
An t-Seann Mhuileann, Bun Easain, Muile

Co-chomhairleachadh coimhearsnachd – Aithisg dheireannach



Bunnessan Mill, Isle of Mull

Community Consultation – final report

Prepared for

The Ross of Mull Historical Centre



Author: Sara Carruthers MCIQB, BSc(Hons), MA (Conservation, IoAAS),
Certified Building Conservation Specialist (CIQB)

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Executive Summary

The Ross of Mull Historical Centre (RoMHC) is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) whose purposes are to promote the advancement of heritage, science and education by the study, display and promotion of the cultural history and natural environment of the operating area. See www.romhc.org.uk

In 2001 the RoMHC acquired the Old Mill and Millbrae Cottage in Bunessan. Millbrae Cottage has been converted into a permanent home for the RoMHC and operates as a heritage centre, open to the public and run by volunteers. The adjacent C listed Mill is a shell, with masonry walls intact but no roof or interior structure. Some machinery remains in situ or the vicinity. Some urgent repairs are needed to consolidate the mill which, if left to deteriorate, may restrict safe access to neighbouring Millbrae Cottage and limit ongoing outreach activities. In 2023, a report and contract documents were drawn up by Krystyna Pytasz, of Addison Conservation and Design, and RoMHC are starting to fundraise for these urgent repairs.

The RoMHC would like to fully repair the mill building and bring it back into use: this will preserve a heritage asset and provide a usable space for the RoMHC and the community. During the summer of 2024 the RoMHC engaged an independent built heritage specialist to consult the community on the project and this report presents those results.

The village of Bunessan is in the area covered by the Ross of Mull and Iona Community Plan and has an estimated population of 730. The consultation was carried out through a community survey and a drop-in event in Bunessan. There were 115 responses to the survey, 97 of which were from residents of Mull. The drop-in event was attended by 14 members of the local community, with a full and lively discussion about the project. In summary:-

- 98 % of respondents supported the repair and re-use of Bunessan Mill
- 94% thought a new development should include facilities for the local community
- 82% thought facilities for visitors should be included
- 64% agreed that it should include training facilities
- 93% thought that the development should support the local economy through the provision of employment opportunities
- 18 respondents offered to assist with the development as volunteers

Respondents were asked for their opinion on five specific uses for the mill: a café/bakery; workshop/craft areas; a shop for local produce/food hub; a Gaelic centre; and flexible office space/training centre. There was majority support for all of these.

There were other uses suggested by the community which included for commercial manufacturing, as a community hub, an extended museum or complementary educational centre on the natural environment, affordable or holiday accommodation, arts centre and others.

The more general themes which were most frequently raised as wider issues were that:

- The development should not be in competition with other local facilities, whether community based or commercial.
- Building in flexibility and enabling a variety of uses was most likely to ensure sustainability and resilience.
- Grounding the project in wellbeing and sustainability may be key to securing initial funding and ensuring the long-term viability of the project.
- A committee of volunteers may not have capacity to drive the project forward without external support in the form of paid staff.
- Partnering with other organisations, whether commercial or third sector, may reduce the risk to RoMHC and bring in additional resources.
- Access to and around the mill may limit future uses and ways to mitigate this should be considered early in the project.

The Community Consultation has established that there is support within the local community for a project which brings the mill back into use and support for a variety of new uses for the mill. There is potential for several of these uses to be combined within a single proposal which could increase the community benefits and create greater resilience for the project. If RoMHC wishes to develop this project further, the next stage will be to carry out an Options Appraisal and Feasibility Study. This would look in more detail at a selection of the proposed uses and test their financial, technical, management, economic and marketing feasibility. The RoMHC would then be in a position to make an informed choice on a future sustainable use for the mill which has community support and could be worked up into a full Business Plan.

SC 7Oct24

This consultation has been carried out by Sara Carruthers, Built Heritage Consultant, on behalf of the Ross of Mull Historical Centre for the purpose of gauging community support and generating ideas for new uses for The Old Mill at Bunessan as part of the project development. The report should only be used for this purpose. Use or copying in whole or part should only be by the express permission of RoMHC or the author. The consultation was possible thanks to support from the Board of the Ross of Mull Historical Centre and residents who gave their views through the survey, event and during follow-up conversations.



Bunessan Mill, Isle of Mull Community Consultation



98% of replies supported the repair and re-use of Bunessan Mill



81% of replies were from local residents of the Ross of Mull and Iona



18 new volunteers offered to help with the project



94% thought the mill should include facilities for the community



82% thought the development should include facilities for visitors



64% thought the development should include training facilities



93% thought the development should aim to support the local economy through the provision of work opportunities

The Project- The Old Mill / An t-Seann Mhuileann

The Ross of Mull Historical Centre (RoMHC) is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) whose purposes are to promote the advancement of heritage, science and education by the study, display and promotion of the cultural history and natural environment of the operating area. See www.romhc.org.uk

The Old Mill and the neighbouring Millbrae Cottage at Bunessan were acquired by the Ross of Mull Historical Centre in 2001. Millbrae Cottage was opened in 2009 as a small museum, an office and an archive storage space and has been open to the public since then. The Old Mill is a ruinous shell and has become increasingly fragile over the last 20 years. It is now at a stage where it needs consolidation work to ensure it is safe enough for activities in and around Millbrae Cottage to continue.

The RoMHC would like to repair the mill building and bring it back into use: this will preserve a heritage asset and provide a usable space for the RoMHC and the community. During the summer of 2024 the RoMHC engaged an independent built heritage specialist to consult the community on the project.



Above: the roofless Bunessan Mill with Tigh na Rois, the Ross of Mull Historical Centre, in Millbrae Cottage on the left

While the urgent repair works are essential, The Ross of Mull Historical Centre would like to go further and repair the building fully with a new use so it can be at the heart of the community once again.

Brief History of the Mill

The walls that can be seen today are the remains of a T-plan two-storey water mill that was last in operation before the First World War. Prior to this date, grain, that is oats, barley and corn, had been ground on this site for hundreds of years.

There is evidence of an earlier 18th century single storey mill on the same site. Records show the mill building was altered in 1830 when improvements were being made to the general

estate management of the wider Argyll Estate on Mull. In its current form, the building comprises space for grinding machinery at the front and a grain-drying kiln at the rear.

The power was provided via a mill lade, that diverted water from the burn, giving a 20-foot head of water to power the over-shot waterwheel. Traces of the lade can still be seen running alongside the road above the mill to Linne a Dhuais. Unfortunately, the line of the lade was blocked by the construction of the new road and it is not currently thought to be feasible to reinstate the supply.



Above: the old mill in November 2023, the waterwheel sat against the right-hand gable

During the nineteenth century the 11-foot diameter wheel was replaced with a larger one of 14-foot diameter and grooves from both can still be seen in the end wall of the mill. The wheel shaft passed through the end wall of the building and connected to a series of cog wheels that turned the large mill stones. Although no longer intact, some of the millstones and machinery can still be seen in and around the building.

A little is known about the millers who ran the mill. Donald McIntyre was the miller at Bunessan in 1744. By 1779, the Argyll Census records that Duncan Graham, his son Donald and his 84-year-old father were living at the mill. Up until the mid-19th century there were at least six sizeable water mills on Mull. By 1892 there were only two, one of which was Bunessan, which was operated by Neil McPherson and his family. After milling ceased, they continued to use the building as a joinery workshop.

The Old Corn Mill, Bunessan was listed Category C by Historic Environment Scotland in 1991. Category C listing indicates it is a building of special architectural or historic interest which is a representative example of a period, style or building type.

<https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB12948>



Above: views of the old mill in November 2023

Bunessan Mill is also on the Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland. The Buildings at Risk Register has been in operation in Scotland since 1990 in response to a concern about the

