

The Highland Council

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| Agenda Item | 6ii |
| Report No | LA/5/25 |

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| Committee: | Lochaber Area Committee |
| Date: | 27 January 2025 |
| Report Title: | Community Asset Transfer Request – Lease of Unit 9a, Blar Mhor Industrial Estate, Fort William |
| Report By: | Chief Officer - Housing and Communities |

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| 1. | Purpose/Executive Summary |
| 1.1 | The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act introduces a right for community bodies to request to own, lease or use public sector assets through a process known as Community Asset Transfer. As part of this request a discount on market value can be requested. Once a formal request is submitted, Local Authorities have 6 months after validating the request to assess the application against a range of potential community benefits and determine whether to grant the request. |
| 1.2 | Where Council assets are between the value of £10,000 up to £100,000, decision on the transfer of any asset rests with the Area Committee. This report asks Members to consider and agree the Community Asset Transfer request received from Fort William Men's Shed Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) for lease of Unit 9a, Blar Mhor Industrial Estate, Fort William, PH33 7PT for £2,750 per annum over 5 years. |
| 2. | Recommendations |
| 2.1 | Members are asked to agree the following Community Asset Transfer request: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Lease of Unit 9a, Blar Mhor Industrial Estate, Fort William, PH33 7PT for £2,750 per annum over 5 years to Fort William Men's Shed SCIO, in line with the terms outlined at section 8 and on the basis no objections are received during the statutory consultation period which closes on 31 January 2025. |

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| 3. | Implications |
| 3.1 | <p>Resource: The industrial unit subject to this Community Asset Transfer is currently owned by Highland Council and valued at £80,000. Fort William Men's Shed SCIO are requesting a discount on the current lease, which is £5,500.</p> <p>The officer-led Asset Management Board including representatives from Legal, Finance, Property and Communities and Place has considered and scrutinised the request and supporting evidence. The request is recommended to proceed due to the wider community benefits from the activities of the Fort William Men's Shed SCIO.</p> |
| 3.2 | <p>Legal: Community Asset Transfer is a legislative process set out in the Community Empowerment Act. Public bodies have the right to refuse a Community Asset Transfer application on the grounds that greater community benefit will arise from current or alternative use. However, community bodies have the right of review, first to the public body and then by appeal to Scottish Ministers.</p> |
| 3.3 | <p>Risk: Although any Community Asset Transfer assessment considers sustainability, there are risks that any group could fail in the future or choose to dispose of the transferred asset. The Community Empowerment Act provides a clause which stipulates how dissolution must be dealt with to ensure any transferred asset remains in community hands, for the benefit of the community, in the event of an organisation ceasing to exist.</p> |
| 3.4 | <p>Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people): There are not considered to be any implications associated with this transfer.</p> |
| 3.5 | <p>Gaelic: There are not considered to be any implications associated with this transfer.</p> |
| 4. | Integrated Impact Assessment Screening - Summary |
| 4.1 | <p>In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.</p> |
| 4.2 | <p>Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.</p> |
| 4.3 | <p>An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken and the conclusions have been submitted to the relevant Manager for review and approval.</p> |

