

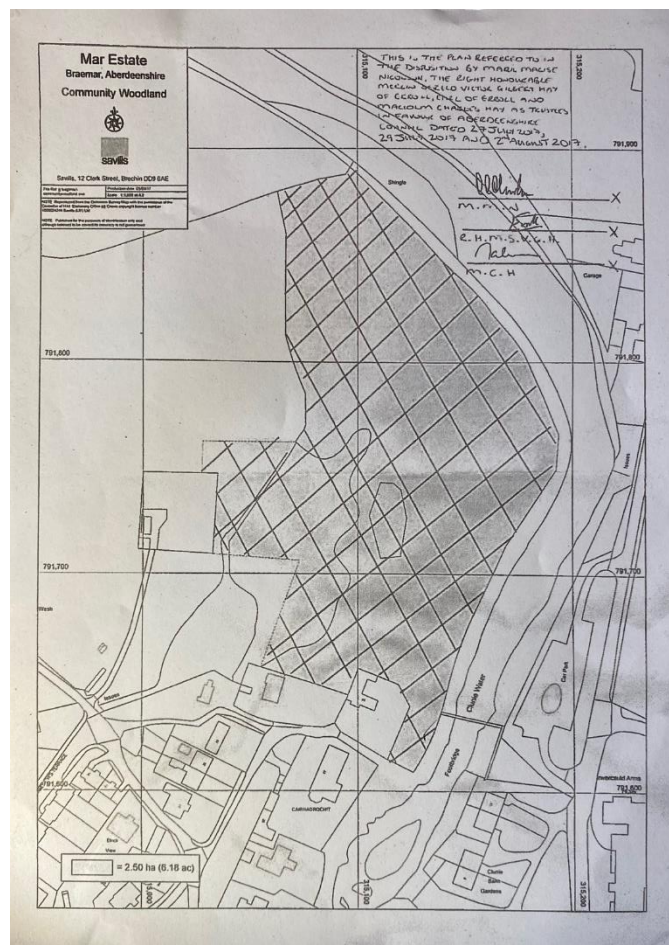
Request for Community Transfer of Community Woodland Braemar

1: The Community Transfer Body (CTB) making the request.

Name: Braemar Community Limited (BCL); A company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital.
Registered office: Amicable House; 252 Union Street Aberdeen; AB10 1TN
Company number: SC276254
Charity number: SC038573
Articles of Association: Appendix One
Contact: Dr Roelf Dijkhuizen; An Cnochan Dubh; Braemar AB35 5XX
Telephone 01339741946; Mobile 07984800276.
Email rsdijkhuizen@hotmail.co.uk
Position at BCL: Board Director

2: Description of the asset requested.

The asset comprises of the area of land situated to the East of St Andrew's Drive, Braemar which extends to 2.5 hectares between Braemar Village and the river Clunie. The area was a disposition by Mar Estate to Aberdeenshire Council in August 2017 for use as a Community Woodland for recreational and community purposes:



Disposition of the area of land by Mar Estate to Aberdeenshire Council. The Ordnance Survey map shows the Community Woodland as a shaded area.

The area comprises a mixture of woodland and open field. There are also three small streams with some associated wetland. There is a stockproof fence, but the site is frequently visited by deer and there is no regeneration of trees. The path along the river Clunie river is beautiful but narrow and slippery. The views across the open field towards the North and upwards the Dee valley are magnificent. There are two routes of access at present. One on the east side via a bridge over the river Clunie with a walk along the narrow path along the river to access via a gate. The other is via the village, on the corner of St Andrew's Terrace, around the electricity building through a gate on the north-west side of the land.



On the East is the river Clunie Views towards the North-West Trees on the village side.

3: Rationale for community transfer request

The request is for BCL to take ownership of the land to allow regeneration of its natural biotopes and provide access for the benefit of the health and wellbeing of the Braemar population.

Braemar is very beautifully located in the heart of the Cairngorms National Park attracting many visitors from far and wide. However, the existing nature trails to access the natural beauty in and around the village are not suitable for people with wheelchairs or using walking aids. People with limited mobility have little access to Braemar's beautiful surroundings but are confined to walk on poorly designed pavements in the village centre and/or along the main streets out of the village such as the road to the golf course.

