

Agenda Item	11b
Report No	HP/30/25

The Highland Council

Committee: Housing and Property

Date: 13 August 2025

Report Title: Community Asset Transfer Request – Former Roy Bridge Primary School

Report By: Assistance Chief Executive - Place

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 six months to assess the application against a range of potential community benefits and determine whether to grant the request.

1.2 Where Council assets are over the value of £100,000, decision on the transfer of any asset rests with the Housing and Property Committee; this report asks Members to consider and agree the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) request received from Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry, Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SBRBA SCIO) for the purchase of the former Roy Bridge Primary School.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to **Agree** the sale of the land and property comprising the former Roy Bridge Primary School to the SBRBA SCIO for £100,000 (with vacant possession) or £75,000 (with sitting tenant) based upon the terms of transfer as set out in section 6.

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** – SBRBA SCIO is requesting a 53% discount on the market value of the assets which is estimated at £210,000 (without a sitting tenant) or £160,000 (with the sitting tenant). The CAT Asset Management Board, including representatives from Legal, Finance, Property and Community Support and Engagement, has considered and scrutinised the CAT request and supporting evidence. The request is recommended to proceed as the wider community benefits would outweigh the benefit from the Council retaining the Assets.

- 3.2 **Legal** - Community Asset Transfer (CAT) is a legislative process set out in the Community Empowerment Act. Public bodies have the right to refuse a CAT 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.
- 3.3 **Risk** - Although any CAT 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.
- 3.4 **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.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** - There are not considered to be any implications associated with this transfer.

4 Impacts

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 **Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary**
- 4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on the Asset Transfer Request for the former Roy Bridge Primary School. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.
- 4.3.2 The Screening process has concluded that, as there are no identified negative impacts, a full impact assessment is not required. Members are asked to consider the summary in **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening
Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age: Positive • Disability: Positive • Pregnancy and maternity: Positive • Marriage and civil partnership: Positive
Socio-economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive
Human Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Positive</i>
Children’s Rights and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Positive</i>
Island and Mainland Rural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>No Impact</i>
Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>No Impact</i>
Data Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>No Impact</i>

5 Overall Summary

- 5.1 The former Roy Bridge Primary School has been mothballed since 2017 when the roll fell to two children. The catchment area was re-assigned to that of the nearby Spean Bridge Primary School. In October 2022 Highland Council made the decision to close the school and this decision was supported and confirmed by Scottish Ministers in December 2022. The decision notice specified that *“As noted in the Education Scotland report, in taking forward the proposal to close Roy Bridge Primary School, Highland Council should work with the community to explore how to make best use of the former Roy Bridge Primary School.”*
- 5.2 Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry, Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation carried out a very comprehensive community engagement exercise to develop their Community Action Plan for the broader area and two specific priorities identified were:-
- community ownership of the former school; and
 - the creation of affordable housing
- 5.3 The SBRBA SCIO therefore now proposes to purchase the former Roy Bridge Primary School (two parcels of land totalling 0.85 acres in all at Aberroy, Roy Bridge, Inverness-shire PH31 4AG) to create social housing and holiday accommodation. Its aim is to develop the site in partnership with Lochaber Housing Association who may take on two units, the SBRBASCIO will control a further five units as housing and will also offer two small holiday-letting units which will help offset the ongoing revenue costs of the housing.
- 5.4 Part of the requested site is currently under a 50-year lease (expires in 2054) to another local charity Taigh Na Sgoile. Discussions are currently ongoing between the SBRBA SCIO and the tenant, with the SBRBA SCIO being willing to take on Highland Council’s landlord responsibilities if the tenant wishes to remain in place. The building which the tenant occupies is outwith the area which would be for housing development.
- 5.5 The SBRBA SCIO has ambitious plans for the site which will substantially deliver against the priorities of the Community Action Plan. The assets requested comprise the original Victorian era main school classroom building; a modern classroom, offices and WCs in a badly deteriorated demountable building; a Post-War prefabricated canteen/hall; an MUGA all-weather pitch in the grounds of the school which it is anticipated will be retained as part of the amenity space to the completed housing scheme and level open space, lawns and parking with two existing vehicular access points to the minor public road off the A86.
- 5.6 With the canteens and demountable building removed, the open part of the site will be re-purposed to provide seven houses for affordable housing; one two-bedroom bungalow suited to adaptable living, four two-bedroom semi-detached houses for couples and young families and two larger three-bedroom family houses, all with parking and gardens. The Victorian school classroom will be re-configured and refurbished to provide two one-bedroom apartments, initially for holiday letting, to offset overall income, thereby enabling the new houses to be let at affordable rent levels. At a later date these flats could be let on long term leases.