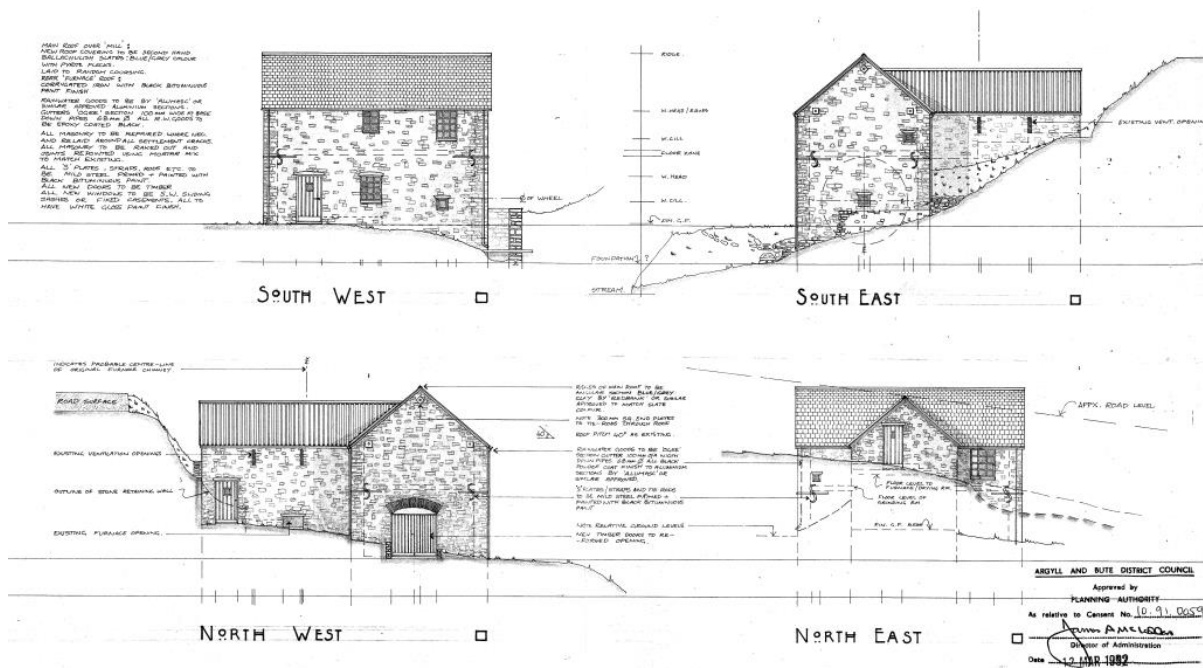
growing number of listed buildings and buildings in Conservation Areas that were vacant and had fallen into a state of disrepair. The Register is maintained by Historic Environment Scotland and provides information on properties of architectural or historic merit throughout the country that are considered to be at risk. The entry for Bunessan Mill can be viewed here

[https://buildingsatrisk.org.uk/search/keyword/buinessan/event_id/894325/building_name/buinessan-mill-buinessan](https://buildingsatrisk.org.uk/search/keyword/bunessan/event_id/894325/building_name/buinessan-mill-buinessan)

In 2001, the Ross of Mull Historical Centre acquired the Old Mill and the adjacent Cottage which has now been converted to be a permanent home for the Centre. The Mill is still a shell and now in a fragile condition. The Ross of Mull Historical Centre are currently exploring ways to ensure that the mill's importance as an historical asset is safeguarded for the future.

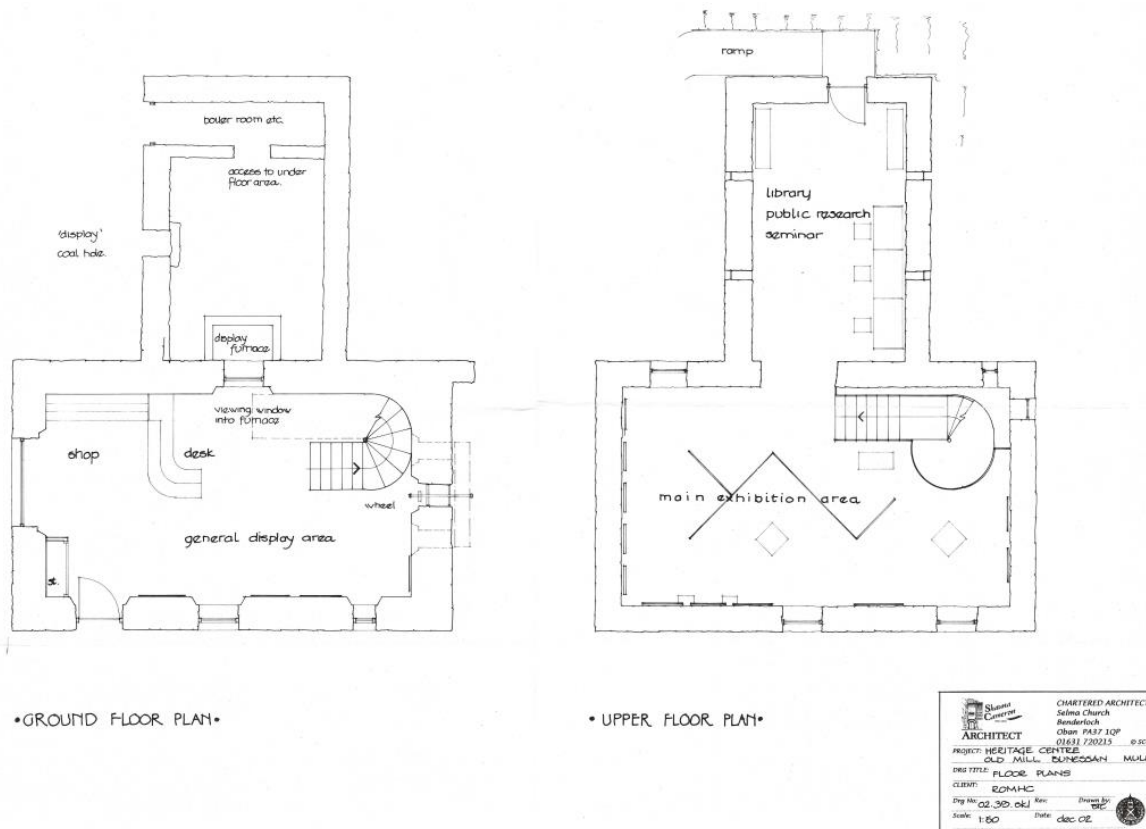
Previous repair schemes

A repair scheme was drawn up in 1991 by J S Fiddimore for the previous owner. The scheme did not proceed, but the drawing gives an impression of what the repaired building could look like from the outside.



Above: Elevations of Bunessan Mill as proposed in 1991 © RoMHC courtesy of J S Fiddimore

In 2002, an outline scheme was drawn up by Shauna Cameron, Architect. It shows a proposal to fit out the mill with a shop, exhibition and library space which did not proceed. The plans are copied below as they give an impression of the spaces available for use within the existing building.



Above: Floor plans of Buinessan Mill as proposed in 2002 © RoMHC courtesy of Shauna Cameron

In 2023, the Ross of Mull Historical Centre commissioned a structural survey of the mill from Krystyna Pytasz of Addison Conservation and Design. She found that overall, the ruined building is in good condition and suitable for reuse in the future. However, she identified some structural repairs which do need to be addressed urgently (within 2 years), in particular repairs to timber safe lintels and some areas of masonry stabilisation, and further work within 5 years.

In more detail, her recommendations are divided into two Phases;-

Phase 1 URGENT – to be carried out as soon as possible but not later than within two years – the replacement of timber lintels; localised masonry stabilisations Building (B), pointing of internal faces of Building (A), securing loose stones at wall heads; vegetation control.

Phase 2 ESSENTIAL – to be carried out within five years - repointing of masonry generally; vegetation control. It should be noted that if the Essential works are not carried out within the given period, the masonry might become affected, resulting in cracking and bulging.

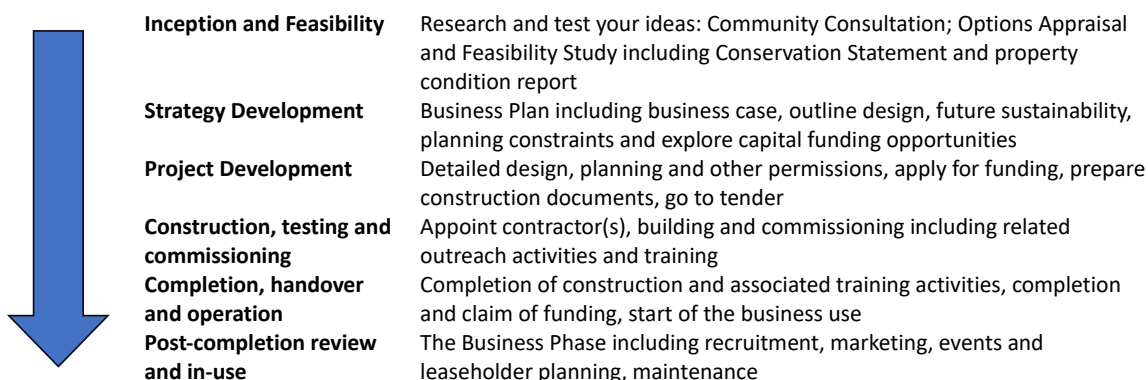
NB Building B is the main south facing block, Building A is the leg of the T, or kiln block, to the rear.

The total cost of the two phases is estimated to be in the region of £130,000 including VAT and fees, but there may be savings if the works are carried out in one contract. If these works are completed, it should be sufficient to mothball the building for at least the next 50 years. If the building is to be brought back into use, these works would also be required.

What next for 2024 and beyond?

The Ross of Mull Historical Centre (RoMHC) is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) whose purposes are to promote the advancement of heritage, science and education by the study, display and promotion of the cultural history and natural environment of the operating area. As owners of Bunessan Mill, they have a responsibility to stop the mill, as an historic asset, deteriorating, but also realise that the fragile masonry may restrict safe access to Millbrae Cottage and limit current outreach activities. In addition, the RoMHC realise that this could also be an opportunity to carry out full repairs so the mill would become a fully functioning building again that could be of benefit to both themselves and the community.