| | Members are asked to consider the Integrated Impact Assessment Screening summary in Appendix 1 to support the decision-making process. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|------------------------|---|----------|----------|----------------|----------|--------------|-----------|----------------------------------|----------|---------------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| 4.4 | <p>The Screening process has concluded that there are no direct negative impacts identified by the Community Asset Transfer request and it has been acknowledged that this asset transfer may have a positive impact through enhanced amenity for the community in Fort William and may have a positive impact in relation to equalities, poverty and children's rights and wellbeing.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Impact Assessment Area</th><th>Conclusion of Screening/Full Assessment</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Equality</td><td>Positive</td></tr> <tr> <td>Socio-economic</td><td>Positive</td></tr> <tr> <td>Human Rights</td><td>No impact</td></tr> <tr> <td>Children's Rights and Well-being</td><td>Positive</td></tr> <tr> <td>Island and Mainland Rural</td><td>No impact</td></tr> <tr> <td>Climate Change</td><td>No impact</td></tr> <tr> <td>Data Rights</td><td>No impact</td></tr> </tbody> </table> | Impact Assessment Area | Conclusion of Screening/Full Assessment | Equality | Positive | Socio-economic | Positive | Human Rights | No impact | Children's Rights and Well-being | Positive | Island and Mainland Rural | No impact | Climate Change | No impact | Data Rights | No impact |
| Impact Assessment Area | Conclusion of Screening/Full Assessment | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Equality | Positive | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Socio-economic | Positive | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Human Rights | No impact | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Children's Rights and Well-being | Positive | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Island and Mainland Rural | No impact | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Climate Change | No impact | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Data Rights | No impact | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. | Lease of Industrial Unit | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5.1 | Fort William Men's Shed Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) have leased Unit 9a, Blar Mhor Industrial Estate, Fort William, PH33 7PT (see map included in Appendix 2) from The Highland Council for the last ten years. The group are no longer able to sustain rent payments at the current level and are seeking a reduction in their current rent over 5 further years, 50% reduction equates to £2,750 per annum. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5.2 | The proposed benefits which this group offers includes providing year-round support to members of the community which results in positive outcomes for participants in relation to physical, mental and social health and wellbeing. Increasing community capacity in acquiring publicly owned assets, with improved outcomes for communities, is a priority for both Scottish Government and The Highland Council. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. | Summary of CAT Assessment | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6.1 | The full CAT assessment can be found at Appendix 2 . This is a strong application from a well-established local community group which has proportionate experience, financial stability, and skills to deliver on commitments for this project for the benefit of the local and wider community through continuation of operating the Fort William Men's Shed. The organisation has demonstrated a strong commitment to maintaining this asset for the benefit of the community. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | Recommendation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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| 7.1 | <p>Lease of Unit 9a, Blar Mhor Industrial Estate, Fort William, PH33 7PT for £2,750 per annum over 5 years to Fort William Men's Shed SCIO. Terms of the transfer would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community access to use of the facility must be maintained. • Any transfer will be subject to existing burdens/conditions in the Council's title to the property (e.g., third party access rights, etc.). • The Council will only transfer/lease property for which it has title to do so. <p>Any other terms to be agreed by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place, in consultation with the Chair of Communities and Place Committee.</p> <p>Designation: Chief Officer - Housing and Communities Date: 07 January 2025</p> <p>Author: Lynn Bauermeister, Community Development Manager</p> <p>Appendix 1: Summary Integrated Impact Assessment Screening Appendix 2: Community Asset Transfer Framework</p> |
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Appendix 1

Integrated Impact Assessment Screening Summary

The screening highlighted overall positive impacts noting these impacts potentially extend across all groups.

The screening specifically notes the potential positive impact on prospects, opportunities and places noting all groups may be positively impacted by the enhanced opportunities for physical, mental and social health and wellbeing in the Greater Fort William as the organisation aims to improve outcomes for all.

The Fort William Men's Shed is a shared space where men, from all parts of the community, attend voluntarily to work on practical projects (examples include building picnic benches and maintaining planters in the town centre), find camaraderie, conversation and friendship. The Fort William Men's Shed has been running for circa ten years and has supported many men in the Lochaber area through volunteering activities and providing a pathway to engaging community activity as part of retirement planning as well as providing low/no cost services to people in need.

Fort William Men's Shed is helping to alleviate pressure on acute health care services by providing upstream preventative interventions which help people to keep well and minimise the need for interventions from health or social care professionals.

The Men's Shed provides an open and inclusive environment for men to socialise, to share skills and to participate in community life. This can be particularly important for those at risk of social exclusion due to age, retirement from the workforce or unemployment.

APPENDIX 2

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Community Asset Transfer Approach

Assessment Framework

Purpose

The purpose of the assessment is to ensure that the decision making process will produce the best decision for the community, not necessarily Highland Council nor the requesting Community Asset Transfer Body.

Evidence

Primarily the assessment will be based on the information received within the application form and any business plan however additional representations from external parties will also be included along with internal service knowledge.