The area of land referred to in this community transfer request, is geographically close to the village centre and provides 2.5 hectares of flat land with interesting biotopes in the form of woodland, wetland, and grassland with spectacular views along the river Clunie towards the surrounding Cairngorm hills. The main objective of our project is to create paths through the area providing access to meaningful walks for all people of Braemar including people using pushchairs, walking aids and wheelchairs.

We will enhance the biodiversity of the area building on the opportunities provided by the forest, the open field, and the streams. Simple interventions to protect and enhance the natural characteristics of this environment, such as strategic positioning of fencing and planting to promote growth of young trees will improve the biodiversity of the forested area. Facilitating the inundation of certain areas along the small streams will promote biodiversity in the wet areas. Management of the open fields could promote wildflower growth as well as create grassed areas for recreation or exercise.

We have submitted a request to the Scottish Land Fund (contact person Elyn Whang), to help with the acquisition of the land. Pending a decision by Aberdeenshire Council relating to the Community Asset Transfer we are allowed to submit a Stage One application. We will commission quotes for independent land valuations, and habitat surveys. With support of Community Woodland Association Scotland (contact person Piers Voysey) we will commission a topographic survey and develop a woodland management plan.

4: Community proposal

The project is to be delivered in phases:

Phase one: Acquisition (year 2023)

Request for Community Asset Transfer was approved at the BCL AGM in October 2022 with some 50 of 256 BCL members present. We are working with the Scottish Land Fund to obtain funding for a valuation survey, tree and habitat surveys, and costs of acquisition. Advice relating to the regeneration of the various biotopes has been obtained from an experienced ecologist. The community asset transfer is advertised on the BCL website and in the local Braemar Buzzard March 2023 (delivered to every household in the village) in the form of an enclosed leaflet with requests for ideas and volunteers. A public presentation of the project was made in the Village Hall 4/4/23 at the regular Tourism Group public information meeting.

Phase two: Start of regeneration of natural biotopes (year 2024)

The area needs top up of its existing stock fencing to reduce the burden of grazing by visiting deer. The creation of a hedge on the North side of the site will enhance wildlife. The diversity of the grassland can be enhanced by the sowing of indigenous wildflowers. Ideas that have come from the community about the potential lay out and use of the woodland will be presented and tested at public meetings in the Village Hall. Scottish Land Fund may help with the start up as part of the acquisition of the land.

Phase three: Development of access and paths (year 2025)

Informed by the public consultation exercise, a path network of up to 500 meters in total is to be constructed. Granite dust paths 150mm deep lined with geotextile are to be 1 metre wide (costs about £20 per square metre). Development costs also to include provision of improved access as per public consultation. The capital needed will be sought through funding requests to 'Paths for All' or alternative funding source.

Phase four: Maintenance (years 2026 onwards)

Maintenance will be carried out by BCL volunteers. Paths and fences need to be maintained, and further tree planting and/or mowing of grass may be needed depending on public consultation. Costs are uncertain, therefore relatively high proportion of Project management/contingencies in the budget. Funding sources to be determined but partially to be from BCL fundraising activities.

5: Benefits

A Woodland management Plan will be developed in collaboration with the Community Woodland association to ensure the delivery of the benefits anticipated to be derived of the Community asset transfer of the woodland:

x We have taken advice from an experienced ecologist:

Regeneration of the existing woodland, wetland, and grassland biotopes. At present, the biodiversity of the area is poor. The trees, mainly birch and aspen, are dying, with no evidence of new growth because of the heavy grazing pressure imposed by visiting deer. The biodiversity of the grassland could be vastly improved by the introduction of wild flowers, hedges and shrubs, attracting insects and wildlife. The wetlands could be extended and managed in a way to attract more flora and fauna specific to this type of biotope.

x The land is already accessed by many Braemarians as a short cut to get from the Auchendryne side of the village, west of the river Clunie to the Castleton side on the east. Together with the path along the river Clunie towards the river Dee, the land is visited frequently also by residents walking their dog. The views towards the Dee Valley are truly magnificent. However, as it is, the paths are only accessible to people with good mobility excluding elderly residents, young families and people

with reduced mobility. We aim to enhance the area's natural beauty for all and provide access also to those with reduced mobility.

