proposals for redevelopment were generated to include catering, retail, visitor accommodation and toilet/shower facilities plus parking and access. The next stage of the process is to identify a business model and legal entity to take a project forward. A mini-exhibition of the initial proposals was undertaken in the autumn to enable residents to review and comment on work so far.



Butt of Lewis Lighthouse (Credit Northern Lighthouse Board)

Crofting & Land Use

Croitearachd is Cleachadh Fearainn

Land management formed a major part of the activity during the year. Numerous enquiries were received with many translating into formal transactions.

Commercial contracts with utility companies and mobile communications operators remain an important income source. Efforts continued throughout the year to negotiate agreements at various locations across the Estate, relating to activities such as electricity network upgrading and sand extraction.

The Hebridean Community Garden has been transformed over the course of the year. Three polycrubs are now bursting at the seams with organically grown vegetables, herbs and flowers.

Local stonemason Chris Barrowman has completed two sets of drystone walls for the project and the grounds at Clan Macquarrie – creating visually striking seating areas and windbreaks for expansion into outdoor raised beds.

Outputs - Toraidhean

210 crofting and land enquiries
13 land transactions instructed
9 commercial agreements negotiated
3 polycrubs with 14 community beds
1 drystone walling course with 8 attendees
1 fishing session with 16 attendees
63 deer dispatched in autumn 2021
134 geese dispatched
11 townships receiving Gunnera treatment

Geese have been regular invaders on our crofts and we were relieved to see the goose management scheme continuing after NatureScot provided funding. Invasive species 'Gunnera' has been growing rapidly across Galson Estate recently. Spraying was organised when weather conditions allowed and permission granted to access crofts. The Urras is considering options to run a course in the future to train people from the Estate in the safe use of pesticides.

Deer also caused consternation and 67 were dispatched during the autumn 2021 shooting season. An island-wide deer count was undertaken by Nature Scot in September and this will guide future planning to manage herds.



Drystone wallers at South Galson (Sradag Creative)

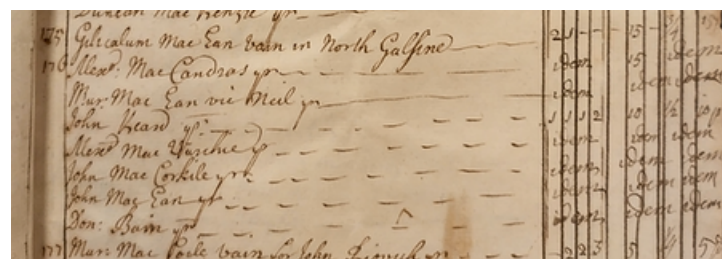
Tutor Chris Barrowman also supplied his expertise for another successful Drystone Walling Course. The course was held at the UOC Business Centre over two days in July.

Our Loch Fishing session in July, run by the Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust and Roddy John MacDonald, proved to be very popular. Anglers enjoyed a sunny day at Loch an Dùin in Shader and caught a few fish into the bargain.



'Gotcha' - success at the Loch Fishing session

Juliette Desportes, a third-year PhD student spent a three-month internship with the Urras to research the history of Galson Estate in the lead-up to the 1923 re-settlement of the townships. She has written a series of interesting blog posts.



Historic rental entries (Courtesy of University of Glasgow)

Exceptional Place Àite air leth

Our heritage festival Dùthchas in early September delivered a range of fantastic events. There was a coastal walk with local RSPB, an artist in residence and time for prayer at St Moluag's, interspersed with two pertinent talks from doctoral researchers Juliette Desportes and Ryan Dziadowiec. Attendees also enjoyed Ceòl sa Cafaidh, tweed waulking and wool spinning demonstrations, plus a screen-printing session with local artist Elaine Smith.



Dùthchas Music session at Comunn Eachdraidh Nis

Fèis na Fairge ran for a week in late March, providing an exciting programme of maritime-related events. Features included talks, story-telling and walks with guest contributors. These were delivered by local partner organisations.



Fèis na Fairge Land Sea Ceremony (Sradag Creative)

The five-year strategic planning process kicked off in March with community workshops, continuing onto feedback from local organisations, concluding with a household survey over July and August. Follow-up interviews with respondents will continue into the autumn.



Plòigh Session with Comunn na Gàidhlig at Eoropie Playpark

There was another strong uptake of places for Plòigh and Plòigh Mhòr activities, the school holiday programme run during April, July and October. Older children participated in some very cold and wet raft building sessions with the Scaladale team last October. For younger ages, there were games at Spòrsnis, cake baking with Comunn Eachdraidh Nis, a treasure hunt with Comunn na Gàidhlig, a film at Taigh Dhonnchaidh and much more.



Reinstatement under way at Port of Ness

The Urras was pleased to work with contractors Duncan Mackay and Sons to reinstate the access road to Port of Ness Harbour. This was an expensive repair funded primarily by the Urras and staff will be working closely with boat owners to manage a safe access for harbour users and members of the public.