There are many stages to develop a project like this and these are outlined below.



Community Consultation- methodology

As a first stage, the Centre carried out a Community Consultation during 2024 to gauge whether there is community support for the venture and aimed to hear from as many people as possible who have a connection to the area.

The purpose of the first step, Community Consultation, is part of the Inception and Feasibility Stage. It is to gauge the community's support for the project and to establish if there is a demand for various different uses for the building. Current ideas for the building include workshops, office/training type space, a Gaelic Centre, a retail outlet for local produce, a café/bakery, or a combination of the above. Restoration as a working mill is not considered feasible owing to the road having cut through the mill lade. However, the community were also asked whether there were other uses they thought should be considered and whether they had any other more general comments on the project.

The community consultation was carried out principally through an online survey in June and July 2024. RoMHC promoted the survey very actively in the local area and gave additional assistance to anyone who did not have online access to the surveys by circulating paper copies. The survey was supported by a drop-in event on 26 June in Bunessan Community Hall where there was a thorough and lively discussion on the project. The RoMHC engaged Sara Carruthers, who specialises in community led heritage projects, to assist them with the community consultation.

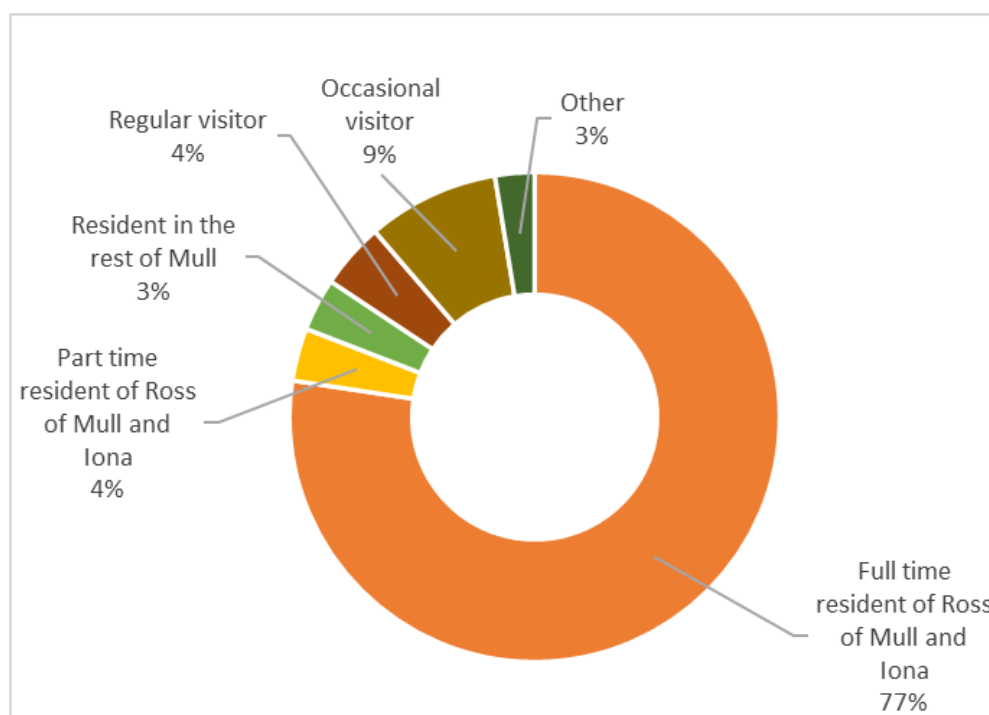
The results of the surveys and event have been collated and presented below. The survey asked for brief information on the respondents, the level of their support for the project and for their ideas on what the purpose and new use of the mill could be. This report evidences the level of community support and interest in the project and may also be used to support future funding and planning applications if the project proceeds.

Community Consultation – The Survey Results

The total number of responses returned was 115 (56 paper surveys, one letter and 58 online surveys). The letter did not directly answer all the questions but was strongly supportive. Not all questions on the paper surveys were fully completed. Of these surveys, 89 were from full-time residents of the local area. This is out of an estimated population of the Ross of Mull and Iona which was put at 730 in 2011 (RoM&I Community Plan). This is a response rate of slightly over 12% which is a significant response in a community consultation within this type of rural area.

The connection of the respondents to the area (Q1)

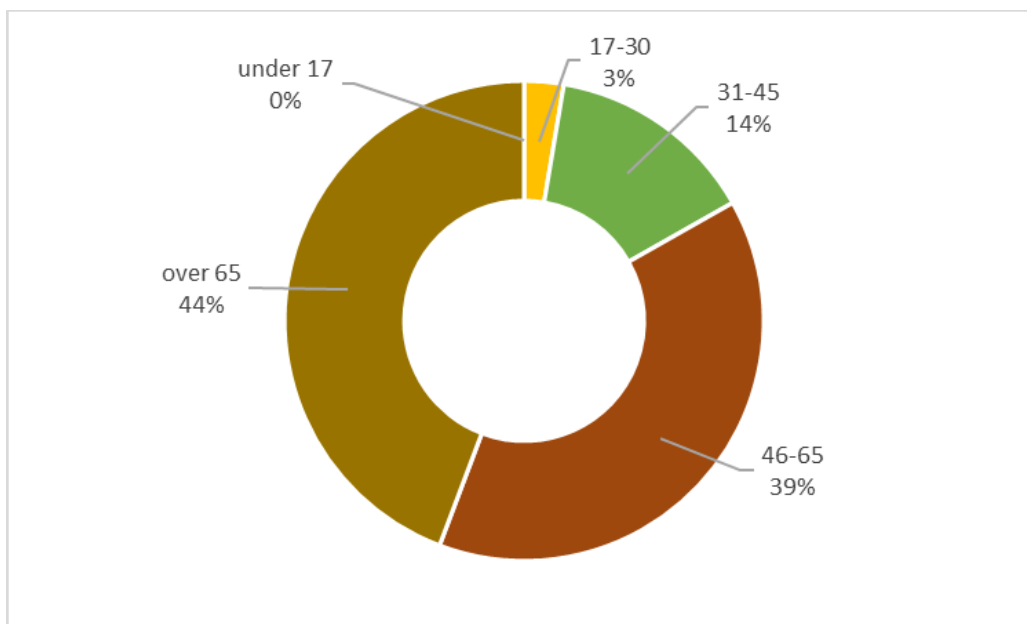
Respondents were asked what their connection was to the area.



Residency status	Number of responses
Full time resident of Ross of Mull and Iona	89
Part time resident of Ross of Mull and Iona	4
Resident in the rest of Mull	4
Regular visitor	5
Occasional visitor	10
Other	3
Total	115

Age group of respondents (Q2)

Respondents were asked which age group they were in.

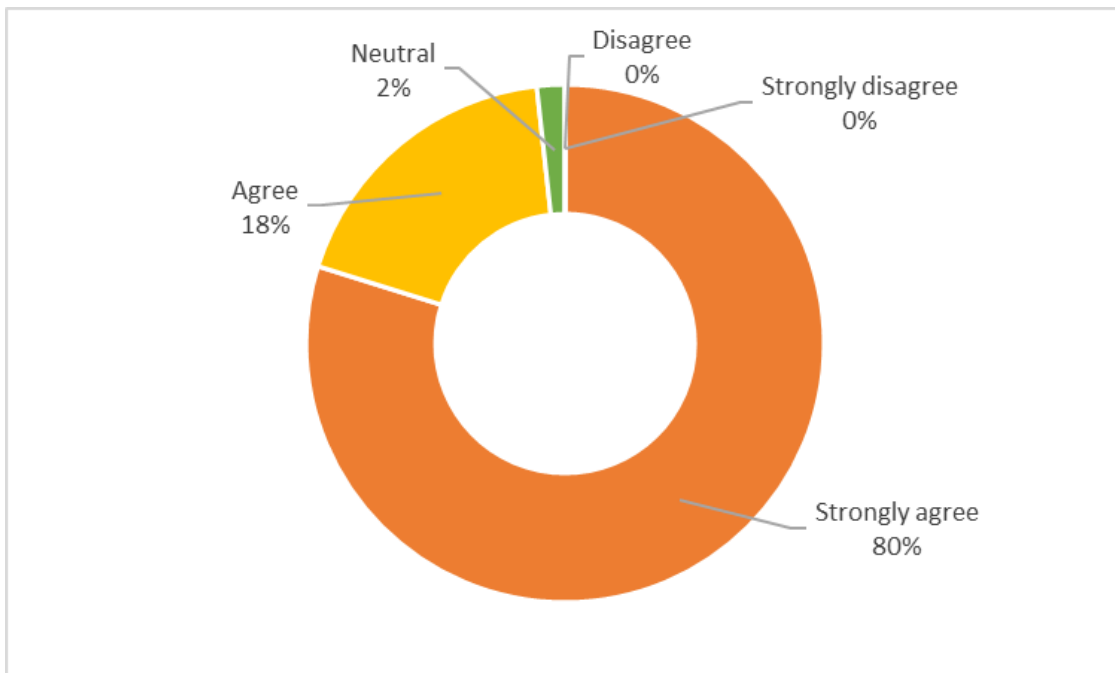


Age Group	Number of responses
under 17	0
17-30	3
31-45	16
46-65	44
over 65	50
prefer not to say/blank	2
Total	115

83% of the respondents were aged over 46 years which is understood to reflect the demographic of the area. Concerns were expressed during the drop-in event that there were limited opportunities for younger adults and families in the area, and most moved away. This pull started with young people boarding in Oban for secondary school and was compounded with difficulties in getting affordable accommodation in the area other than remaining with parents.