x The regeneration of natural habitats will provide learning and development opportunities for primary school children, beavers/scouts and could improve the understanding of the natural environment by other members of the Braemar community also. Signposting and nature walks undertaken by BCL volunteers will be developed in the future to exploit these opportunities. These activities are to be developed with community engagement in collaboration with Aberdeenshire Community Learning and Development Officer (contact person Mr Ed Garrett).

x Improving the access to an area of natural beauty will provide opportunities for public health for the residents in Braemar. These opportunities will be developed with community engagement in collaboration with Braemar Care, the GP practice, and the Aberdeenshire Community Health Partnership Public Health Co-ordinator (contact person Ms Dawn Tuckwood).

x Because at present, nobody in the village takes responsibility to look after the site, it is abused for waste disposal and dog waste is not always picked up. During the summer months the site is sometimes used by tourists for camping and starting fires accompanied by loud behaviour and further waste disposal problems. It has occurred on several occasions that the river Clunie was used by motorhome owners to empty their waste tanks, gaining access via the parking area opposite Invercauld Hotel and the bridge over the Clunie. This is of significant concern to the residents of the village, those living adjacent to the woodland in particular. Taking the land in public ownership provides the opportunity to tackle these issues in collaboration with the owners of Invercauld Hotel.

6: Risk Analysis

The following risks have been identified:

x Organisational risk. BCL has been in existence since 2004 and has shown the capacity to deliver major projects as is outlined in Section 9 below. Much of the maintenance work of the woodland will be dependent on volunteers; BCL has an excellent track record of working with volunteers as is demonstrated by the successful running of the castle project over many years.

x Two properties on the edge of the village border directly with the southern end of the community woodland. The owners of these properties have been approached to identify how any nuisance from increased activity in the area can be mediated, and how their uninterrupted view across the area can be maintained at the same time. From our discussions to date, we believe that a satisfactory solution can be achieved to enhance privacy with clearing of waste, fencing and planting.

x Funding of all the aspirations of the project presents a challenge. Hence the phasing of the project as outlined in Section 4. Most of the fencing needed to allow regeneration is in place already and generally in good order. All that is needed is raising the west and north side of the existing stock fence to deer height which can be done at relatively low cost. Maintenance of the woodland will be undertaken by volunteers. The public involvement to date has already delivered several potential volunteers and the neighbours of the field have also offered to be active in the areas of joint interest. However, the construction of paths in phase three of the project (2025) carries a significant cost. Funding will be sought from 'Paths for All' in the first instance and 'The Cairngorms Community Led Vision Fund' if the former is not successful. The phased introduction of the developments is to mitigate against the risks involved with funding applications.

x Community engagement carries the risk of expectations in the community that may be difficult to reconcile or materialise. At this stage of the project, we have advertised the acquisition of the woodland at our 2022 AGM, in the March 2023 Buzzard which is delivered to every household in the

Braemar Community (see attached), and we have presented the project at the Braemar Tourist Group open day in the Village Hall 4/04/2023. We are also approaching specific stakeholders in Braemar, such as Braemar care, Primary School Scouts, Kindrochit Court and Braemar households who walk their dogs in the area presently. We will bring the responses together in public meetings in the Village Hall to be planned for each of the phases of the project between now and 2026. The approach to community involvement is outlined in Section 7 of this document.

x Improving access to this hitherto rather unknown piece of land may attract activities that are less welcome and could become a nuisance to villagers who live nearby. Already there are issues with sanitary waste disposal into the river Clunie by tourists parking on the parking lot opposite Invercauld Hotel and garden waste disposal by some of the villagers. Camping, making fires and loutish behaviour by visitors from outside the village who park on the parking lot opposite Invercauld Hotel and gain access via the bridge over the river Clunie will need to be discouraged. BCL will work with the Hotel and with Aberdeenshire Council to limit parking a car for this purpose and prohibit camping and the making of fires. This will be included in the Wood Management Plan to be developed if the asset transfer of the woodland is successful. The following risks have been identified:

7: Community Engagement

Braemar Community Limited has 256 members from a community of circa 500 residents. Agreement to proceed to a Community Asset Transfer request was approved at the AGM 24/11/22 with some 50 people present. Information about the project with requests for feedback and volunteer involvement is published on the BCL website (braemarcommunitylimited.co.uk), and via a leaflet included in the March 2023 Braemar Buzzard which is delivered to every household in Braemar. A public presentation was made in the village hall 4/4/2023. Responses to these engagement activities are coming in, all positive to date with ideas as to how the potential of the project can be maximised. Several volunteers have expressed an interest to be involved in the maintenance of the area, the upgrade of the fencing and the potential planting of trees.