Cognisance will be taken regarding the nature of the request e.g. whether it is for lease, use or ownership. The level of assurance required will differ depending upon the nature of the request with higher level of compliance/support required for organisations wishing transfer of an asset as opposed to a leasing arrangement.

Structure of Assessment

The assessment will be structured under 5 key headings.

- Benefit to the community (outcomes)
- Capacity to deliver
- Level of community support
- Sustainability
- Resourcing

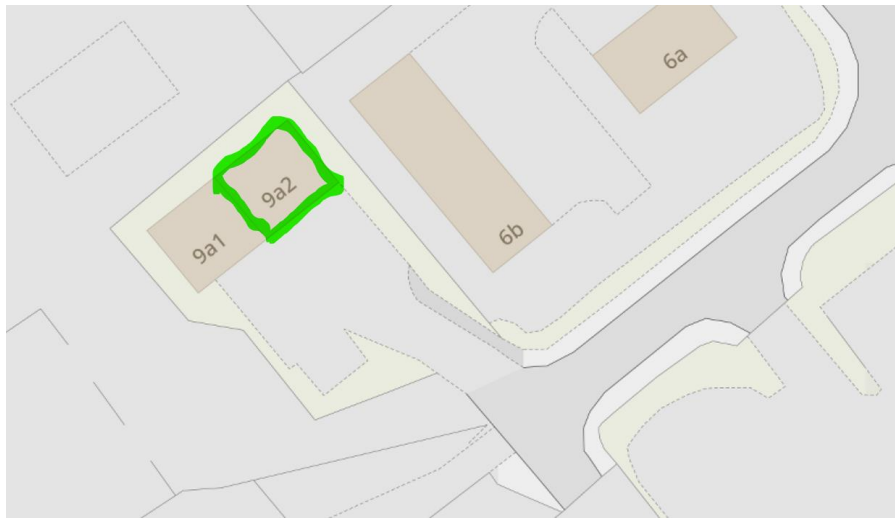
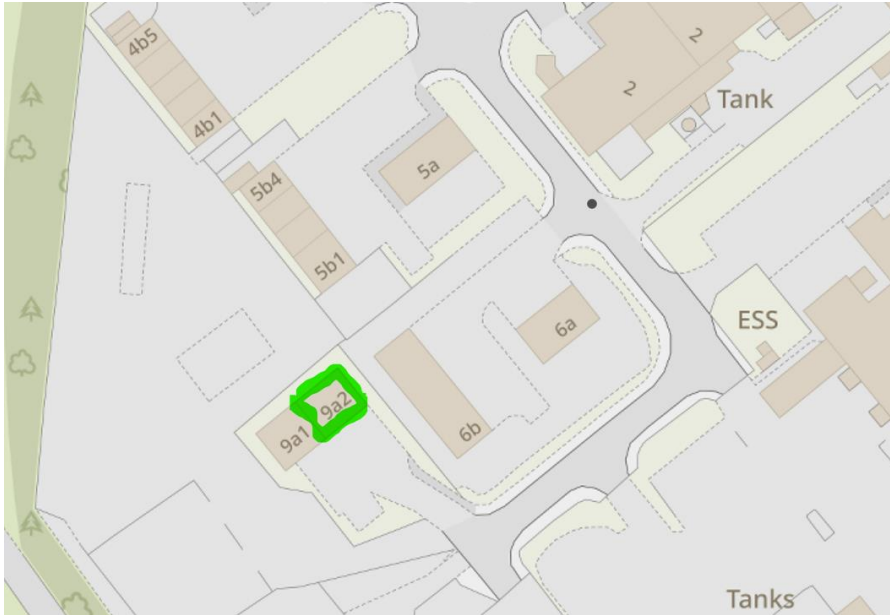
Consideration will also be given to the terms and conditions requested by the Community Asset Transfer Body and what equivalent terms may be appropriate.

