Garve & District Community Council discussions re trees in The Avenue

Feb 2022 - Recent storm damage has brought down a number of trees in our area including in **The Avenue**. Well done to all involved in the clean-up effort. Cllr Cockburn confirmed that The Highland Council would have no objections to people cutting up fallen trees and taking them away as the roads team can’t be everywhere. All help would be appreciated.

March 2022 - **The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee** – The Highland Council’s Roads Department have raised no objections to us planting seven trees in The Avenue as discussed at our last ordinary meeting. Their Forestry Officer would raise no objections if we planted more depending what space there is in The Avenue but our Chairman has pointed out there is no budget for that … just like there isn’t a budget at The Highland Council! We have asked SSE if they would like to be involved in this project as they were ten years ago but they don’t have any local funds in the Garve area so they wouldn’t be in a position to provide support. However, they do send us the best of luck with the project – *“it sounds like a lovely way to mark this special occasion”.* The good news is that the Community Council has been awarded 100 FREE trees through the project “i dig trees” which aims to have 600,000 trees planted across the UK this season. The trees are due to be delivered at the end of this month *(20 x Common Oak, 20 x Silver Birch, 20 x Green Beech, 20 x Hornbeam, 20 x Common Alder plus 100 x Spiral guards).* Community Council member Bob Moir is happy for the trees to be delivered to his house. If anybody would like to donate more trees, that would be most welcome. We are also grateful to all those who have already offered to help plant the trees. More offers of help were received tonight at this meeting. The Secretary suggested a planting plan would be useful. Community Council member Sadie-Michaela Harris suggested a contact she knew might be willing to help in this regard. Community Council member Bob Moir had been speaking to a retired Forester who also suggested the same person so Sadie will make enquiries. The point was made would these new trees be in keeping with The Avenue? It was felt the planting plan would iron out/highlight any issues. It has also been suggested that people could buy their own tree to plant in their own gardens to mark this historic event. We would welcome pictures if anybody does this. Just after our last ordinary meeting, our Chairman planted a tree in Achnasheen to mark Accession Day. Our thanks to The Midge Bite Café in Achnasheen for their assistance in this project. All trees are gifted to the landowners as Community Councils are not advised to own assets.

April 2022 - **The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee** – all trees are gifted to the landowners as Community Councils are not advised to own assets. On Saturday 5 March 2022, Community Council members Bob Moir, Sadie-Michaela Harris co-opted member Hamish Leslie Melville walked The Avenue with Murdo Maclennan (attending in a personal capacity) to see exactly what could or couldn’t be planted in The Avenue. The group had a look at the soil quality, it was quite a sandy composition which Murdo says will be prone to drying out more quickly during drought and that is something we should consider alongside climate change when thinking about which species of tree to plant. Murdo felt several existing trees may need urgent attention, especially some which appear to have a form of root and butt rot (this was in evidence in the trees that fell in the high winds a few months ago). These concerns have already been forwarded to Nick Richards, Forestry Officer at The Highland Council with appropriate pictures *(thanks to Sadie for the pictures)*. Murdo felt that reverting back to our original idea of planting seven trees to mark The Queen’s seven decades on the throne as discussed at our February 2022 ordinary meeting would be our best course of action as Murdo felt the 100 free trees would be too difficult to manage and some species weren’t suitable. Murdo also suggested that we could plant more trees over time as more trees fall in winds or are removed for safety reasons if we felt it to be manageable and subject to landowner’s permission. The gift of 100 free trees has had to be declined since our last ordinary meeting as we can no longer meet some of the *“i dig trees”* project terms and conditions such as planting all the trees in the one location. Murdo wonders if it may be advisable not to plant Scots Pine again due to the concerns of possible rot and perhaps transition the site to Sessile Oak if the landowner agrees? Murdo also raised an issue over who owns the land either side of the road that runs through The Avenue so we have asked the various parties to compare notes including The Highland Council’s roads and legal department, neighbouring properties and we are consulting directly with Registers of Scotland … currently awaiting feedback.  This project is now on hold until the land ownership issue is resolved. Our Chairman had hoped to involve the local school in this project but until the land ownership issue is resolved, that is also on hold. Our thanks to Murdo for his time and advice on this matter and to everyone in the community for their help, advice, sharing ideas and willingness to help plant trees. We note press reports that in the UK, over one million Jubilee trees have already been planted. Our Chairman forgot to express at our last ordinary meeting his thanks to Community Council members Bob Moir and Sadie-Michaela Harris for talking to Garve and Strathgarve residents while out in the Village about this project. Community Council member Bob Moir noted that the landowner would become responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of any trees planted and that the trees would probably be for the next generation as advised by Murdo.

