

Highland Council Asset Transfer Request Approach Asset Transfer Request Form

This is an asset transfer request made under Part 5 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

Section 1: Information about the community transfer body (CTB) making the request

1.1 Name of the CTB making the asset transfer request

Assynt Development Trust Limited

1.2 CTB address. This should be the registered address, if you have one.

The Mission,
Culag Park,
Lochinver,
Sutherland,
IV27 4LE

1.3 Contact details. Please provide the name and contact address to which correspondence in relation to this asset transfer request should be sent.

Contact name: Adam Pellant, Development Officer

The Mission,
Culag Park,
Lochinver,
Sutherland,
IV27 4LE

Email: adam.assyntdevelopmenttrust@gmail.com

Telephone: 01571 844275

☒ We agree that correspondence in relation to this asset transfer request may be sent by email to the email address given above. *(Please tick to indicate agreement)*

You can ask the relevant authority to stop sending correspondence by email, or change the email address, by telling them at any time, as long as 5 working days' notice is given.

- 1.4 Please mark an "X" in the relevant box to confirm the type of CTB and its official number, if it has one.

X	Company, and its company number is	SC379557
X	Charity registered with OSCR	SC015208

Please attach a copy of the CTB's constitution, articles of association or registered rules.

- 1.5 Has the organisation been individually designated as a community transfer body by the Scottish Ministers?

No ☒

Yes ☐

Please give the title and date of the designation order:

--

- 1.6 Does the organisation fall within a class of bodies which has been designated as community transfer bodies by the Scottish Ministers?

No ☐

Yes ☒

If yes what class of bodies does it fall within?

Community Right to Buy Body.

Section 2: Information about the asset requested

- 2.1 Please identify the asset - land or building(s) - which this asset transfer request relates.

You should provide a street address or grid reference and any name by which the land or building is known. If you have identified the land on the relevant authority's register of land, please enter the details listed there.

It may be helpful to provide one or more maps or drawings to show the boundaries of the land requested. If you are requesting part of a piece of land, you must attach a

map and full description of the boundaries of the area to which your request relates. If you are requesting part of a building, please make clear what area you require. a drawing may be helpful.

Information on Highland Council register of land:

Business Unit Name: Site of Mission Centre
Business Unit Ref: HC 06382
Category: Other and Buildings
Function: Visitor Centre
Easting: 209284
Northing: 9221132
Address: Site of Mission Centre, Lochinver, LAIRG, IV27 4LE

Registers of Scotland Title No STH2846 for 477m2 of Land under and around The Mission Building, Culag Park, Lochinver

2.2 Please provide the UPRN (Unique Property Reference Number), if known.

This should be given in the relevant authority's register of land

UPRN: 130118022

Section 3: Type of request, payment and conditions

3.1 Please tick what type of request is being made:

☒

for ownership (under section 79(2)(a)) - go to section 3A

for lease (under section 79(2)(b)(i)) – go to section 3B

for other rights (section 79(2)(b)(ii)) - go to section 3C

3A – Request for ownership

What price are you prepared to pay for the asset requested? :

Proposed price: £1 Plus the legal costs for Assynt Development Trust Limited but not Highland Council

Please attach a note setting out any other terms and conditions you wish to apply to the request.

3B – Request for lease

What is the length of lease you are requesting?

Not applicable

How much rent are you prepared to pay? Please make clear whether this is per year or per month.

Not applicable

Please attach a note setting out any other terms and conditions you wish to be included in the lease, or to apply to the request in any other way.

3C – Request for other rights

What are the rights you are requesting?

None

Do you propose to make any payment for these rights?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If yes, how much are you prepared to pay? Please make clear what period this would cover, for example per week, per month, per day?

Not applicable

Please attach a note setting out any other terms and conditions you wish to apply to the request.

Section 4: Community Proposal

- 4.1 Please set out the reasons for making the request and how the land or building will be used.

This should explain the objectives of your project, why there is a need for it, any development or changes you plan to make to the land or building, and any activities that will take place there.

Proposal

The Trust wishes to purchase the freehold title to the land under and around the Mission building through Community Asset Transfer. The boundaries of the land are outlined on Registers of Scotland title No STH2846 appended to this application.

The Trust recently instructed Graham & Sibbald surveyors to value the Mission building; their valuation report is appended. With the present lease in place Graham & Sibbald have given the market valuation of the Mission building at £7,500 and the Trust are offering to buy the building from Highland Council for the discounted price of £1. The Trust does not believe that there is a risk to Highland Council in agreeing to the transfer as there is no opportunity cost in terms of alternative uses of the building or loss of income to the Council.