Each of the 5 assessment areas will be assessed separately, considering evidence of best value and be given an overall rating from very strong to poor. A summary of the evidence required to achieve each rating is outlined below:

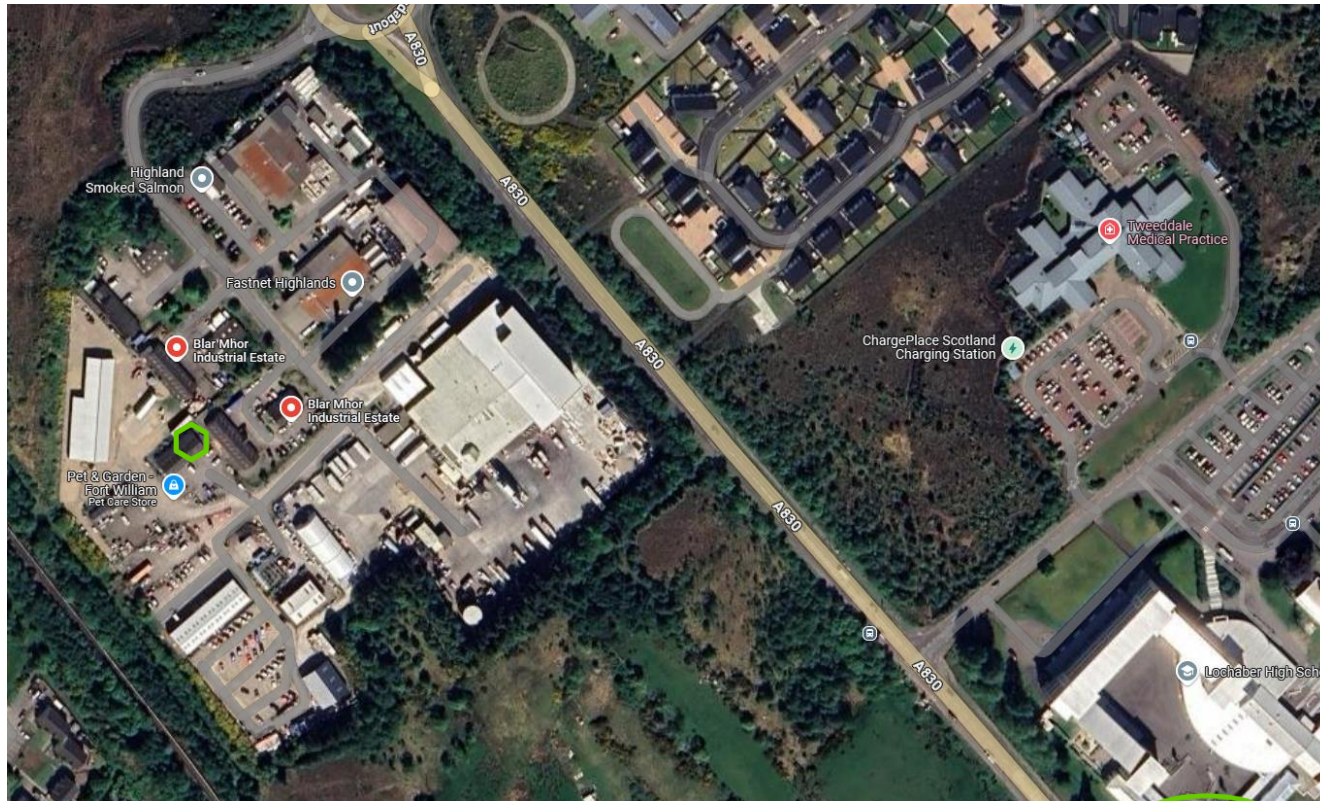
| Evidence | Overview |
|-------------|---|
| Very strong | Governance and financial arrangements are strong and sustainable. Best value characteristics are evidenced and contained throughout the approach. Related projected benefits are very robust and demonstrate value for money. |
| Strong | Governance and financial arrangements are sound and sustainable. Best value characteristics are in evidence in the proposal. Related projected benefits are demonstrated well and represent value for money. |
| Moderate | Governance and financial arrangements are in place and acceptable. Best value characteristics have been considered as part of the proposal. Related projected benefits are acceptable and could lead to value for money. |
| Weak | Governance and financial arrangements are weak. Best value characteristics are not well demonstrated in the proposal. Related projected benefits are not based on robust information and demonstrates questionable value for money. |
| Poor | Governance and financial arrangements are poor. There is little evidence of Best Value characteristics in the proposal. Related projected benefits are ill defined and/or unrealistic and do not demonstrate value for money. |

Proposal Outline:

Operate Fort William Men's Shed in a more sustainable manner in the context of reduced available income to pay for market value rent.