Continued Support

‘We will identify and overcome any barriers to participation’

A mixture of approaches will be used to maintain involvement of all residents of Braemar throughout the project, using the specific characteristics of village life. The concomitant use of articles in the local Braemar Buzzard, surveys, questionnaires, ballot boxes in the local pharmacy, COOP, St Margaret’s Church, and Kindrochit Court will be used alongside public meetings for each phase of the project.

- An approach to dedicated organisations such as the church, Braemar Care, Braemar Scouts, Primary School, and the Braemar Community Group is being made to seek advice on participation.

Planning

‘There is a clear purpose for the engagement, which is based on a shared understanding of community needs and ambitions’

- Using the expertise of the Community Woodland Association we will provide an information package for the local community and conduct a survey to assess the community’s expectation of the engagement process, what outcomes should be focussed on, and what success of the process would look like.
- The engagement process will be supported by volunteers from BCL.

Communication

‘We will communicate clearly and regularly with the people, organisations and communities affected by the engagement.’

- On the BCL webpage we will keep record of all engagement activities, feedback received and outcomes of decision making.
- We will provide updated information in each of the quarterly editions of the Braemar Buzzard.

Inclusion.

We will identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement

- There are two dwelling houses on the southern border of the woodland. Their occupiers have been informed about the intention of BCL, and discussions are taking place how their interests which relate to privacy and free view over the field can be secured.
- Discussions are taking place with Braemar Care as to how elderly residents and residents with disability can be involved in the project. The local residential home, Kindrochit Court is a focal point for involvement of elderly residents in Braemar.
- The headteacher of the local primary school will be approached to identify learning and development opportunities provided by the project. Similarly we will speak to the leaders of the local scouts/beaver/cubs groups.
- A meeting has taken place with the Aberdeenshire community learning and development officer and with the public health co-ordinator to explore the opportunities offered by this project.
- Co-ordination with Mar Estate will be sought relating to the fencing of the area.

8: Funding

Acquisition Funding for stage one in 2023 has been well prepared. BCL will cover the costs for the acquisition of the Community Woodland with the help of a grant from the Scottish Land Fund. A Stage One application is on its way, and a Stage Two application will be made pending the outcome of the Aberdeenshire Council's decision relating to the Community Asset Transfer. Applications for grants from 5K upwards to 1 million can be made. Applications need to demonstrate the local community will achieve (a) more sustainable economic, environmental, and/or social development through the ownership of land, (b) will have a stronger role in, and control over their own development, and (c) will own well managed, financially sustainable land and buildings. We have been asked by SLF to put in a submission by 22/5/2023.

Maintenance The fields, wetland, and forest areas will be planted and maintained by BCL volunteers. BCL has a good track record in working with volunteers in all the projects described under 'capacity to deliver' in Section 9 below. The maintenance will be according to a woodland management plan which will be constituted with support of the Community Woodlands Association.

Development Preparing the woodland for its regeneration in phase two of the project in 2024 requires an estimated 10k in total. We will ask the Scottish Land Fund to support the development of a management plan, the public consultation and project management during the startup of the project as part of its stage two funding. We will fundraise ourselves to obtain the money for the upgrade of the existing fencing to exclude deer from the area and allow regeneration to start taking place. Informed by public consultation the main development requirements are anticipated to take place in phase three of the project in 2025. This involves improving the access to the site and the construction of paths. With help and advice from the Community Woodland Association, BCL will consider several potential sources of funding, two of these are mentioned here:

'Paths for All' (www.pathsforall.org.uk) provides funding for projects that create new volunteering opportunities for everyone, bring communities together to work and learn from each other, create better places for people to explore and enjoy, improve communities health and wellbeing by getting people more active outdoors and in contact with nature.