General support for the principle of the project

Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the statement: 'I support the repair and re-use of Bunessan Mill'? (Q3)



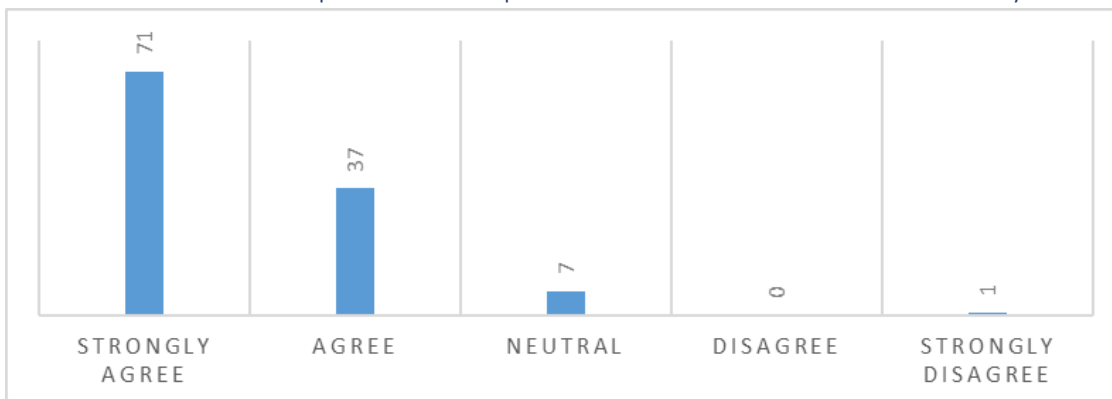
Answer	Number of responses
Strongly agree	92
Agree	21
Neutral	2
Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	0
Total	115

98% of respondents were supportive of the repair and re-use of Bunessan Mill.

The aims and objectives of the project

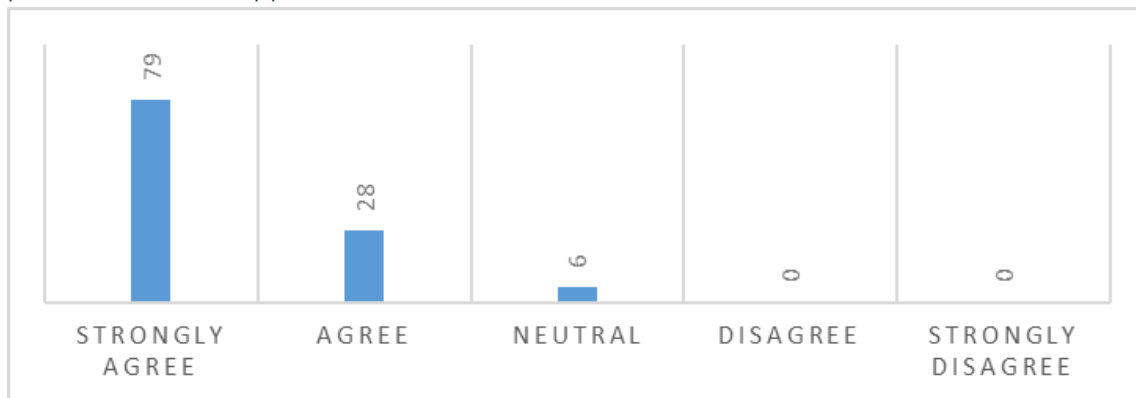
The respondents were asked about the aims and objectives of any development and to give an opinion on how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following statements.

Statement 1: The development should provide facilities for the local community



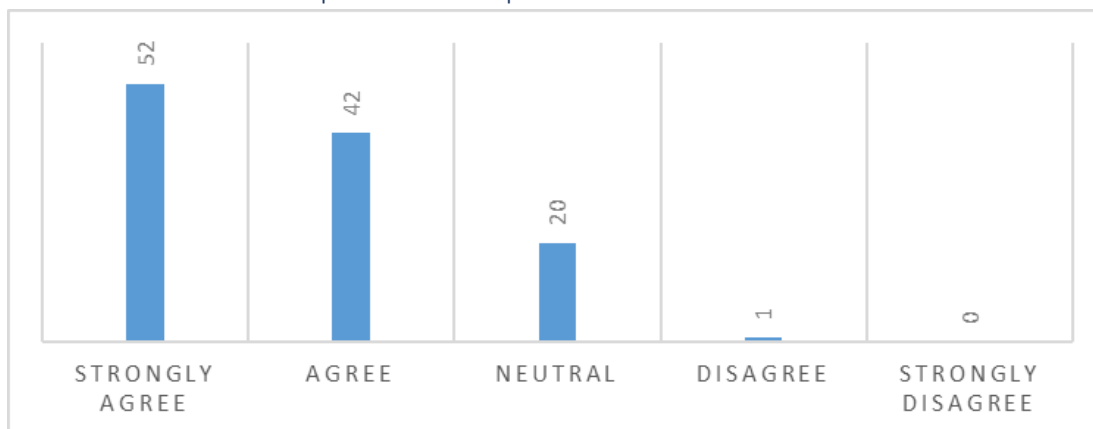
94% thought a new development should include facilities for the local community

Statement 2: The development should aim to support the local economy through the provision of work opportunities



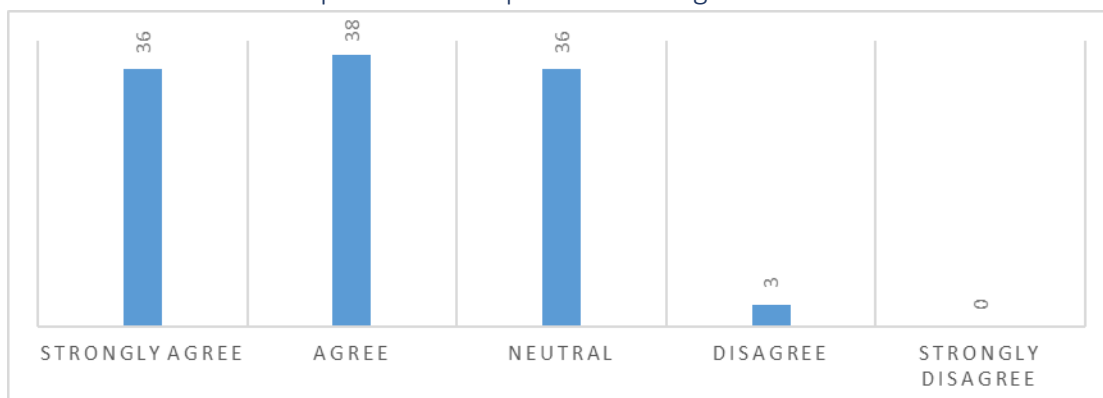
93% of respondents thought that the development should support the local economy through the provision of employment opportunities