May 2022- **The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee** – it should be noted that any trees planted become the responsibility of and belong to the landowner. Working with Registers of Scotland and The Highland Council in recent weeks has confirmed that The Avenue is owned by The Highland Council. Our thanks to all for their help. Nick Richards, The Highland Council’s Forestry Officer visited the site last Thursday (28 April 2022) to discuss the rotting trees currently on their site with our Chairman and Community Council members Bob Moir and Sadie-Michaela Harris. Nobody from The Highland Council’s Road's Department attended but apologies were received from Andrew Bone. Nick felt some trees may need to be removed for safety reasons and others may need surgery but was very positive in the possible replanting of the whole site.  Nick had been re-reading the SSE tree survey from 2013 and felt an updated tree survey would be a good starting point before any felling/surgery/re-planting took place.  Nick noted the 2013 SSE tree survey talked about planting 250 trees *(200 Scots Pine, 20 Lime, 10 Horse Chestnut, 10 Holly and 10 Oak).*  Nick also noted on site the number of regeneration trees already growing in The Avenue which, in time, would need thinning out. Nick also acknowledged that the damaged fence would probably need to be repaired by The Highland Council as it was their tree that fell and caused the damage in the first place.  Nick will now talk to his colleagues at the Road's Department as all this would be their responsibility/budget but would keep us updated on progress. Our thanks to Nick for his time. This update has already appeared on our website and the Lord Lieutenant has, at her request, been kept informed. Over the last few months, we have **received several suggestions** both in writing and verbally about which species of tree should or could be planted in The Avenue to help keep its character. Sue Tarr wrote to us in early March 2022 and although she liked the idea of replanting The Avenue, she did have some reservations. Sue noted the original planting of The Avenue was made up of mainly Scots Pine but also Larch and Lime. Hornbeam would be regarded as an unusual choice for the Highlands, Elder is more a hedging species and Birch are fairly short-lived trees. Oaks and Beeches would provide the stature expected of an avenue and Sue would like to see replanting approached in a planned way with consideration given to the design and end result. LCT funding could help plant the appropriate trees with a long-term view in how The Avenue could look in 50-100 years’ time. Community Council member Bob Moir didn’t believe LCT funding would be available as we now know the land belongs to The Highland Council. Our Chairman tended to agree. Murdo Maclennan suggested native - Sessile Oak & Scots Pine (with the rot issue and feasibility of replacing with pine looked into), non-native - Beech (native in the south) & sycamore (very much naturalised to the UK but not native). Murdo mentioned native/non-native as it often comes up in discussions about woodland so felt it worth noting. Murdo felt those suggestions would enable us to retain The Avenue’s character but other species could also grow there. We have also received several verbal suggestions on this topic. All the verbal suggestions received were Oak, Scots Pine, Larch, Beech, Lime, Horse Chestnut, Sycamore and Palm trees. There was also a suggestion to stick to one species only to make an avenue such as Limes or Horse Chestnuts. Oaks are too slow, birches too easy and beeches (either green or copper) tend to break off. Another suggestion was more variety the better as The Avenue has naturally evolved over the years. Community Council member Sadie-Michela Harris noted there is Scots Pine, Lime, Sycamore and Horse Chestnut there now and noted the Palm trees in Ullapool. Our Chairman talked about the famous Plockton Palm trees, some of which have suffered storm damage in recent years and Community Council member Bob Moir recalled as a young lad going to Ullapool where an orange tree grew behind a hotel. Community Council member Joe Stewart noted (via email) that Oak trees are not the best to have near livestock. The growing leaves and acorns contain tannin which can be toxic to livestock if eaten in large amounts. Our Treasurer suggested that Hawthorn be planted in between any larger species. There is also some useful information at <https://treesforlife.org.uk/> which details native species to the Highlands. She also felt perhaps on safety grounds, the felling of possible falling trees should be The Highland Council’s first priority. Community Council member Bob Moir noted it will be up to The Highland Council what happens next as it is their land. Our thanks to everyone for sharing their thoughts. We will now await further news from The Highland Council as it is their land/responsibility/budget. The Secretary felt we should pay our Chairman the £72.00 fee for Registers of Scotland that he has paid out of his own pocket to help try and resolve the land ownership issue. Although our Chairman wasn’t looking to be reimbursed, Community Council members unanimously agreed he should be, proposed by the Secretary, seconded by the Treasurer. The Secretary also felt we should receive an additional £72.00 on top of our annual grant funding this year from The Highland Council as they had the paperwork all along and only shared it with us after we had shown them what paperwork we had received from Registers of Scotland!