Outputs - Toraidhean

£33,084 grant assistance which attracted
£243,975 other funding
215 sqm of new grant aided accommodation
34 Dùthchas sessions/330 attendances
5 Fèis na Fairge sessions/63 attendances
34 Plòigh sessions/847 attendances
Land released for 6 new affordable houses
130 household surveys returned
270 residents consulted

Financial Overview

Ard-shealladh Ionmhais

Financial performance for 2021/22 reflected a strong recovery from previous setbacks and enabled the Urras to carry out a wide range of activities.

| | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| Income | £820,063 |
| Expenditure | <u>£678,003</u> |
| Surplus | £142,060 |

Wind energy income is critical to the activities undertaken across the year and, after coming through the loss of income for around 18 months, wind speeds during 2021/22 boosted performance. A total of £450,000 was drawn down from Galson Energy during the year. Wind energy income accounts for around 70% of gross income from year to year.

External funding received for projects amounted to £201,330. Other sources of income included £59,223 from commercial leases and £21,300 from consultancy/management fees plus £16,800 from land sales. Croft rents paid totalled £7,990.

Major items of expenditure were salaries of £259,827 and project delivery amounting to £256,214. There were 14 staff employed during the year, equating to 8.5 full-time equivalents with an average of 26 hours worked each week per employee. Directors do not receive any remuneration.

Grant awarded through the Community Investment Fund totalled £33,084, involving seven community organisations of which five were based within the Estate area.

Whilst wind energy income has created significant autonomy for the Urras, careful consideration is now required to balance needs and opportunities; deciding between delivering long-term impacts, creating a portfolio of investments for the future and supporting local organisations to develop.

Under auditor rotation requirements, the Urras is required to appoint an alternative party for preparation and filing of its 2021/22 annual accounts. We are grateful to Calum Macdonald and his team at CIB Services for the many years of advice and support provided since the inception of the Urras. The company will continue providing payroll services while auditing services pass over to another accountancy team. Calum is pictured on the right presenting the annual accounts at a previous AGM held in the Clan MacQuarrie Community Centre.



Grant Support

Community Investment Fund grant awards during the year were as follows :

- Ness Football Club granted £2,000 to compete in the Highland Amateur Cup semi-finals
- Cross Church of Scotland granted £2,000 to support a youth club for S1-S6 pupils
- Acair granted £1,000 to assist with publication of a Nicolson Institute Centenary Book
- Hebrides Mountain Rescue Team granted £10,000 towards the costs of a new operating base
- Carthannas Nis granted £7,800 for installing new office accommodation
- Galson Cemetery Committee granted £6,284 for storage accommodation
- Comunn Eachdraidh Nis granted £4,000 to install a specialist display unit.

www.galsontrust.com/community-investment

Contact us at **cif@uogltd.com** or **01851 850 393**.



Focus On Regeneration

Fòcas Air Ath-bheòthachadh



We welcome our guest columnist and keynote speaker at this year's AGM, Ronnie MacRae, Chief Executive of Communities Housing Trust, based in Inverness. From his extensive experience of housing-led development, Ronnie shares his current thoughts on regeneration across the Highlands & Islands.



Scottish communities are in a unique position within the UK. They are empowered through legislation, policy and funding support to positively direct their own futures. This provides more local power over decision-making and controllable growth.

The number of communities demonstrating how they can deliver a choice in affordable tenure options (crucial for rural and island communities) and a more diverse economy alongside key community-owned facilities such as schools, health centres, shops, youth and sports facilities, is impressive and growing.

The Communities Housing Trust has worked with well over a hundred communities facing challenges of depopulation, fuel poverty, social isolation, and loss of services.

Our community-led projects like Gairloch, Staffin, Strontian and Tomintoul delivered benefits in different ways, from providing much-needed housing, to increasing local skills and job opportunities, to a community's long-term sustainability through ownership of assets. They provide proof of concept and confidence for others, showing that with strong partnerships and the correct support, developments are not just sketches and ideas on paper.

Community landowners such as Knoydart, Assynt Crofters, and Assynt Foundation amongst others are actively pushing forward with plans for more affordable housing alongside facilities such as workspaces and essential infrastructure, all using place-based community growth approaches.

In some ways challenges are increasing: rural populations are dropping, the skills gap between urban and rural areas has widened, labour and materials are less available – but it is said that “out of adversity comes opportunity.”

Now is the time to look holistically at these issues to help grow our rural economies. By working in partnership with existing and emerging business and service providers, and the many who want to return or who bring skills with them, we can, and already are, able to offer choice in employment and housing options in communities with strong social infrastructures.

R. MacRae



Image on left shows a community-led development in Skye involving a partnership of Staffin Community Trust, Communities Housing Trust and Lochalsh & Skye Housing Association. The facilities include six affordable homes of three different tenures, a community-owned health centre leased to NHS Highland and workshop/office space. Construction commenced in 2020 and residents moved in during February 2022.