Current use of The Mission Building

The Mission is currently used for multiple purposes and hosts a range of tenants - An Cala Café & Bunkhouse, together with office space for the Assynt High Life Highland Ranger, Connect Assynt (community transport body) and Assynt Development Trust's development officers (funded by the Scottish Government's Investing in Communities Fund), all of which provide key local services.

Reasons for the proposal

Increasing confidence to invest in development

The Trust intends to continue to operate the Mission building and the site as a focus for economic activity in our community and in furtherance of local socio-economic need. Our business plan requires us to maximise the use of the space within the building, both for rental income, which is then used by the Trust for its charitable objects, and for direct community benefits.

Owning the freehold of the land will give the Trust security over the building and will allow the Trust to invest in long term business plans and possible future development without the risk and uncertainties of being leaseholders.

Secured Borrowing

Owning the freehold will enable borrowing to be secured against the asset, with any capital raised being used to deliver additional projects. This would increase the Trust's ability to deliver future projects for community investment, for instance as match funding when applying for grant funding. Owning the freehold could therefore enable some key projects to be delivered by the Trust, such as Affordable Housing Provision, where capital investment costs could be repaid through future tenancies.

Simplifying grant-funded projects

A recent example of our direct experience of difficulties and costs related to obtaining grants due to a Highland Council lease being in place is as follows:

In the working up of the Assynt Motorhome Waste Disposal Facilities project at Assynt Leisure Centre, we have encountered significant additional work and expect to incur greatly increased legal costs due to the site for the project being leased by Assynt Leisure from Highland Council, rather than being under direct ownership by Assynt Leisure. A key funder has stated requirements for us to negotiate with Highland Council to increase the term of that lease, due to the standard Grant Obligation Period of 20 years being beyond the date of the current lease expiry, and to negotiate to amend the allowed uses of the site as stated in the lease.

Issues such as these could potentially prevent or cause significant delays to future projects at the Mission, alongside the additional costs of staff time, negotiations with the landlord (Highland Council) and legal costs for lease amendment. All these issues and costs would be absent from future grant-funded projects if the Trust were to own the freehold of the site.

Flexible use of the Mission

Owning the Freehold would free the Trust from current restrictions in the lease, in particular those relating to use of the building and land. They include restrictions on the permitted use of the building and on subletting. While these restrictions allow for change of use to be permitted by the landlord through specific written permission, the process of negotiating such permissions incurs costs including staff time and legal fees. Furthermore there is an additional risk for the Trust that permission for change of use or tenancies may be refused by the landlord. The Trust is required to abide by its own constitution and charity law, so there will still be a safeguard in place to ensure the assets are used for community benefit. We feel this safeguard is a much more appropriate mechanism than the current additional legal requirement for permissions being granted by Highland Council as landlord.

Benefits of the proposal

- 4.2 Please set out the benefits to the community that you consider will arise if the request is agreed to. This should include:- economic, regeneration, health, social wellbeing, environmental benefits; or how this will tackle inequalities.

This section should explain how the project will benefit your community, and others. Please refer to the guidance on how the relevant authority will consider the benefits of a request.

Economic development and regeneration

Profits and community benefit

The Trust's trading subsidiary receives the rent for the space within the Mission building and its profits represent a significant proportion of the charitable Trust's annual income which is then used to fulfil the Trust's charitable objects. Developing the building could further increase the Trust's income. The Trust's application to buy the freehold will also improve the prospects of obtaining funding to develop the Mission building and therefore maintain our community work.

Borrowing

Ownership of the freehold is sought as it could improve the Trust's prospects in developing future community projects and associated grant applications. A reducing period of lease remaining will result in increasingly unfavourable terms for borrowing. Some of the projects that we are developing may require that we invest capital and the most cost effective way of achieving this is with secured borrowing. By owning the freehold the Trust is free to make the best business decision for the benefit of our community.

Development, income and benefit

Any additional use of the Mission building could result in an increase in rental income for the Trust to invest in fulfilling its charitable objects but will also likely involve affordable rental of new space to local businesses, individuals or even charities. The result will be an increase in services provided for local people.