Map of land at Unit 9a2 Blarmhor Industrial Estate, Fort William, with areas for Community Asset Transfer highlighted.



Ariel view of Unit 9a Blar Mhor Industrial Estate, Fort William • Unit highlighted green.

| ASSESSMENT AREA: | BENEFIT TO THE COMMUNITY | | |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|
| Criteria | <i>Evidence from Community Asset Transfer Body</i> | <i>Additional Evidence/Information</i> | <i>Assessment of Compliance</i> |
| Economic benefits | <p>Supporting local businesses to engage employees in volunteering activities and providing a pathway to engaging community activity as part of retirement planning.</p> <p>Providing low/no cost services to people in need in the community, such as making a counter for Lochaber Action on Disability.</p> | <p>It is now well understood that volunteering makes a substantial contribution to the economy. It is estimated that every volunteer contributes approximately £2,000 per annum to the economyⁱ.</p> <p>The National Council for Voluntary Organisations: <i>What is the economic contribution of the voluntary sector?</i>ⁱⁱ</p> <p>The Fort William Men's Shed has an average of 10 men attending weekly sessions which presents an opportunity cost of £20,000.</p> | Strong |
| Regeneration benefits | <p>The Fort William Men's Shed are supporting improvements to community amenities and facilities in the Fort William area, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produced picnic benches for Kilmallie Village Hall • Provided maintenance to planters in locations in Fort William town centre | <p>Men's Sheds help to regenerate and build sustainable communitiesⁱⁱⁱ</p> <p>The proposal links to the following Highland Outcome Improvement Plan Strategic Priority: Place ([to] Work in partnership to develop sustainable and resilient local communities)^{iv}</p> | Strong |
| Health benefits | Fort William Men's Shed is helping to alleviate pressure on acute health care services by providing upstream preventative interventions which help people to keep well and minimise the need for interventions from health or social care professionals. | <p>Men's Sheds activities can provide positive male health outcomes, often in unexpected and non-obvious ways.^v</p> <p>Gender-specific approaches in the informal and safe environment of Men's Shed are</p> | Very strong |

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| | | <p>effective in engaging men in structured health and wellbeing initiatives, particularly those who may be more vulnerable, isolated or lonely.^{vi}</p> <p>Research has shown that Men's Sheds activity can provide localised support for the mental health and social wellbeing of men within communities as well as positive impacts on physical health.^{vii}</p> <p>Research continues to be commissioned to further explore how Men's Sheds can help improve health outcomes in men.^{viii}</p> <p>The proposal links to the following Highland Outcome Improvement Plan Strategic Priority: People (Enable people to live independently, safe and well within their community)^{ix}</p> | |
| Social wellbeing benefits | Fort William Men's Shed is helping to alleviate pressure on acute health care services by providing upstream preventative interventions which help people to keep well and minimise the need for interventions from health or social care professionals. | <p>A large body of research shows that social isolation and loneliness have a serious impact on older people's longevity, their physical and mental health, and their quality of life. The effect of social isolation and loneliness on mortality has been compared to that of other well-established risk factors for mortality such as smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity.^x</p> <p>More than half of people aged over 50 in Scotland experience loneliness and community groups and services for older</p> | Very strong |

