

Clan vows to fight on after losing fresh bid for centre

By Tina Kemp

A LOCH Lomondside clan has suffered its second crushing defeat in a battle to secure a heritage centre.

For the second time in four years Clan Macfarlane members have seen a longed-for lochside base slip through their hands.

The clan was hopeful that a resurrected bid to buy the Ben Lomond restaurant in Tarbet — which it lost to another buyer in April 2004 — would be successful.

But just last week members discovered they had again been beaten with the listed building, which was sold instead to a Rutherglen-based property developer, who wishes to convert the property into five flats.

Devastated vice president Brian Macfarlane told the Lennox Herald: "We offered £10,000 over the asking price and thought we would get it. We weren't even told our bid hadn't been successful, we only found out when we called to check progress of the sale.

"That's two occasions we have tried to get it and failed. We just wanted to get the place secured and to get our heritage centre.

"When we contacted the selling agents they said they'd prefer to see something where people's livelihoods would be protected. We know

the seller has to take the best offer but we were trying to keep and increase employment in the area, as well as increase awareness of our heritage locally, in Scotland and internationally. This would have brought in a lot of visitors."

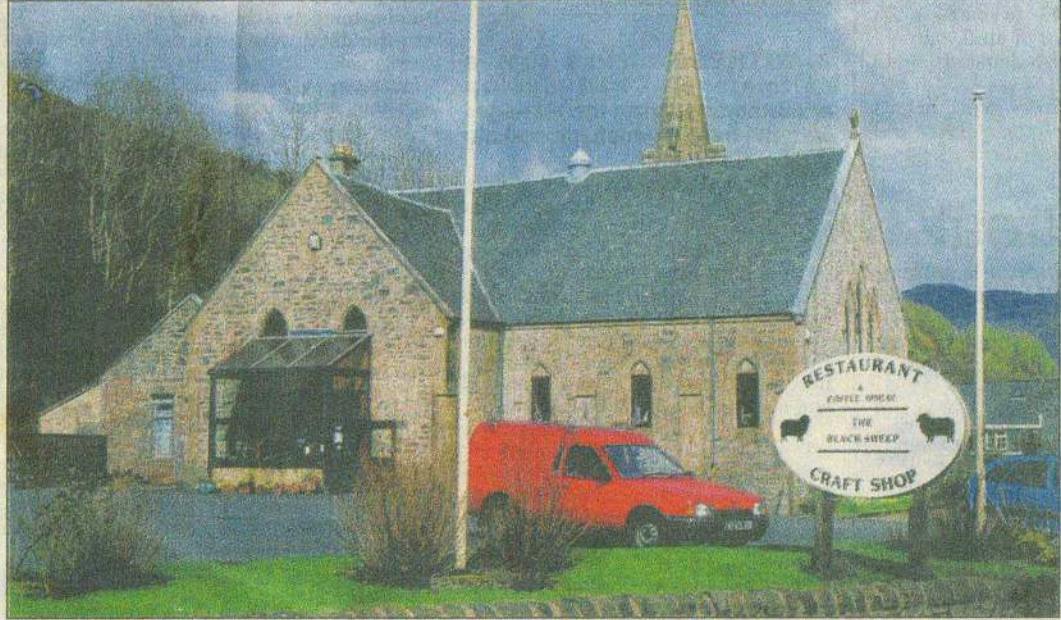
Clan members, including Brian, are now lodging objections to the proposals for the former 19th century church, which has been operating as a restaurant and craft shop for a number of years.

They believe the historic building should be retained as a local amenity and not turned into houses.

And they are concerned about the future of the attached cemetery, which has several clan grave sites bearing the escutcheon from their chiefly coat of arms.

Clan Macfarlane, which has historic links with Arrochar, first expressed interest in the buying the former United Free Church in 2001 when it was the Black Sheep restaurant and craft centre. It launched a major fundraising drive among its 1200 members worldwide to fund the creation of a heritage, museum and educational centre, and pulled in £100,000. But three years later the property, built in 1867, was sold to another restaurateur, who renamed it the Ben Lomond.

The clan was quick to respond when it heard the building was up



DEFEATED: Clan Macfarlane has failed a second time to secure its desired heritage centre.

for sale again last year. Brian said: "We started negotiations in November last year and had arranged a bank loan. We also had well over £100,000 in our heritage fund for this purpose.

"The property was valued at £375,000 and the original asking

price was £475,000. Then the price came down to £425,000. We put in bid of £435,000, which is a lot of money for a society like ours, but we just wanted our heritage centre. We'll certainly be lodging objections to the plans for the building."

The clan, which has held its annual gathering in Arrochar, hoped not only to fill the building with Macfarlane-related material but to use it as a museum of the local area, with free access for local schoolchildren to encourage them to learn more about their past.