June 2022 - **The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee** – it should be noted that any trees planted become the responsibility of and belong to the landowner. Cllr Kraft is taking a keen interest in this matter having read our minutes covering this topic over the last few months. Our Achnasheen tree and our Jubilee tree from 2012 are now both registered at <https://queensgreencanopy.org/> Yesterday late afternoon we received an update for The Highland Council’s Forestry Officer which informed us that he is not going to be able to find time to carry out an updated tree survey in The Avenue due to other work commitments. To keep the momentum going, he suggests that we get an Arb/Forestry consultant in. He feels it is a good time to get a tree survey carried out while the trees are in leaf. Any tree surgery/felling work can take place after the bird nesting season, but before the autumn. Trees can then be planting at the back end of the year. The 2013 SSE tree survey would be a good starting point for the consultant. Community Council members felt the email seemed to suggest we pay for a consultant to survey Highland Council owned trees. As The Avenue is their responsibility, (their land) surely it should be at their cost? What about the safety of people following trees falling in the winds? As Community Council member Sadie-Michaela Harris put it, this isn’t a cosmetic whim! Cllr Kraft will see what can be done from the Highland Council side.

Aug – 2022 - **Trees in The Avenue** – Cllr Kraft and Nick Richards, The Highland Council’s Forestry Officer have both confirmed that it will be for The Highland Council’s Road’s Department to fund any work needing doing including tree surveys as The Highland Council owns the land, our thanks to them. On Tuesday 14 June 2022 we received reports (thanks to Community Council member Sadie-Michaela Harris and Murdo Maclennan) that one of the leaning trees in The Avenue was leaning more following high winds the previous day and was now leaning onto a neighbouring tree over the road. There is also a long split in the tree trunk that you can get your hand into. We reported this urgent matter directly to The Highland Council (Case - FS429594788) that day. Nick Richards confirmed that he had been discussing The Avenue with his road’s colleagues and understands that they are going to appoint a consultant to carry out a full survey of all the trees and recommend any work which may be required. He noted that while it would be more convenient to wait until this survey is complete and to carry out any work after as one operation, he has seen the leaning tree and would recommend that it is felled as a matter of urgency. An on-site meeting took place on Monday 20 June 2022 which the Community Council were not invited to as they wanted the survey to be conducted autonomously however, we are told the meeting went well and they are now going to conduct a survey on all the trees in The Avenue and draw up a planting plan. The leaning tree in question will be felled. Our thanks to everyone for their continued help on this matter. We understand the survey work is/near complete. We have asked, if possible, if we can see the survey, awaiting a reply … This update has already been posted on our website and the Lord Lieutenant has been kept informed. Cllr Liz Kraft noted that a falling tree which could block a main road into/out of a Village would affect emergency services, something that we are all aware of after the tragic incidents in Sleat and Dornie earlier this week.