Statement 3: The development should provide facilities for visitors



82% of respondents thought that facilities for visitors should be included

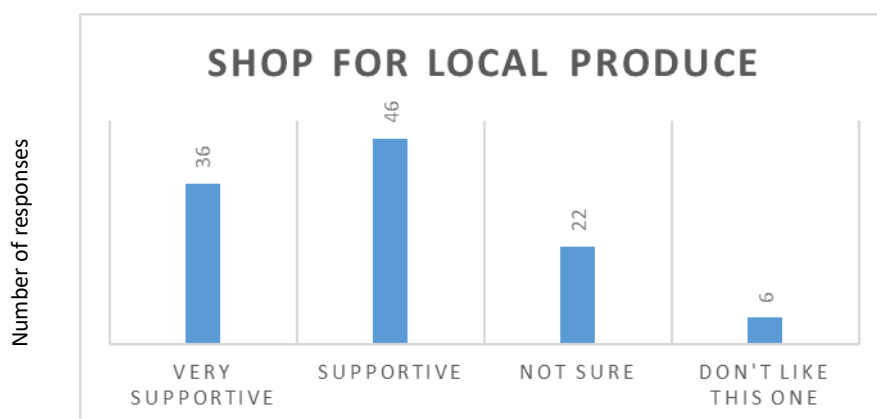
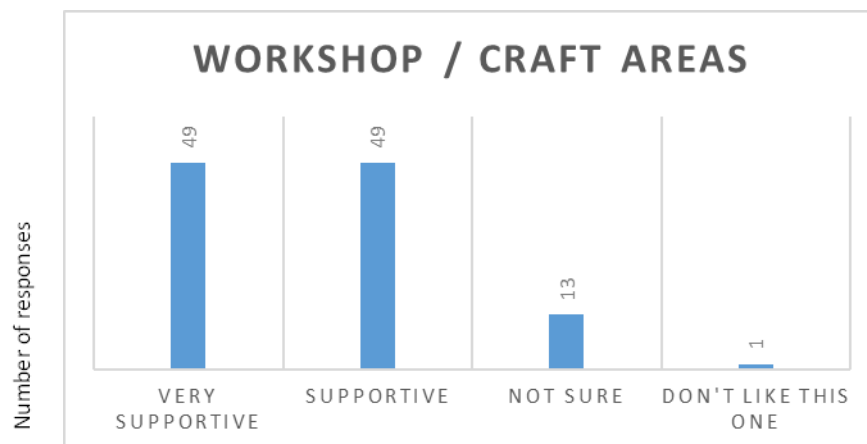
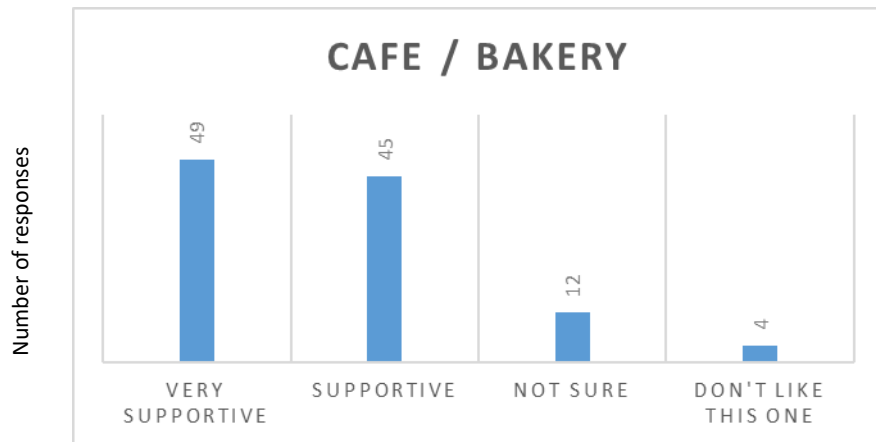
Statement 4: The development should provide training facilities

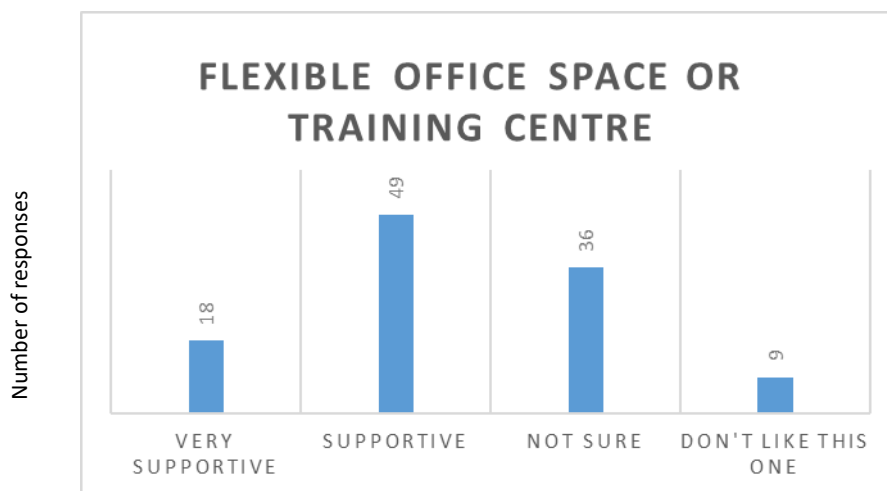
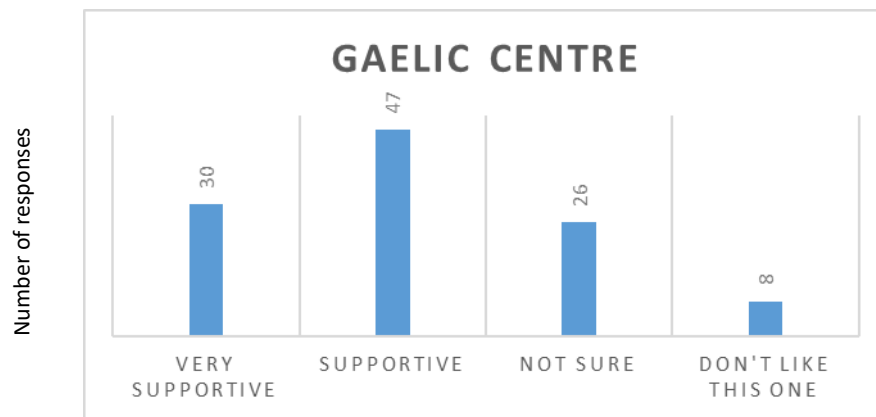


64% of respondents agreed that the development should include training facilities. The type of training was not defined within the survey.

Support for specific uses

Respondents were asked for their views on five specific ideas for uses for the mill which had been put forward by the committee. They were also asked if they had other suggestions of their own.





SUMMARY

Suggested use	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Café/bakery	85%	11%	4%
Workshop/craft areas	88%	11%	1%
Shop (local produce)	75%	20%	5%
Gaelic Centre	69%	23%	7%
Flexible office/training	60%	32%	8%

Community Consultation – other proposals

The community was asked if they had any other proposals for the mill. The full comments from the surveys, follow-up conversations and the community drop-in event are included in Annex 1 and 2 and are summarised here.

Community use: there were frequent mentions of some sort of community use, in particular mentions of providing mutual support or a comfortable ‘warm space’ for all generations, such as the Snug at An Tobar or space for winter activities, classes such as cooking to link with the community garden, internet based training, repair café – all uses which help to combat rural isolation and encourage intergenerational support. This could also support the Gaelic language by providing informal opportunities for Gaelic speakers and learners to use the language, and combine with a local food hub, which would support local producers, the local economy, enable locally produced food to be consumed locally, and develop Mull or Ross of Mull and Iona as a brand.

Commercial use: there were frequent mentions of various commercial uses for the building, which could include other third sector organisations such as co-operatives, CICs or SCIOs:

- Manufacturing eg to process local produce, a specialist brewery or distillery (seaweed, bracken), dairy/cheese; reinstating the mill machinery and using the water mill to produce electricity and/or flour;
- Non-specific workspaces for individual use eg photographic studio, workshops for self-employed trades people.
- Shop, possibly combined with a café with an outlet for local produce/crafts manufactured elsewhere on the Ross of Mull; larder or outlet for craft produce; other community uses could share the space.
- Dentist surgery: there is a real need for a dentist in the area, however this may be more suitable if based in Bunessan Health Centre. Current service is in Tobermory (100 miles, 3 hours round trip and emergencies only) or Oban.

Visitor or education centre: There was strong support for the existing Ross of Mull Historical Centre and interest in its expansion, with the mill being used to provide alternative or additional space for it, including possible use as a working or demonstration mill.

There were also many mentions of a complementary centre promoting the natural environment, including both the existing wildlife and geology of Mull, but also as a centre for environmental and ecological education and promoting climate action. It was noted there was currently no wildlife centre on Mull and that there were also opportunities for renewable energy education and generation at the mill. There was also strong interest in promoting local food production and the circular economy.

Training opportunities: there were several mentions of incorporating training opportunities for traditional building skills into the development project

Arts centre: there were several mentions of a small performance space for music and drama, and use as an art gallery.

Accommodation: the shortage of various types of accommodation was noted including affordable housing for young single people, hostel accommodation and holiday accommodation. The potential to move the Historical Centre to the mill and convert the former miller's cottage back to accommodation was also mentioned. The lack of housing is supported by the recent housing needs survey. More holiday accommodation appeared not to be popular, although could be profitable.

Community Consultation – other comments

Respondents were asked if they had any further comments about the project:-

Competition with other facilities: many respondents noted the fragility of the local economy and cautioned against being in competition with other local facilities, whether looking at potential community or commercial uses.

Flexibility and variety: many respondents stressed the need for the space to have the flexibility to support a variety of uses and that having a combination of end-uses may ensure sustainability and resilience.

Wellbeing/sustainability and partnering: strengthening the community wellbeing and sustainability aspects of the project may be key to securing funding; consider partnering with other organisations for the project.

Capacity: relying on volunteer committees to develop and run facilities may limit their development.

Access: the current terrain around the mill may limit future uses and ways to mitigate this for both people and vehicles should be considered early in the project.

Sustainability: the future running costs could be offset by solar and hydro generation.

Consultation: Continuing engagement with the community during the development of the project should be included to ensure no one feels their livelihoods are threatened through lack of information.

Views of local businesses

A few respondents identified specifically as answering as a business in this section of the survey and made the following points:-

Competition: if the mill offers a different type of space and atmosphere from other venues or facilities and this is clearly articulated, then there is room for all. Capacity and demand can both increase.