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| | | <p>people play a central role in tackling loneliness and social isolation.^{xi}</p> <p>Men's Sheds target and support a range of marginalised male subpopulations who are at risk of social isolation^{xii}</p> | |
| Environmental Benefits | Fort William Men's Shed is facilitating possibilities to reuse and recycle through fixing items such as sewing machines and lamps which no longer work | | Strong |
| Tackling inequality | | Men's Sheds provide an open and inclusive environment for men to socialise, to share skills and to participate in community life. This can be particularly important for those at risk of social exclusion due to age, retirement from the workforce or unemployment. ^{xiii} | Strong |
| Promotion of equality | A recent development of Fort William Men's Shed is to support young people with learning disabilities to benefit from the activities in the shed. | A charity is able, under the Equality Act 2010, to limit its benefits to people who share a protected characteristic. It is recognised that by default, this may exclude people with other protected characteristics. It is allowed if the charity complies with equity law as defined in the Scottish Charity Regulator guidance. ^{xiv} | Strong |
| Benefit to the Community Assessment Summary: | | | <i>Rating – Strong</i> |

| ASSESSMENT AREA: | CAPACITY TO DELIVER | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| Criteria | <i>Evidence from Community Asset Transfer Body</i> | <i>Additional Evidence/Information</i> | <i>Assessment of Compliance</i> |
| Experience of organisation | Fort William Men's Shed have been established for over 10 years. The organisation is a Scottish Charitable Incorporate Organisations (SCIO). They currently have an average of 10 members participating in activities weekly. | | Very Strong |
| Access to appropriate advice and support | <p>Fort William Men's Shed are a registered charity, and their registered charity number is SCO45365.</p> <p>Fort William Men's Shed had it's most recent accounts (for the year ended 31st January 2024) independently examined by Voluntary Action Lochaber.</p> | Through its registration with the Scottish Charity Regulator Fort William Men's Shed has access to advice and support from the regulator. | Strong |
| Have sought advice and support during application phase | <p>During the application phase Fort William Men's Shed have liaised with The Highland Council's Community Support and Engagement Team regarding their aspirations and plans.</p> <p>Fort William Men's Shed have sought advice from the following organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary Action Lochaber • Development Trusts Association • Scotland Community Ownership Support Service | | Very Strong |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scottish Men's Shed Association | | |
| Appropriate skills within the organisation | During the time the Fort William Men's Shed have been a tenant in the premises they have maintained the property to a high standard, using the skills of their members. | | Strong |
| Access and level of volunteer support | Fort William Men's Shed current has over 10 active members and are seeking to encourage new members including younger men through an emerging initiative. | | Strong |
| Capacity to Deliver Assessment Summary: | | <i>Rating – Strong</i> | |

| ASSESSMENT AREA: | LEVEL OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT | | |
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| Criteria | <i>Evidence from Community Asset Transfer Body</i> | <i>Additional Evidence/Information</i> | <i>Assessment of Compliance</i> |
| Community involvement in developing the request | Fort William Men's Shed have consulted their members regarding developing the Community Asset Transfer Request | | Weak |
| Community support for the request | Letters of support for the request have been provided from Age Scotland and Lochaber Action on Disability | | Strong |
| Level of Community Support Assessment Summary: | | <i>Rating – Moderate</i> | |

| ASSESSMENT AREA: | SUSTAINABILITY | | |
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| <i>Criteria</i> | <i>Evidence from Community Asset Transfer Body</i> | <i>Additional Evidence/Information</i> | <i>Assessment of Compliance</i> |
| Financial – ability to support/fund the asset in the future | The organisation has successfully raised funds over the last 10 years to operate and cite monthly rent costs as continuing to cause a burden which threatens the shed's future sustainability. They remain committed to securing ongoing core funding. | | Strong |
| Governance – sustainability of the organisation | The Fort William Men's Shed was registered in its current legal form in January 2015. It has a constitution which outlines the governance of the organisation and it meets on a regular basis to pursue its endeavours. | | Strong |
| Sustainability Assessment Summary: | | <i>Rating – Strong</i> | |

| ASSESSMENT AREA: | RESOURCING | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|---------------------------------|
| <i>Criteria</i> | <i>Evidence from Community Asset Transfer Body</i> | <i>Additional Evidence/Information</i> | <i>Assessment of Compliance</i> |
| Value of asset | Estimated <u>Capital</u> Value of £80,000 | | |
| Legal title and relevant information | Currently held by The Highland Council | | |