Sept 22 - **Trees in The Avenue** – the latest update from Tuesday 16 August 2022 via Cllr Kraft is that the tree surgeon hopes to carry out work at the end of September - first week in October 2022, tbc depending if their quote is acceptable to The Highland Council. They will also check to see if there is a real need for a MEWP as they try to avoid using large machines where possible as they tend to do more harm than good, again tbc. Our thanks to Cllr Kraft for the update which has already appeared on our website.

Oct 22 - Trees **in The Avenue** – Cllr Kraft tells us that a contractor has been appointed and it is hoped all surgery/felling works will be completed by the end of this month. Our thanks to all involved. This update has already appeared on our website. Community Council member Bob Moir had a look yesterday and today and noted no works so far. Community Council member Sadie-Michaela Harris is also on lookout duties!

Nov 22 - **Trees in The Avenue** – Cllr Kraft updated us to say tree surgery/felling on The Avenue should start from Monday 7 November 2022.  The contractor has got a bit behind and the wet weather hasn't helped.

Dec 22 - **Trees in The Avenue** – work begun on Monday 7 November 2022 lasting around five days. Six dangerous leaning trees were cut down, some were 150-200 years old (our Chairman was out counting their rings). Other trees have had some surgery work with a general tidy up taking place on Friday 25 November 2022. The Lord Lieutenant and Cllr Kraft visited The Avenue after Remembrance Sunday service along with our Chairman and Community Council member Bob Moir to see the work for themselves. Other Community Council members have visited when passing. It has also been confirmed that there is no update with regards to a replanting schedule yet, probably further news in the spring 2023.

Feb 23 - **Trees in The Avenue** – no news about the replanting plan is expected until the spring.

March 23 - **Trees in The Avenue** – no news about the replanting plan is expected until the spring.

April 23 – Same

May 23 - **Replanting trees in The Avenue** – The Highland Council’s roads department tell us that they will ask one of their arbo team to work something out and will keep us updated.

June 23 - **Replanting trees in The Avenue** – awaiting an update …

Aug 23 - **Replanting trees in The Avenue** – discussions between Roads and Amenities departments are ongoing. Our Chairman asked for an update via email on Monday 10 July 2023, no reply received.

Sept 23 - **Replanting trees in The Avenue** – it would appear someone at The Highland Council forgot to copy us into a very long chain of emails on this matter!  The Highland Council has been tasked to identify suitable sites they own that could be improved for biodiversity; The Avenue is now on the list.  A survey carried out in 2013 suggested 200 Scots pine, 20 lime, 10 horse chestnut, 10 holly and 10 oak could be planted in The Avenue but since then further trees have been felled so, in theory, more than the above list could be planted.  The Highland Council’s Forestry Officer is unsure if so many Scots pine trees should be planted as they have proven vulnerable to windblow.  He would prefer to increase the number of oak and lime instead, with a greater proportion of smaller growing trees and shrubs; however, The Highland Council’s Biodiversity Officer has advised not to plant lime trees due to the potential for bee mortality.  The Highland Council’s Forestry Officer is happy to go along with this recommendation.  Once the number of trees and planting plan is agreed, it is felt by all departments within The Highland Council that the process should then be straight forward but reports have since been received by The Highland Council of flooding in The Avenue.  This has since been proven to be unfounded reports.  We now await further updates.  Our thanks to all for their help so far.  This update has already been posted on our website.

Oct 23 - **Replanting trees in The Avenue** – We have received a copy of the planting specification document which has been sent to contractors for quotes by The Highland Council. Given the challenging ground conditions, cell grown trees are thought to be the most likely to bring the best results and will be easier to plant than bare-rooted stock. Nursery stock will be sourced from local provenance where available. Estimates for site area, based on an estimated area of 1.1 hectares and a planting density of 2000 stems per hectare, an allowance has been made for 300 trees. Planting should be undertaken in winter/spring 2023/2024 (tbc). 50 x Scots Pine, 50 x Pedunculate Oak, 50 x Downy Birth, 50 x Silver Birch, 25 x Juniper, 25 x Alder, 25 x Aspen and 25 x Hazel. It has also been acknowledged by The Highland Council that successful establishment of the young trees is entirely dependent on a robust maintenance programme therefore, an initial three-year maintenance contract will also be secured with the planting contractor. Our thanks to everyone at The Highland Council. This update has already appeared on our website.