Management capacity: finding enough people to volunteer to actively manage existing facilities is difficult already and to be successful, a multi-use venue is likely to need a paid manager or project officer. It may be possible to obtain development funding to support this post. This is probably the reason many activities and opportunities in the area are not developed further.

Housing: There is poor availability of living accommodation, whether for permanent or seasonal staff. Including accommodation at the mill for staff eg a project officer, manager etc, may be useful, but the terms of the tenancy or occupancy will need to be fully thought through in relation to the business plan.

Shared workspaces: A need for producers to be able to share a local food hub where small scale producers could sell produce locally was expressed – how this could operate would need to be investigated, but co-operative models have worked elsewhere. There are already outlets for local crafts and makers, so this was of less interest. In regard to office space, it was noted that improved broadband is being installed so it will be easier to work from home; there may be a benefit to work alongside peers for mutual support; offices are available at the Columba Centre but thought not to be well used – the reasons behind this should be investigated further.

Volunteering with RoMHC

Eighteen respondents expressed an interest in helping with the development of the project or in volunteering with the RoMHC and provided contact details. Their names have been passed to the RoMHC Board.

Next steps- Options Appraisal and Feasibility Study

The Community Consultation has established strong support and interest from the community for a number of different options for new uses for the mill. If the RoMHC wishes to proceed, the next stage to develop the project would be to test the feasibility of a selection of these through an Options Appraisal and Feasibility Study. The RoMHC would then be in a position to make an informed choice on a future sustainable use for the mill which could be worked up into a full Business Plan.

Annex 1: Community survey – narrative comments in full

Q6 Are there any other uses we should consider for the building? (Grouped thematically)

General discussion

A. The most important thing is that it can operate sustainably, long-term. Capital/project funding can pay for one-off for repair/rebuild, but after that, the mill needs to be a base for people, businesses, and/or organisations/groups who can cover ongoing costs, and operate effectively.

B. In the medium to long term such usages will certainly change, so we need to build flexibility into any plans for the space, even if we need a defined initial usage (eg to create a business case for funding applications).

C. The western Ross of Mull has a small population and is not short of general community spaces (St Columba Centre, St Ernan's, Talla Creich, Bunessan Hall, ROMHC, Bunessan Church etc). Bunessan Mill needs to provide very distinctly different function(s) to avoid further diluting potential local users among even more venues.

D. It should not compete with existing local businesses or community operations - this might be a particular danger for something like cafe, or shop facilities. But perhaps the mill could provide a better, or additional space for existing local business(es), organisations, or partnerships? This could be single-user, or, perhaps better, a shared space.

E. A brand-new, top-down proposal is almost certain to fail. Building on existing local expertise, activity, communities and businesses is essential to maximise viability.

F. Potential partners who might benefit from a better base in SW Mull? E.g. - Nature Scotland/Historic Scotland: given the outstanding geological and biological significance of western Mull and Iona, might these organisations be interested in being more permanently embedded in the community here, with perhaps enhanced facilities for field researchers and public engagement? A science angle could be an attractive complement to the ROMHC's more human-historical approach. - Ranger service? - SWMID office? Or other SWMID/MICT functions? - Argyll and Bute education service (might contribute to eg field science facility for use by Bunessan/Iona schools?) - Health: (eg dentist facilities!) - Existing businesses that might benefit from a new space: hairdresser? bakery? (other local food possibilities eg brewery? - v risky??)

G. It might be very useful to proactively individually approach and ask local businesses about their thoughts on business possibilities of the mill (positive or negative) even if they don't respond to this survey. This might tease out some new ideas, and well as help delimit/ prioritise options.

H. Most potential users are not going to be able to sustainably pay for use of the whole mill building, but if we design a flexible space with (eg a couple of workshop/big room spaces, plus a couple of smaller office spaces) these could be mixed and matched with changing needs.

I. One issue: if the mill can't attract enough tenants who can fund their use of the space long-term, who might be liable for eg rates, water/electricity, insurance etc? How can exposure to such risk be minimised?

J. A final possibility which might be considered: simply repair the existing structure as a stable, safe and attractive ruin (eg like the nunnery on Iona) Maybe as a picnic space? Maybe an extension of the community garden?

Place for community uses

- Training for internet business
- Repair café eg for IT – an opportunity for young people (perhaps for a fee) to repair and help others with IT and digital issues. Provides cross-generational and mutual support.
- Local Food Hub: many crofts find it difficult to distribute and find markets for their food, particularly when they are small specialist producers; it is difficult to purchase locally produced food locally and there is an opportunity for a Food Hub to promote the local circular economy

and to develop Mull or Ross of Mull as a brand; this could be for vegetables, pork, lamb venison, but also added value products such as cured meats, pickles etc. See an example for comparison at <https://gallowayfoodhub.org.uk/> A stumbling block for this use is the difficult car/van access to the mill – could this be resolved? This option might need an additional unit adjacent – check spaces in a feasibility study. This option is likely to need start-up funding, but could then be run on a co-operative basis: new Agricultural Act allows for provision of start-up funding. A food hub complements the historical centre and community garden and would not duplicate other business and community ventures. A complementary food production space (possibly a separate local venture) may be needed with just a small kitchen in the mill to serve users.

- There are no local rooms available for rent for small scale meetings or for people to meet, sit and talk. If you create the right space then all the complementary uses of social, educational, food hub, performance will develop and use it.
- Traditional skills training base: construction, sustainability, recycle and re-use
- Library facilities to order and return books etc? Winter craft activities? Evening lessons?
- Just a loving [lovely?] space
- Children's indoor play / café; housing (or convert existing historical centre
- Public meeting area?
- Uses would need to be mindful of local businesses; Somewhere for families to go that is free - similar to the Snug at An Tobar; Flexible space offering cooking classes, using locally grown produce
- The monthly Community Café is very popular – run by volunteers, it has cake, stories, cushions and books for all generations and is held in the village hall. The mill might provide a better space for this.
- Use of building by young children to play and learn climbing, crawling etc in safety (playhouse
- Activity hub for children - hands on craft activities, archery
- Children's playpark in the grounds
- Potential business model: on the ground floor sits a low risk business (like a snack bar) which is run by students or elderly folk. Making profit or paying full wages is not the point but it will generate enough income to run and support a community space on the first floor. Like a dance school or something that would not be sustainable without support.
- Dentist / health facility – see below.
- Gaelic hub – there have been previous inconclusive discussions on where best to site a Gaelic hub to serve the whole of Mull, but Gaelic in the Ross is distinctive and could support its own hub, particularly with a place where children from the Gaelic medium classes, parents, other learners and native speakers could mix informally together to use the language eg a community hub with Gaelic/non-Gaelic days or events.
- St Ernan's by the Loch, near Fionnphort is being taken over by the community for community use <https://sternansbytheloch.co.uk/>

Place for use by a local business

- Industrial use ie to process local produce
- Brewery - using seaweed, bracken etc
- Dairy / cheese makers
- Combine café/bakery with an outlet for local produce/crafts
- Photographic studio
- The building could serve as all of the [suggested uses] and include a local larder for local croft produce as well as local arts and crafts. We are currently thinking about how to best establish a local, community owned food processing facility for local croft produce on the Ross, yet, we have discussed with more experienced people (Harrie & Dan) that the Mill is not ideal for this. However, it could be a space where this produce could be showcased and sold alongside other

locally produced items as well as providing for a space to meet, run courses etc. We do think this could be done in a way that does complement rather than compete with other locations such as the shop, the hall and the Inn and would be a great addition to the historical centre

- Working mill to produce electricity and flour from local crops (would need farmer cooperation)
- repair cafe and a workshop where young generation can teach/help elderly with IT stuff
- it would be nice to see the mill set up as it was in its working days + a cafe??
- Local food hub where producers can make, sell, show their products and craft (beer)
- I'd like to see a workshop that local people could actually make use of themselves
- Get a dentist to invest in the mill and have his/her practise there. We really need a dentist on this side of the island. Would it be possible to run a dentist as a Community Interest Company? It's always so painful to see dentists drive around in expensive cars whilst the local community suffer from bad teeth. Many people here decide not to fix their teeth here because it's just too expensive! Our unique selling point is that it's simply an amazingly beautiful part of the world. It could be an open call and I'm sure there will be a socially and community minded dentists within the UK that would be interested. Now most folk go to Oban. Appointments are often cancelled due to ferry or the dentist herself being too busy. Wait time are more than a year!!! It would be brilliant!
- A dentist is desperately needed in The Ross, but may be better suited if in the Bunessan Health Centre. There was a mobile unit but this is no longer in use and the dentist has retired. Options are Tobermory (emergencies only) or Oban.