'Cairngorms Community led Vision Fund' (www.cairngormstrust.org.uk) is a funding source that has become available since August 2022. Its stated priorities are: rural poverty, community capacity, journey to net zero, climate emergency, and COVID recovery. Applications are invited from charities, community groups, and small to medium sized enterprises throughout Cairngorms National Park. Examples of projects that could attract capital funding are listed on the website and include: green public spaces, outdoor play & recreation.

The estimates for costs and funding requirements are summarised in the finance table below:

Finance Table

Clunie Wood

Projected Income/Expenditure

<u>Description</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026</u>	<u>2027</u>	Per Annum Costs	
						<u>2028-2030</u>	<u>2031-2035</u>
<u>Expenditure</u>							
Valuation	1,250						
Tree Survey	1,500						
Land purchase	unknown						
Legal Costs	3,000						
Project management/ contingency		3,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Access and paths			15,000	150	150	150	150
Training			350	350	350	350	350
Signage			500	250			250
Planting		500	500				
Fencing &Gates		5,000				250	250
Biotope management		500	500	200	200	200	200
Insurance		250	250	250	250	250	250
Auditing/Accounting Fees		400	400	400	400	400	400
Total	5,750	9,650	22,500	6,600	6,350	6,600	6,850
<u>Income</u>							
SLF income	5,750	5,000					
Development funding			21,000				
Other Grant Funding		1,000		5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Fundraising/Donations		4,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Total	5,750	10,000	23,000	7,000	7,000	7,000	7,000

9: Capacity to Deliver

9.1 Structure of the BCL Organisation

BCL was created in 2004. Membership is open to all residents of Braemar and any organisation within the area. It currently has 256 members out of a village population of around 500. The organisation is governed by a board of directors who are elected by the members. BCL communicates with the community via the Braemar Community Website, its yearly AGM, and public meetings relating to projects BCL is involved with.

The Directors bring a range of skills including estate management, accountancy, broadcasting & communications, project management, tourism, and arts education.

Members are encouraged to suggest projects and take a lead role in steering them. Specific to the application for community transfer of the Braemar Woodland to BCL, we have multiple expressions of interest to become involved in the development of the area.

9.2 BCL objectives

These are set out in the Memorandum of Association can be summarised as follows:

- To relieve poverty among the residents within Braemar
- To manage community land and associated assets for the benefit of the people of Braemar and the public in general following principles of sustainable development
- To advance environmental protection or improvement.
- To advance community development
- To provide, or assist in providing, recreational facilities, and/or organising recreational activities, which will be available to members of the public at large with the object of improving the conditions of life of the people of Braemar
- To advance education of the natural and built environment amongst the inhabitants of Braemar
- To promote the protection of the environment and conservation of flora and fauna
- In furtherance of the foregoing, to maintain close working relationship with Braemar Community Council and other organisations

9.3 Projects delivered by BCL

Braemar Castle was leased to BCL by Invercauld estate in 2007 for a period of 50 years. Since that time, it has been managed effectively by volunteers providing a regular income to the organisation. In the years prior to COVID it accommodated 13000 (2018) and 14000 (2019) visitors. Unfortunately, the castle had to close during the COVID pandemic, but in recent years £1.6 million money has been raised with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund and public fund raising under the title 'Raising The Standard' to completely redecorate the castle, which will open again midsummer 2023. The operational management will be handed over to an independent company, with BCL maintaining the ownership of the lease.

Auchtavan is a restored traditional highland clachan situated 6 miles north-east from Braemar village. The clachan was restored to its original form by BCL in 2008 with financial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic Scotland and the Cairngorms Leader Fund. The village can be visited, and there is a yearly open day. In 2022, with financial support from the Cairngorms National Park, the road to the village was upgraded to allow vehicles to take people to and from this unique heritage site.

Tomrichton Wood was acquired by BCL from Mar Estate in 2020 with financial support from the Scottish Land Fund. The wood is between the centre of the village and the Braemar Gathering games park. The wood has a significant number of mature trees, and there are walking paths with nature trail signage connecting the centre with the games park and the Cluniebank road on the south of the village.

A ***housing scheme for 15 affordable homes*** has been planned adjacent to Tomrichton Wood. Full planning permission was granted in June 2022. The initiative is a collaboration between BCL, Aberdeenshire Council, and Cairngorm National Park. Financial support for the planning application process was provided by the Charities Aid Foundation. Full costings of the build are expected during the Spring of 2023.