Nov 23 - **Replanting trees in The Avenue** – the contract to plant the trees has (we understand) gone out to tender, awaiting updates but we also note flooding in and around Garve on Saturday 21 October 2023 following heavy rain. 90.40mm fell at Inchbae and 77.00mm fell at Strathgarve. Sue Tarr asked if the historic integrity of The Avenue would be kept? Our Chairman confirmed that is something we have already requested. He also read out the following from the minutes of our last ordinary meeting for information … g*iven the challenging ground conditions, cell grown trees are thought to be the most likely to bring the best results and will be easier to plant than bare-rooted stock. Nursery stock will be sourced from local provenance where available. Estimates for site area, based on an estimated area of 1.1 hectares and a planting density of 2000 stems per hectare, an allowance has been made for 300 trees. Planting should be undertaken in winter/spring 2023/2024 (tbc). 50 x Scots Pine, 50 x Pedunculate Oak, 50 x Downy Birth, 50 x Silver Birch, 25 x Juniper, 25 x Alder, 25 x Aspen and 25 x Hazel. It has also been acknowledged by The Highland Council that successful establishment of the young trees is entirely dependent on a robust maintenance programme therefore, an initial three-year maintenance contract will also be secured with the planting contractor.* It was noted the tendering process is usually advertised online and our Treasurer noted an old photo seen recently of the War Memorial showed in the background how few houses were in Garve and how thick with trees The Avenue was in days gone by. *(Post meeting note - this project is going to be going out to tender by the end of this month along with nine other lots as one combined contract. This will allow planting to commence in the new year. We will be updated once a contractor has been appointed. A full report of all updates since February 2022 is available in the library section of our website, thanks to our Treasurer for putting together for us).*

Dec 23 - **Replanting Trees in The Avenue** – full reports since February 2022 are available in the library section of our website, our thanks to the Treasurer for going back through the minutes! A tree planting contractor is still to be appointed and **ditches at the far end of The Avenue** have been noted as needing cleared out. They have been confirmed as being on the “to do” list of jobs at the roads department, thanks to everyone at The Highland Council and Cllr Liz Kraft for their joined-up approach to this issue.

Feb 24 - **Replanting Trees in The Avenue** – awaiting a contractor to be appointed. Following Sunday’s stormy weather, the Treasurer was concerned that some more trees are leaning badly and that the frequent storms we have been getting lately might quicken their deterioration further. She will try and get our Chairman some photographs. **In slightly related news, a Tree Preservation Order** came into force in the Inchbae area on Thursday 7 December 2023. More details are available in the library section of our website.

March 24 - **Replanting Trees in The Avenue** – awaiting a contractor to be appointed.

April 2024 - **Replanting Trees in The Avenue** – From October 2023 ordinary meeting … “g*iven the challenging ground conditions, cell grown trees are thought to be the most likely to bring the best results and will be easier to plant than bare-rooted stock.  Nursery stock will be sourced from local provenance where available.  Estimates for site area, based on an estimated area of 1.1 hectares and a planting density of 2000 stems per hectare, an allowance has been made for 300 trees.  Planting should be undertaken in winter/spring 2023/2024 (tbc).  50 x Scots Pine, 50 x Pedunculate Oak, 50 x Downy Birth, 50 x Silver Birch, 25 x Juniper, 25 x Alder, 25 x Aspen and 25 x Hazel.  It has also been acknowledged by The Highland Council that successful establishment of the young trees is entirely dependent on a robust maintenance programme therefore, an initial three-year maintenance contract will also be secured with the planting contractor.”*  We have learnt in recent days that The Highland Council did put this work out to tender but unfortunately there were no contractors able to take on the work this planting season so before the winter of 2024/25 they will be putting this contract out again for tender to get this work completed.  We have been asked when and where was the tender advertised?  We have been advised that due to the cost of the tender being below a certain threshold, the contract was put out to three contractors selected online through a search.  Concern has been raised at the “tendering” process and did the nine other sites in the Highlands due to have tree planting done also not go ahead?  Can fruit trees also be included in The Avenue as suggested by a local resident (The Highland Council will consider this suggestion) and can we see sight of the planting plan?  The Highland Council confirmed yesterday that five projects did go ahead but projects in Tain, Golspie Garve and Dingwall did not receive any quotes for tendering.  The Garve project was grouped with two other sites in Dingwall however, The Highland Council confirmed that if a local contractor was willing to take on the Garve project, just contact us here at the Community Council and we will pass on their contact details.  The one consideration The Highland Council would ask is that there is a Rhododendron Bush on site which needs to be removed.  The tree planting plan and a full history of this project is available in the library section of our website.  This update has already been shared on our online channels.  Community Council members expressed their concern at the “tendering” process and feel it should have been promoted more widely.