Social well-being: tenants, employment and service provision

Ownership of the freehold will also provide a more secure future for our tenants, and thus for a significant number of local jobs. There are seven year-round jobs plus around ten seasonal jobs currently associated with the Mission building. Many of these jobs are held by younger members of our community which is especially important given our ageing demographics. The type of jobs and related services secured are of benefit – for example a) Connect Assynt's provision of social activities and access benefits for a significant number of isolated residents including older residents b) the highly valued local educational role of High Life Highland Ranger

service, and c) the mid-price all year locally important café facility of An Cala. All these things will be given greater long term security by local ownership of the site.

Public health

Outdoor sporting activities: The Trust owns and manages Culag Park which is immediately adjacent to The Mission building. Culag Park and the Mission building are a focus for outdoor community activities, sport and exercise. Culag Park is Assynt's only sporting field and area of flat easily accessible public park land in the village. The park is used by Lochinver Primary School as part of their sports curriculum; Lochinver Football Club and is the home for Assynt Highland Games. The Trust has invested in deer fencing to reduce the risk to the public from Lyme disease from the deer which habitually grazed the Park. Owning the freehold of the Mission will enable the Trust to continue to raise funds to manage and develop the sports field and park for the benefit of the community and to invest in developing land to the east of the Mission for further sporting, leisure and recreational activities.

Restrictions on use of the land

4.3 If there are any restrictions on the use or development of the land, please explain how your project will comply with these.

Restrictions might include, amongst others, environmental designations such as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSI), heritage designations such as listed building status, controls on contaminated land or planning restrictions.

No restrictions

Negative consequences

4.4 What negative consequences (if any) may occur if your request is agreed to? How would you propose to minimise these?

You should consider any potential negative consequences for the local economy, environment, or any group of people, and explain how you could reduce these.

None

Capacity to deliver

4.5 Please show how your organisation will be able to manage the project and achieve your objectives.

This could include the skills and experience of members of the organisation, any track record of previous projects, whether you intend to use professional advisers, etc.

New constitution

Today with an amended constitution, which is eligible to be considered for Community Asset Transfer ACA has become Assynt Development Trust (ADT). The Trust has a long history of managing community assets including the planning, fundraising and management of the redevelopment of the Lochinver Mission building in 2010-11

Managing the Mission building

The past five years have seen the management team successfully overcome the legacy of some difficulties that were experienced in the early years of the running of the refurbished Mission project.

The Lochinver Mission is now being managed as a successful hub. An Cala Café restaurant and bunkhouse (run by a local couple who sublet those parts of the building from the Trust's trading subsidiary) and as affordable office space, including for Connect Assynt a local community transport charity, and for the Assynt High Life Highland Assynt Ranger Service

The Trust is continuing to invest in on-going capital works, for example in upgrading the heating system, enhancing fire prevention and safety to current standards together with expansion of the café into under-used space. This also involved significant capital investment by the tenant altering an area where the Trust previously stored tourist information materials.

The Trust's general strategy has been for subletting space to local businesses and groups, which removes most of the business risks and management time from the Trust and its trading subsidiary. This reduces dependence upon volunteer board directors while also promoting local enterprise.

In recent years other services and facilities have been provided in the building, including the Assynt Community Digital Archive of local history and a volunteer-staffed tourism information hub in 2018/19 (since the closure of Lochinver's Visit Scotland Tourist Information Centre). The Trust have now transferred these two services and facilities to Assynt Crofter's Trust offices and Assynt Leisure Centre, respectively, for the benefit of all organisations including better use of space and generating increased footfall for other local groups. In this way, flexible space in the Mission building has allowed the facilities to grow and develop enabling them to flourish in a larger space elsewhere with wider benefits.

Past success in securing grant aid

1. *The Scottish Government funded Strengthening Communities Programme which includes employing and managing staff (now the Investing in Communities Fund). Commenced April 2017 and will run through with ICF to March 2021.*

2. *Making Places Design Charrette (along with HIE and HC). Gaining funding from SG, HIE and HC, publishing an invitation to tender. Subsequently appointing*

and supporting John Gilbert Architects to manage the charrette, with the report published in October 2019.

3. Transport Scotland's e.Bike project (along with Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape and Assynt Leisure). Acquiring six community e.Bikes and working with Assynt Leisure establishing systems for hire.

4. Assynt Motorhome waste project (along with Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, LEADER, HIE, HC and Assynt Leisure). Taking a project from conception through to gaining planning consent, engineering design, Scottish Water consent to issuing the invitation to tender through Public Contracts Scotland. Delivery is expected later in 2020/21.