Visitor/educational centre

- Extension of museum - historical/local culture library
- Move the museum to the GF & add a café/kitchen; Create a mezzanine seating area for a café; Return the old miller's cottage to its 'original' state to bring the history to life.
- Archive for local records, poetry, music and Gaelic culture, agricultural and maritime history. Future environmental care and management to ensure biodiversity is preserved/enhanced. Extend Ranger services to help reduce emissions.
- Move existing historical centre into the old mill; combine with an innovative centre for natural history/wildlife theme 'Looking back and Looking forwards'; Interpretations and records of both Social and Natural History (including Gaelic language and culture), acknowledging effects of climate changes, past, present and future.
- Museum; Flour mill
- I would like to see a millwheel in situ at the side of old mill either working or for decoration. I would like to see some sort of local museum at the top of the building with a café/bakery downstairs with seating area.
- Heritage/wildlife visitor centre; Residential flats
- Natural history information / visitor centre; this might assist with the Ranger's position
- Workshop or office space could potentially bring in regular income; Would a shop compete with the store in the village? Could it sell locally milled oats and barley flour? Is there demand for a Gaelic Centre? Other uses: develop the visitor centre, interpretation of the local area (we really appreciated the current display by the way). Include child and family friendly activities/display eg digital projections, video clips of re-enactment and traditional activities.
- Wildlife, landscape and geology information centre; Building does not have to be single use - could incorporate several uses
- Rock Café as at Kylescu <https://nwhgeopark.com/exploring/the-rock-stop/>
- Too early to give answers. The old mill is a unique building.
- Not sure but in order to complement the existing centre and be self-sustaining I think it will have to provide facilities for visitors in some shape or form. Can it be a multi-use asset?

- Exhibition of the history of the mill and others nearby, the social history, the people who owned and worked there, the supply chains, the uses for the product, etc
- Renewable energy centre - tap the stream that used to supply power to the mill and install small scale hydro as an example for others to learn and follow.
- Extending the space for storing or researching the archives; additional historical display space
- Extension to the museum. Or Educational purposes.
- Cultural heritage displays and demonstrations
- I assume that it would have museum space.
- Archaeology information centre/repository
- A working mill
- Museum

Training opportunities

- Training could be for restoration or building skills; there are existing requests for workshops for arts, crafts, gardening; office space is available at Fionnphort. A modern glass link to the historical centre or modern extension overlooking the burn.
- That's enough [suggestions] above but I feel that any possibility of involving volunteers/providing training opportunities in a/ the basic stabilising work b/ any development scheme, could be valuable

Arts centre

- Drama workshops
- Possible venue for the arts; performances and creative arts displays
- Small performance area for music and drama, with a historic theme.
- Art gallery. Quiet space for reflection
- Small arts venue; music, drama, gallery and so on.

Accommodation

- My idea is, once repaired and inhabitable again, to lease the mill to the Scottish Youth Hostel Association. The SYHA could use it as a hostel during the summer months and accommodation for a residential Gaelic/field/history study centre for schools during the winter.
- Air BnB
- Affordable rent housing.
- Affordable accommodation

Question 8: If you have any other comments regarding the development of Bunessan Mill please leave them below

Respondents were asked if they had any further comments about the project:-

- This is a central community space which could be a hub for bringing people together
- Big concern is access - this issue could pose significant limitations on use. Funders are most likely to support community use rather than more museum space (which is likely only practical use of space with maybe café).
- Firming up of ownership structure centred in community wellbeing and sustained communities as principal drivers is key. Partnering formula perhaps crucial - consider models like Greenock Ocean Terminal. Three-pronged financial model with critical heritage and culture charity. <https://discoverinverclyde.com/businesses/the-greenock-ocean-terminal-visitor-centre/>
- I think any of the ones mentioned would be helpful

- Ideally the development should not duplicate existing provisions within the Ross eg Columba Centre provides craft areas; shops can be outlets for local produce.
- The future running costs could be offset by generating power from the burn using Archimedes screw and solar panels on the roof. Planning should not be an obstacle - just transition to net zero is more importance than appearance
- Any development will need to attract substantial funding and needs to be topical and inclusive - more family-orientated, educational, interactive. The space to be flexible to allow for presentations/changing displays/use by Rangers, wildlife experts - using Mull's continued promotion as the best Wildlife Destination. There is a Marine Centre in Tobermory but, as yet to my knowledge, no complete Wildlife Centres. The natural environment within Centre Grounds is as full as ever. Millbrae Cottage might be re-purposed or made available for crafts/cafe/bakery, but vehicular access for supplies and waste disposal could be problematic. Would the shop for local produce be for the Community Garden or other enterprises?
- It would be great to see it used and maintained
- It is difficult to see a business case for a particular commercial operation, so I think any development would need to leave it flexible for a variety of possible uses.
- Natural history is part of ROMHC's remit as well as social history and is not currently covered at all.
- Would be great to see the mill buildings restored and conserved. Would be hard to rebuild a working mill, better to put to different uses and show a mill workings digitally? We really enjoyed the existing visitor centre. Thank you for a warm welcome. Lots of interest, inside and out.
- A haven for visitors and beautifully done and maintained. Would benefit from extensions especially with a café and small shop. I wish you every bit of luck in the future that you will achieve your ambitions.
- Can any island community afford to lose its heritable infrastructure? I would say not.
- Holiday lets are a good source of income. An old, restored mill/heritage centre would be a great selling point.
- Gaelic centre - could use school; Office space/training centre - could use Columba Centre; needs to be an offering not currently available
- It will drive more business to the mill and historical centre, so the mill needs to be developed that will promote economic activity that will be to the benefit of the whole village.
- The mill must be made stable and safe. Any larger scheme will involve not only a great deal of money but also time, energy and effort by (currently) a very small group of trustees and volunteers. We should not embark on something for which we don't have capacity.
- Consultation opportunities are important in case anyone feels their livelihood could be affected, and also to have a face-to-face opportunity for anyone locally based to put forward further ideas.
- It would be great if crofting would feature in the new development and with one third of all SCF staff currently living in Bunessan this may provide for a good opportunity :-)
- Possible opportunity for teaching skills related to the rebuilding of the Mill. Perhaps grants available for this.
- A bakery and cafe is a great idea. Just need the people (and accommodation for them) to allow it to happen.
- I understood that Historic Scotland wouldn't allow anything other than consolidation?
- Just to make sure you don't do anything detrimental to other businesses in the area
- Focus on using it mainly for visitors and residents all year round
- This is a wonderful opportunity to revitalise this building.

- Should provide local tourist information B&BS etc;
- Pleased it's all going forward
- Be imaginative, be bold

Question 9: We are keen to understand the views of local businesses. If you have a local business and would like your views to be considered, please leave your name and contact details here

- Housing is a problem!
- As a business I would be broadly supportive of any new life and purpose for the old Mill.
- Not in tourism now, retired but understand its potential
- We are not a local business yet but plan to become one and, on line with Scotland's aspirations to become a good food nation, it would be great to have a local food hub for all local producers to share

Annex 2: Community Drop-in to discuss the future of Bunessan Mill

A community drop-in session was held on 26 June 2024 at Bunessan Village Hall 4pm-8pm

Attendance: 14 members of the community in total including 5 RoMHC Trustees and 9 other members of the public

Points discussed:-

- There is a shortage of small scale workshop type accommodation in the area and this point came through from suggestions that local people were looking for space for:-
 - Dark room/photography studio
 - Weaving shed
 - Work units for self-employed building trades eg plumber, electrician etc,
 - Work units for young people NB the chronic shortage of housing for local people means the under 30s who are self-employed in the area are often staying with parents and therefore don't have access to independent working from home / working storage / workshop space at home. Also would prefer to be spending the working day away from home.
 - Seaweed vodka/gin NB local community owned Aird Fada Seaweed Farm is looking for additional products <https://swmid.co.uk/our-projects/aird-fada-seaweed-farm/>
 - All the above were viewed as longer-term leases
 - Medium-term leases eg artists/craftspeople/writers in residence
 - It was noted that small businesses currently looking for accommodation will move to accommodation available now, wherever it is, and are unlikely to wait 2-5 years for the mill to become available – new businesses will be looking for accommodation at that point.
- It was noted by several that there should be care in ensuring the use of the mill is complementary/supplementary to other venues rather than being in competition with them.

For example, there are several village halls which can be hired for classes and one-off events. Also, the St Columba Centre, Fionnphort (c 5 miles away) has space for hot-desking, office/room space for hire, a community gym and houses an arts and crafts cooperative <https://swmid.co.uk/our-projects/columba-centre/>

- Access to the mill:
 - there is a right of access for vehicles to the mill through the adjacent privately owned Mill Cottage, but this passes through the garden directly past the house.
 - Pedestrian access is usually via the level footpath from the car park and over the Bunessan River Footbridge or via the steeper footpath down from the road running past the north of the mill.
 - Reasonably level access for pedestrians could be introduced from the road on the north side of the site directly into the 1st floor of the mill, as it is built into the hillside.
 - Alternative vehicular access could be introduced from the east directly to the mill, but this would need additional land to be purchased and probably earthworks: this area is covered in heavy vegetation but appears to be too steeply sloping for vehicular use without re-grading. There is already a small parking/turning area to the north-east of the mill which may be a useful part of this.
 - Community purchase of this area of land to the east of the mill is currently being negotiated by others for use as a children's play area. There may be potential for collaboration here.