May 2024 - **Replanting Trees in The Avenue** – awaiting a contractor to be appointed. Two local companies who have expressed an interest have been passed onto the relevant contact within The Highland Council. It was again noted that going out to tender and looking up companies online is NOT the same thing in our book!

June 2024 - **Replanting Trees in The Avenue** – following our input regarding tendering/appointing a contractor, The Highland Council has confirmed that they met with a local contractor on site to discuss options recently and they plan to progress the work this coming winter. Our thanks to all for their help in this matter. A full list of the monthly updates since February 2022 is available in the library section of our website. This update has already appeared on our online channels.

July 2024 - **Replanting Trees in The Avenue** – a full list of the monthly updates since February 2022 is available in the library section of our website.

September 2024 - **Replanting Trees in The Avenue** – over the summer, a decision was made by The Highland Council to carry out this project in house rather than to contract out so the Environment team within The Highland Council will be carrying out the planting works. There is no date set yet when this will happen however, the Community Council will be updated in due course.  Our thanks to all involved. A full list of the monthly updates since February 2022 are available in the library section of our website. This update has already appeared on our online channels.

October 2024 - **Replanting Trees in The Avenue** – awaiting news. A full list of the monthly updates since February 2022 is available in the library section of our website. A Strathgarve resident has also noted the issue of tree cutting required in The Avenue and through Garve village, as the trees are now encroaching on vehicular access, especially by HGV’s. We have asked for photographs which we are happy to forward on but delivery drivers should be raising such matters through their line manager who in turn should raise directly with The Highland Council. Again, photos are appreciated.

November 2024 - **Replanting Trees in The Avenue** – The Nature Restoration Fund 2024/25 was pulled from local authorities and so it has taken some time for The Highland Council to look at their existing funds and work out what they have available for this project using funds remaining from 2023/24. They are also currently working on getting stock lists from local nurseries to understand their availability and costs for bare root stock but all being well, planting will go ahead in late November 2024 or early December 2024, date to be confirmed. The planting plan is already available in the library section of our website and has been available since April 2024. We have asked if the planting plan is still the same (yes depending on stock availability) and if we can have a copy of the maintenance schedule that was discussed before once these trees have been planted. A full list of the monthly updates since February 2022 is available in the library section of our website. Our thanks to all involved.

December 2024 - **Replanting Trees in The Avenue** - tree planting is now complete, 50 crab apple trees, 50 sessil oak, 50 rowan trees, 55 scots pine and50 sweet cherry trees with ongoing maintenance over the next twelve months as detailed in the updated report on our website. Trees selected were based on The Highland Council Foresty Officers recommendations following his experience, public feedback and species availability. On site there are crab apples which in a few seasons or so will be fruiting and so the community are more than welcome to pick this fruit. The planting has been done to meet the UK woodland assurance standards. The trees were planted the same week as National Tree Week - <https://treecouncil.org.uk/seasonal-campaigns/national-tree-week/> A full list of the monthly updates since February 2022 is available in the library section of our website. Our thanks to all involved. This update has already been shared through our online channels.