Credit Hugh Ross (SCT)

Future Opportunities

Cothroman San Àm Ri Teachd

Following COVID-19 disruptions and staff changes both at the Urras and within local public-sector agencies, partnership working will be an important area to pursue. In the past there was useful collaboration with the local authority, NHS Eilean Siar and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, as well as other agencies, that delivered some significant programmes. Old and new relationships will require to be built up and areas for co-operation agreed to resume this vital aspect of our work.

Efforts will also be focused on some key initiatives over the next year.

Priority - Tourism

Butt of Lewis Lighthouse

There is clearly significant work ahead to deliver these proposals and Urras staff will continue to move ahead as far as possible. The next stage is to carry out further market research, cost-benefit analysis and business planning.

Priority - Care & Wellbeing/Crofting & Land Use

Housing Developments at Upper Barvas

The aspiration remains to create a mix of housing and extra-care accommodation on land at Upper Barvas but these proposals are highly dependent on wider partnership. Different options will be considered and further project planning undertaken with a view to securing firmer commitments from public-sector partners.

Priority - Care & Wellbeing

Cost Of Living Programme

A package of measures has been initiated for the forthcoming winter to deal with the more urgent needs but a longer-term approach is also required to tackle a reduction in household energy bills. There are no easy answers and significant effort will be necessary to develop effective solutions in partnership with external agencies.

Priority - Exceptional Place

Repopulation

Population projections for the medium-term are highly concerning and North Lewis appears to be one the areas with higher losses due to natural change. The Urras intends to work with public agencies to identify potential actions that can be taken to retain younger age groups and boost immigration. Locally, efforts will continue to make contact with recently-arrived residents and develop networks to promote the area to potential residents.



From left : Music at Comunn Eachdraidh Nis; polycrue at Clan MacQuarrie Community Centre; Plòigh session; Plòigh Mhòr rock climbing event (Sradag Creative)

Ar Lèirsinn

Coimhearsnachd a tha soirbheachail le deagh cheanglaichean anns a bheil sàr sheirbheisean agus ghoireasan ionadail, a' cleachdadh a stòrasan nàdarra agus cultar agus àrainn a tha sònraichte a dhèanamh seasmhach.

Vision

A thriving and well-connected community with excellent local services and amenities, harnessing its natural assets to sustain a unique cultural and social environment.

Board & Staff Updates

Cunntasan Stiùirichean is Luchd-obrach

Current board of directors :

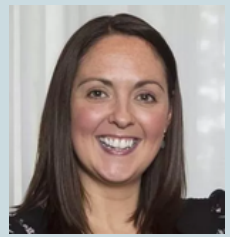
Agnes Rennie, Murdo Macritchie, Carola Bell, Becky Maclean, Johanna Furey, Agnes Macdonald, Donald Macsween and Murdanie Macleod.



We were saddened to lose two of our founding directors during the year. In October 2021, **James Macleod** passed away, followed by **Cailean Maclean** this January. After being elected to the board prior to the buy-out, both gave unstinting service to the Urras over many years and were valued members of the organisation. Their enthusiasm and contributions will be missed.



We are delighted to confirm that **Jemma MacVicar** has been appointed as Executive Manager and will be starting with UOG at the end of October. Originally from Back, she was latterly employed through the North Uist and Benbecula Locality Partnership. Another new member of staff in 2022 is **Janet Macleod**, who joined as Administration Assistant from a community learning role with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.



Lindy Cameron-Saunders, Outdoor Learning Officer, returned after being on adoption leave and giving a much needed boost to the population of the area. **Catherine Thomson** was appointed as a Community Development Modern Apprentice in the autumn, having originally joined for a summer placement. She is our first Modern Apprentice.



We bade farewell to **Lisa Maclean**, former team leader, back in autumn 2021 when she headed home to Northern Ireland to take up a new opportunity. She was in post for nearly 11 years and built up the organisation beyond our expectations. Another departure in 2022 was **Colin Morrison**, graduate tourism officer. He has now taken up full-time education.



Jasmine Montgomery Wilkie, Media & Communications Officer, and **Fiona Rennie**, Development Officer, departed this autumn. After nearly 3 years with UOG, Jasmine recently moved to a new development-focused post with the Outer Hebrides Heritage Forum. Fiona is relocating to Australia with her partner, after being nearly 6 years with the Urras, but hopes to continue with some freelancing work,



Current staff team :

Jemma MacVicar, Christine Amos, Neil Mackinnon, Marie Gillies, Mairi Graham, Joanne Matheson, Christine Murray, Lindy Cameron-Saunders, Janet Macleod, Catherine Thomson, Christopher Smail, Ali Finlayson and John Freck.

Sally Reynolds provided strategy support from February to September.

Current vacant positions are Finance & Business Manager, Cultural Engagement Officer and Communications & Media Officer.

"To promote for the public benefit rural regeneration, following principles of sustainable development, where "sustainable development" means development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, the areas of social and economic deprivation within the Galson area of the Isle of Lewis for the benefit of the Galson Crofting Community".

UOG CALENDAR 2023



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URRAS OIGHREACHD GHABHSAINN
GALSON ESTATE TRUST

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*Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn's staff work in a
hybrid manner, with their working days split
between the Business Centre and home.*

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