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| Current use of the asset and potential impact | Currently used by the Community Asset Transfer Body. No alternative use is known. No negative impact expected from transfer. | | |
| Requested purchase/discount value | Lease @ £1 per annum | It is an industrial unit and an asset which Highland Council can generate income from. Noting the significant community benefits (economic, regeneration, health, social) as detailed above. | Strong |
| Ability of organisation to pay | Very strong | | Very strong |
| Resourcing Assessment Summary: | | <i>Rating – Strong</i> | |

References

- ⁱ The National Lottery Community Fund (2021). *Power in purpose -The difference we make in mobilising volunteers*. [online] Available at https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/documents/TNLCF_KL21-05_Power-in-Purpose_Full-Report.pdf?mtime=20210728185733&focal=none [accessed 12th November 2024]
- ⁱⁱ The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (2021) *What is the economic contribution of the voluntary sector?* [online] Available at <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/uk-civil-society-almanac-2021/impact/#volunteering> [accessed 12th November 2024]
- ⁱⁱⁱ Scottish Men's Sheds Association (2021) *Supporting men's health and wellbeing through Scottish Men's Sheds*. [online] Available at <https://www.scottishmsa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/SMSA-Manifesto-2021.pdf> [accessed 12th November 2024]
- ^{iv} Highland Community Planning Partnership (2022) *Highland Outcome Improvement Plan* [online] Available at <https://highlandcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/2024-2027-HOIP-Finalised-Format.pdf> [accessed 12th November 2024]
- ^v Kelly et. al (2021) *Men's sheds as an alternative healthcare route? A qualitative study of the impact of Men's sheds on user's health improvement behaviours*. [online] Available at <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-021-10585-3> [accessed 12th November 2024]
- ^{vi} McGrath et. al (2022) *Sheds for life: health and wellbeing outcomes of a tailored community-based health promotion initiative for men's sheds in Ireland*. [online] Available at <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-022-13964-6> [accessed 12th November 2024]
- ^{vii} Kelly & Steiner (2021) *The impact of community Men's Sheds on the physical health of their users*. [online] Available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1353829221001453> [accessed 12th November 2024]

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- ^{viii} Glasgow Caledonian University (2024) *Study to examine how Men's Sheds can help working-age men*. [online] Available at <https://www.gcu.ac.uk/aboutgcu/universitynews/study-to-examine-how-mens-sheds-can-help-working-age-men> [accessed 12th November 2024]
- ^{ix} Highland Community Planning Partnership (2022) *Highland Outcome Improvement Plan* [online] Available at <https://highlandcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/2024-2027-HOIP-Finalised-Format.pdf> [accessed 12th November 2024]
- ^x World Health Organisation (undated) *Reducing Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older People*. [online] Available at <https://www.who.int/activities/reducing-social-isolation-and-loneliness-among-older-people> [accessed 12th November 2024]
- ^{xi} Age Scotland (2023) *New research reveals more than half of over 50s in Scotland experience loneliness* [online] Available at <https://www.agescotland.org.uk/news/186-new-research-reveals-more-than-half-of-over-50s-in-scotland-experience-loneliness> [accessed 12th November 2024]
- ^{xii} Cordier & Wilson (2013) *Community-based Men's Sheds: promoting male health, wellbeing and social inclusion in an international context*. [online] Available at <https://menssheds.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Community-based-Mens-Sheds-promoting-male-health-wellbeing-and-social-inclusion-in-an-international-context.pdf> [accessed 12th November 2024]
- ^{xiii} Power et. al (2022) *Men's sheds and the Sustainable Development Goals: Local responses to global challenges* [online] Available at <https://menssheds.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Mens-sheds-and-the-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Local-responses-to-global-challenges.pdf> [accessed 12th November 2024]
- ^{xiv} Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) (2017) *Charities and the Equality Act 2010*. [online] Available at <https://www.oscr.org.uk/media/1395/2014-12-02-charities-and-the-equality-act-2010.pdf> [accessed 12th November 2024]