- The RoMHC is short of space in Millbrae Cottage, currently in use as the Historical Centre: it finds difficulty in displaying all its archives and publications and has recently been bequeathed a further important collection of books on local history from the library of Dr John Stewart Cameron.
 - Should/could the RoMHC consider moving into the Mill and finding a new use for Millbrae Cottage?
 - The Mill would have space for better display and use of the archive and more working space for researchers.
 - Additional users within the mill and Millbrae Cottage could supplement the running costs eg office space is currently rented by the NTS; would another similar tenant take up a space?
 - Other uses for Millbrae Cottage: there is a shortage of local accommodation (a recent housing needs survey identified local housing need and affordable housing is being built in Bunessan). NB Housing Association could manage/take on this, but their proscriptive standards for refurbishment may be prohibitive; RoMHC could undertake this and be landlord (or a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) set up to manage it) and a lighter touch refurbishment/conversion may be possible.

- Gaelic Hub – there is no Centre for the study and promotion of Gaelic on Mull and the University of Glasgow have recently expressed interest in supporting one (Dr Alistair Whyte, School of Humanities, University of Glasgow).

- Bunessan Primary School has a Gaelic immersion class, currently of 12-15 pupils. There is also a thriving Gaelic evening class (around 20 students) and Gaelic scrabble group – many are parents of the immersion class pupils. NB a future threat to the school role has been noted owing to the lack of affordable housing (Housing Needs Survey)

- Examples of other Gaelic Hubs for comparison:-
- Ceòlas Uibhist: this is a joint venture with the University of the Highlands and Islands to promote and celebrate the community's Gàidhlig language and cultural heritage. It runs an active programme of courses, events and festivals which additionally support the local community economically and socially. <https://www.ceolas.co.uk/>
- Ionad Chaluim Chille Ìle (otherwise known as Islay Gaelic Centre): <https://islaygaeliccentre.co.uk/> This appears to be permanently closed on Google, but OSCR accounts indicate it is a thriving concern?
- Sabhal Mòr Ostaig: runs courses outwith Skye so could this be a satellite operation rather than independent? <https://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/>
- The Hub could include accommodation for researchers which might produce additional income towards running costs.

- A geology centre: Mull is noted for its interesting geology; potential to combine with uses as a Gaelic hub / expanded RoMHC

- Hostel:
 - there is no hostel/bunkhouse style accommodation between Craignure and Iona
 - this could be either the mill or Millbrae Cottage
 - this could be space for only 1 or 2 people, particularly available for researchers/ writer in residence etc if associated with the RoMHC archives or a Gaelic Hub, which could provide additional income to support running costs.
 - providing drainage adequate for a hostel may be challenging but not necessarily impossible NB if planning change of use is required SEPA may require an upgrade; separate drainage to the mill may be required for other uses anyway, but requirements should be investigated as part of any feasibility study.

- Shop selling community produce
 - For locals and visitors
 - Locally produced food for sale eg from freezers such as venison, lamb etc; seafood; fresh produce from community garden etc; jam and preserves? Spirits (licencing requirements c/w high mark up)?
 - Other local producers of non-perishable goods eg tweed, wool/yarn, knitting, furniture and other crafts; in person and/or online business base?

- The Historic Centre often has very few visitors owing to its position at the beginning of the village and visitors are past before they realise they have arrived at Bunessan: a comparison was made with takings at Bunessan charity shop within the village on key weekends c/w 2-3 visitors at the Historical Centre.

- Signage could be improved and positioned so visitors are warned in time to slow down
- The car park could be highlighted better
- The availability of tea/coffee could be highlighted
- The mill has an excellent location as it is on the main route between Craignure and Fionnphort/Iona.
- Café:
 - The RoMHC currently offer coffee/tea in return for donations although it does not attract many visitors (see note on signage etc)
 - There is not currently a daytime café in Bunessan open regularly. Local outlets are: a popular community café and market held on one Sunday/month run by volunteers in Bunessan village hall; The Lazy Cow, Creich, open Thurs-Mon 11am-3pm and about 3 miles away; Fionnphort Ferry Terminal Café, 5 miles away; Pennyghael Pop-up community café, Tuesdays only, 10 miles away. Neither the Bunessan Inn nor the Fish and Chip shop are open during the day.
 - A permanent café could be run on a leased basis but a suitable businessperson would need to be interested in taking it on. The development in Bunessan next to the village hall currently under construction includes planning permission for a shop and café.
 - A pop-up or temporary café could cater for visitors and generate income.
 - New RoMHC volunteers or a business would need to be attracted to run it. Could this be a business experience project for local young people (S4-6) during the holidays? Eg Duke of Edinburgh / Developing the Young Workforce/ Scouts and Guides etc?
- Accommodation
 - There is a shortage of housing available locally see recent Housing Needs survey <https://swmid.co.uk/media/1111/bunessan-feasibility-housing-needs.pdf>
 - The survey reported there was significant housing need in the area: small 1-2 bed housing for rent for single households; and 3 bed homes for rent for family households
 - Finding accommodation was identified by local businesses as a significant barrier to recruiting staff
 - It was noted at the meeting that there are few young people (under 30) who remain in the area as it is difficult to find accommodation other than to remain living with their parents. This is exacerbated by pupils attending High School in Oban as weekly boarders from the age of 11, so links with the area start to draw thinner from early teens.
 - It was observed the mill could be converted to housing as small flats (2-3) or Millbrae Cottage converted.
- Waterpower
 - It was suggested reinstating the waterwheel might draw people into the property, even if not operational.
 - A small run-of-river hydro-scheme in Bunessan River may have potential to provide energy and/or income for the development.

- Office space / hot desking
 - The NTS Ranger currently has a desk in Millbrae Cottage.
 - Hot-desking is available at the Columba Centre (5 miles away) – demand needs to be checked.
 - This could be a complementary use to the Gaelic Hub / archive space and generate additional income if an unmet demand can be demonstrated.

- Social Hub:
 - It was felt there may be an unmet need for a social hub / warm space / drop-in area for local people, including for the elderly, parents of young children, young people etc.
 - This could be combined with a larger historical/Gaelic Hub or café as long as there was no pressure to purchase anything (may not be attractive for a business lease?).
 - The Community Garden is adjacent to the mill and draws local people and visitors to the property; the garden is owned by RoMHC, leased and managed by the Southwest Mull and Iona Development Trust.
 - Example given for comparison was An Tobar, Tobermory warm space and café <https://www.antobarandmulltheatre.co.uk/an-tobar-cafe>

- Pop-up / permanent distillery, possibly related to seaweed and community owned Aird Fada Seaweed Farm

- MacDougall Trust - fund understood to be managed by Argyll and Bute Council from a bequest; there may be the potential for this to help fund the project if related to the purposes of the trust which was originally for an Eventide Home eg improving access to the mill or use as a social hub which includes the elderly. May need court order to vary the use. <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s140646/MacDougall%20Trust%20-%20OLI%20Committee%2011Sept2019.pdf>

- It was agreed that the old mill was an important historic structure and its repair as a ruin to stop it being lost would be a positive thing. It was noted that it may not be the most suitable structure and site for several of the suggested uses, and an exercise looking for alternative, more suitable sites (eg for workshops etc) would be useful, but not the RoMHC's remit. The mill's historic interest, character and position would suit, and indeed be a positive asset to, some of the other uses. Converting a redundant, historic building adds additional costs to a project but can also be the justification to lever additional public funding.

Annex 3: Consultant profiles

SARA CARRUTHERS – Built Heritage Consultant and Certified Building Conservation Specialist

Sara is a Certified Building Conservation Specialist (Project Manager, Regulatory) with the Chartered Institute of Building who has specialised in the conservation of historic buildings and monuments for over twenty-five years, mainly in Scotland. She has worked both in the development and management of grant assisted regeneration schemes and projects as a consultant and in the third sector, working with urban and rural communities as well as working as a contractor and specialist conservator, working with bodies such as Historic Environment Scotland and the National Lottery and in operating funding schemes to deliver grants. Sara has been based in Tayside since 1998 and has specific interest and local knowledge of the region's vernacular buildings and working with owners, local authorities and third sector organisations in the area. She is co-founder and vice-convenor of the Fife and Tayside Traditional Buildings Forum.

JOE GRIBBEN – Project Manager and Community-led Development Specialist

Joe has worked for over 30 years in various aspects of the construction industry across Scotland and overseas. He has experience in developing rural community-led projects in Scotland, having worked for an affordable housing charity where he worked closely with communities to identify housing needs, seek suitable funding and provide solutions to housing issues with a realistic and positive approach. Joe started his career as a Building Surveyor in private practice and then with a national charity and more recently worked as a self-employed property developer. He has a MSc in Construction Management and Diploma in Building Surveying. Joe has worked extensively overseas managing development and humanitarian aid programmes in challenging environments.