5. Assynt Housing Needs Survey (along with Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust and Highland Council). Gaining agreement with THC to fund the survey and then commissioning Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust to manage the survey. Report published May 2019.

Board of Directors and Staff

The Trust has an active and well-informed board of directors with much experience of local issues and projects together with strong links with other community organisations in the area. The Trust secured Scottish Government funding through the Strengthening Communities Fund (now the Investing in Communities Fund) to employ a Development Officer, job-shared by two locally based individuals, Ewen McLachlan and Adam Pellant, who have experience and skills including local tourism and community development. Ewen was employed by Visit Scotland while they funded a Lochinver based post. As a previous director of the Trust he also has good knowledge of local development and regeneration issues and proposals. Adam previously worked for many years for another local community organisation, Assynt Foundation, organising and fundraising for projects including the major redevelopment of Glencanisp Lodge (2009-10) as a community income-generating asset.

The Trust is a member of the Development Trusts Association Scotland, and has worked closely with other partnership organisations including locally, the Assynt Foundation and the Scottish Wildlife Trust managed Coigach Assynt Living Landscapes Partnership (CALLP). CALLP fund raised from Heritage Lottery Fund (and others) for a range of local development projects which are now being delivered successfully. Our directors include CALLP's Scheme Manager, Boyd Alexander, and Dr. Nigel Goldie, who is a main representative of two groups leading on CALLP projects, Assynt Foundation and Historic Assynt. The Trust's Treasurer Edwin de Jong has extensive experience of working in finance and IT in the Netherlands and with his wife now runs a successful, award winning, local guest house. Sarah-Ann MacLeod runs the family owned caravan and camp site in Achmelvich while Marie-Anne Hutchison is a local primary school teacher, director of Assynt Leisure and past chair of Assynt Community Council. The Trust's chair Dr Willie Jack has over thirty years experience of running his own businesses together with employing and

managing staff as well as being past chair of school governors and a local Wildlife Trust.

Within a small community in such a remote and rural area a key consideration is the ability to retain and recruit suitably skilled directors. For example after the planned retirement of a long term director the Trust was able to recruit a new Treasurer. We see succession planning as integral to our future to deliver on the many projects that are being proposed and developed.

Where there are gaps in specialist skills or knowledge, we have experience of seeking professional advice and assistance, including through organisations such as DTAS. The Trust can demonstrate that it is planning for the future by engaging recently with the Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS) in considering our ability and capacity to deliver through our current business plan and also assessed our business model, organisational development, financial return and social return over the next three years from 2019 to 2022.

Given this wealth of experience, knowledge and skills in local issues and community development projects, and our experience in obtaining outside advice and assistance where appropriate, the Trust is confident that we can manage the on-going use, management and potential variety of future projects and uses associated with owning the freehold of the Mission building.

Other projects currently being developed by the Trust include affordable housing with a variety of tenures alongside provision of business and community enterprise space for locally based people and businesses. These will directly improve the viability of the area which suffers from a fragile and declining population - affordable housing is intended to help address the local trends of the loss of young and working age people from the community, and the resultant loss of important local services and facilities.

Summary

The Trust wishes to acquire the freehold title to the Mission land for the discounted price of £1. To our knowledge The Highland Council have no alternative proposals for use of the site and no income will be lost to Highland Council as a result of transfer. The Trust asks that Highland Council sells it the freehold title to the land on which the Mission is built, so that the Trust shall have benefit for the reasons detailed earlier in this application

Section 5: Level and nature of support

5.1 Please provide details of the level and nature of support for the request, from your community and, if relevant, from others.

This could include information on the proportion of your community who are involved with the request, how you have engaged with your community beyond the members of your organisation and what their response has been. You should also show how you have engaged with any other communities that may be affected by your proposals.

Parish of Assynt and Trust membership

As outlined in our Articles of Association, the Parish of Assynt constitutes the Trust boundaries. At the 2011 census the parish population was 1,021 although Highland Council mid census data from 2016 indicates a 5% fall in the population in Assynt's largest settlement, Lochinver. The Trust currently has 113 ordinary members.

For an area of such small population, the Parish of Assynt includes very many community bodies such as the three major land-owning organisations: Assynt Foundation, Assynt Crofters Trust and Culag Community Woodland Trust. Many of Assynt Development Trusts members are also members of these and other organisations; there is a great deal of overlap as members are often actively involved in multiple different local community organisations.