Braemar Community Hydro, commissioned in May 2016, is a 100kW hydro scheme which generates clean, low carbon electricity from the Corriemulzie Burn 3 miles west of Braemar village. The scheme was initiated by BCL but now runs independently as a Community Benefit Society. Surplus income from the enterprise flows to a benefit fund which is used for projects and worthy causes in the local community. At the time of commissioning in 2016, the benefit to the community over the lifetime of the project was estimated to amount to a total of £500,000.

The ***Braemar Community Paths Group*** oversees the maintenance, signage, and extension of the paths and bridges network around the village. Paths vary from a gentle stroll along the rivers Clunie and Dee, to more strenuous hikes up Greag Choinnich and Morrone. In collaboration with Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland, the Braemar Community paths Group has secured funding of £200,000 to create a new 1.9km route which will form the first stage of a wider strategy to extend the Deeside Way to link with Braemar. The new path will run through Creag Clunie and the Lion's face Site of Special Scientific Interest and the Ballochbuie Special protection Area.

9.4 Biographies of BCL Board members

Simon Blackett - Chair

After a career in the Armed Forces, Simon trained as a chartered surveyor and from 1993 was resident factor (Chief Executive) to Invercauld Estate, Braemar, retiring in 2016. A founding director of Braemar Community Limited, he has been involved in the management of Braemar Castle for over 20 years and was part of the group that took the Castle in to community control in 2007. Simon is also the key lead in the Housing and Woodland projects.

Doreen Wood - Vice-Chair

Doreen was formerly Editor of Factual Programmes (North) for BBC Radio Scotland. She became a Director of Braemar Community Limited ahead of the community taking over the operation of Braemar Castle in 2007. Her experience in programme making and storytelling supports the running of the castle and her communication strengths have helped to raise the profile locally, and further afield, of the Castle and other BCL projects.

David Chandler – Treasurer

Dave is a Chartered Accountant, formerly a senior partner in accountants Touche Ross & Co in Aberdeen before retiring to Braemar in 2010. As well as being responsible for the finances of BCL and its various projects, Dave is involved in the day-to-day financial operation of the Castle and is a Trustee of St Margaret's Trust SCIO. Appointed 2011.

Rhi Turner

Rhi has significant experience of managing small to medium business spanning hospitality, education, and music. She has lived in Braemar since 2013 and helped initiate the successful Braemar Mountain Festival. She is a strong advocate of the value of arts education and community volunteering. Board member of Woodend Barn in Banchory. Appointed 2014.

Andrew Martin

Andrew's first career was in hotel management, rising to become Swallow Hotels youngest ever Hotel Manager. He then joined the world academia, working for a while in the School of Business at Washburn University, Kansas.

When he returned to the UK he held the post of Director of the Scottish Centre of Tourism at Robert Gordon University. During this time, he led the team on three major multi-million-pound European Social Fund funded projects, advised Scottish Government on Tourism related topics, and published research.

Andrew has been a Trustee for the Grampian Transport Museum (Alford), been on the Board of management of the Burn (an educational retreat in Angus), and sat on the Board of Portsoy Community Enterprise.

He was the inaugural Chair of Moray Tourism Development and was Vice Chair, and latterly Chair of the Aberdeen City and Shire Hotel Association.

Currently, Andrew is providing consultancy to a national hotel management company and spending 3 days a week at Scotland's Rural College at their Craibstone campus.

Appointed 2021

Christine Watts

Christine moved to Braemar in 2018. She is currently working in the Oil and Gas industry where she has developed expertise in project and change management. On behalf of BCL, Christine is heavily involved in the construction and restoration of footpaths and bridges to extend and improve pedestrian access routes. Appointed 2021.

Roelf Dijkhuizen

After obtaining his medical degree in the Netherlands in 1987, Roelf moved to London where he worked as a junior doctor for four years. He then moved to Aberdeen where he practised as a Consultant in Stroke Medicine and Acute General Medicine. He was the Medical Director for NHS Grampian for twelve years until his retirement to Braemar in 2014. Roelf brings experience in institutional governance, risk management and public involvement. Appointed 2022.

Roelf Dijkhuizen

Braemar 12/4/2023