Community benefit

The community benefit that is currently provided by the Trust is attested to by the support for the acquisition of the Mission land by these local groups and their membership:

Assynt Crofters Trust – Community owners of the iconic 21,000 acre North Assynt crofting estate

Assynt Leisure Centre – Community owned leisure centre with over 400 Assynt members and 300 visitors with in excess of 14,000 visits pa

Assynt Foundation – Community owners of the 44,000 acre estate which includes Suilven and Canisp with 231 members

Culag Community Woodland Trust – Community owners of 3,000 acre Little Assynt Estate with over 100 members

Connect Assynt – Assynt's community transport organisation with 69 members

Lochinver Football Club – Formed in 1906 our local Football Club has 25 members

Wider engagement

The Trust also engages actively with groups representing other communities in the north west highlands, from Garve and Gairloch to the south, through to Durness to the north and Ardgay to the east, and especially with Coigach / Ullapool as our nearest neighbouring communities. This includes regular meetings with representatives of other development trusts, tourism groups and community councils launching online surveys representing multiple areas, for example the recent e-car scheme survey, and involvement in Coigach-Assynt Living Landscapes Partnership. However, in relation to this CAT application, we see no potential for indirect negative impacts upon other communities due to a purchase of the Mission site, so have not consulted with neighbouring communities on this matter.

Section 6: Funding

- 6.1 Please outline how you propose to fund the price or rent you are prepared to pay for the asset, and your proposed use of the asset.

You should show your calculations of the costs associated with the transfer of the land or building and your future use of it, including any redevelopment, ongoing maintenance and the costs of your activities. All proposed income and investment should be identified, including volunteering and donations. If you intend to apply for grants or loans you should demonstrate that your proposals are eligible for the relevant scheme, according to the guidance available for applicants.

Scottish Land Fund

On 31st August 2019 the Trust made a stage 1 application to the Scottish Land Fund in respect of The Mission land acquisition. Our application was accepted by the Land Fund on 8th October 2019. A stage 1 SLF application is a funding proposal for a feasibility study and business plan and as the Mission building is already being used by the Trust in furtherance of its business plan and objectives, the SLF accepted our stage 1 application. The DTAS led review of our business plan addresses possible developments from 2019 to 2022.

Valuation

Graham & Sibbald Surveyors have valued the Mission land at £7,500. The Trust has received an estimate for the cost of the legal work involved and it is likely that the total cost will exceed £10,000. As this is the minimum threshold for consideration by the Scottish Land Fund, the Trust intends making a stage 2 application to SLF for a grant to fund up to 95% of the total purchase costs. If the total cost is less than £10,000 then the Trust would seek to invest its own funds and possibly seek funding from external sources.

Signature

Two office-bearers (board members, charity trustees or committee members) of the community transfer body must sign the form. They must provide their full names and home addresses for the purposes of prevention and detection of fraud.

This form and supporting documents will be made available online for any interested person to read and comment on. Personal information will be redacted before the form is made available.

We, the undersigned on behalf of the community transfer body as noted at section 1, make an asset transfer request as specified in this form.

We declare that the information provided in this form and any accompanying documents is accurate to the best of our knowledge.

Name Willie Jack

Address

Date 20/02/2020

Position Chair

Signature

Name Nigel Goldie

Address

Date 20/02/2020

Position Director

Signature

Checklist of accompanying documents

To check that nothing is missed, please list any documents which you are submitting to accompany this form.

Section 1 – you **must** attach your organisation's constitution, articles of association or registered rules

Assynt Development Trust Limited Articles of Association

Section 2 – any maps, drawings or description of the land requested

Registered Title and Map from Registers of Scotland Title No. STH2846

Section 3 – note of any terms and conditions that are to apply to the request

Documents attached:

Section 4 – about your proposals, their benefits, any restrictions on the asset or potential negative consequences, and your organisation's capacity to deliver.

Documents attached:

Section 5 – evidence of community support

Letters of support from local bodies: *Assynt Crofters Trust, Assynt Leisure Centre, Assynt Foundation, Connect Assynt, Culag Community Woodland Trust, Lochinver FC*

Section 6 – funding

Scottish Land Fund stage 1 application acceptance 8th October 2019

Section 7 – other

Accounts year ended 30th June 2019

Graham & Sibbald Mission Rental Valuation dated 27th February 2019

Graham & Sibbald Mission Valuation dated 28th October 2019

Background information to the Community Asset Transfer application to acquire the land under and around The Mission building in Lochinver