- 5.7 The assessment of the application can be found in **Appendix 2**. The application has scored 'Strong' through the assessment framework and the planned proposals have the potential to deliver community social, economic and environmental benefits.
- 5.8 The proposal has been evaluated and the scores suggest that the request should be agreed:-
- Community benefit - moderate;
 - Capacity to deliver - very strong;
 - Community support - very strong;
 - Sustainability - strong; and
 - Resourcing: moderate

6 Recommendation

- 6.1 It is recommended that Members agree the sale of the assets comprising the former Roy Bridge Primary School and associated land for £100,000 (with vacant possession) or £75,000 with sitting tenant. Terms of the transfer would include:-
- SBRBA SCIO will cover all reasonably incurred property and legal costs associated with the asset transfer process – both the Council's and its own;
 - Community access for use of the facility must be maintained in line with the Community Empowerment Act;
 - Any transfer will be subject to existing burdens/conditions in the Council's title to the property (e.g., third party access rights, etc.); and
 - The Council will only transfer property for which it has title to do so.

Any other terms to be agreed by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place in consultation with the Chair of Housing and Property Committee.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 22 July 2025

Author: Lynn Bauermeister, Community Development Manager (West and Mid)

Background Papers: Former Roy Bridge Primary School CAT [Transfer](#)

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment
Appendix 2 - Community Asset Transfer Approach
Assessment Framework – SBRBASCIO

Integrated Impact Assessment Screening – Summary

The proposal has been screened for impact and the following summarises the key findings:-

The screening highlighted overall positive impacts for the community, including for many protected characteristics and towards supporting poverty and socio-economic impacts, through the provision of quality affordable housing that is accessible by all. In addition, the two proposed small holiday-letting units would help offset the ongoing revenue costs of the housing. The proposed bungalow within the development will potentially appeal to older tenants or people with impaired mobility.

Equality

Housing is closely linked to the rights and protections outlined in the Equality Act, which recognises the need to safeguard individuals with protected characteristics, for example older adults may face challenges accessing accessible or supported housing and younger people can struggle with affordability and are more likely to experience housing insecurity.

Housing has a critical role in shaping health outcomes and reducing health inequalities. Safe, secure and affordable housing is a key foundation to good health. Addressing housing quality, stability and affordability is an essential factor in tackling the root causes of health inequality.

This proposed development would help to promote housing equality and reduce health inequalities in the Roy Bridge area.

Socio-economic

Affordable housing plays a vital role in sustaining the fabric of communities across the Highlands. When people can remain in, or return to, the places where they have grown up, worked and built relationships, it strengthens social bonds which underpin health and wellbeing. Facilitating opportunities for people to stay rooted in their communities, through affordable housing options, reduces the risk of social isolation, supports mental health and contributes to a sense of belonging; this, in turn, can create stability in communities which can help ease pressure on statutory services and create the conditions for individuals and families to thrive.

Rural

The provision of Rural Housing has an important role to play in helping the Council addressing the 'Highland Housing Challenge'. The Lochaber Area Place Plan and Highland Outcome Improvement Plan also highlight the importance of addressing housing challenges to ensure that all residents have access to safe, affordable and suitable homes. Housing that supports the needs of key workers, young people, families and older residents while fostering community resilience and sustainable development has been identified as a local and regional priority.

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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

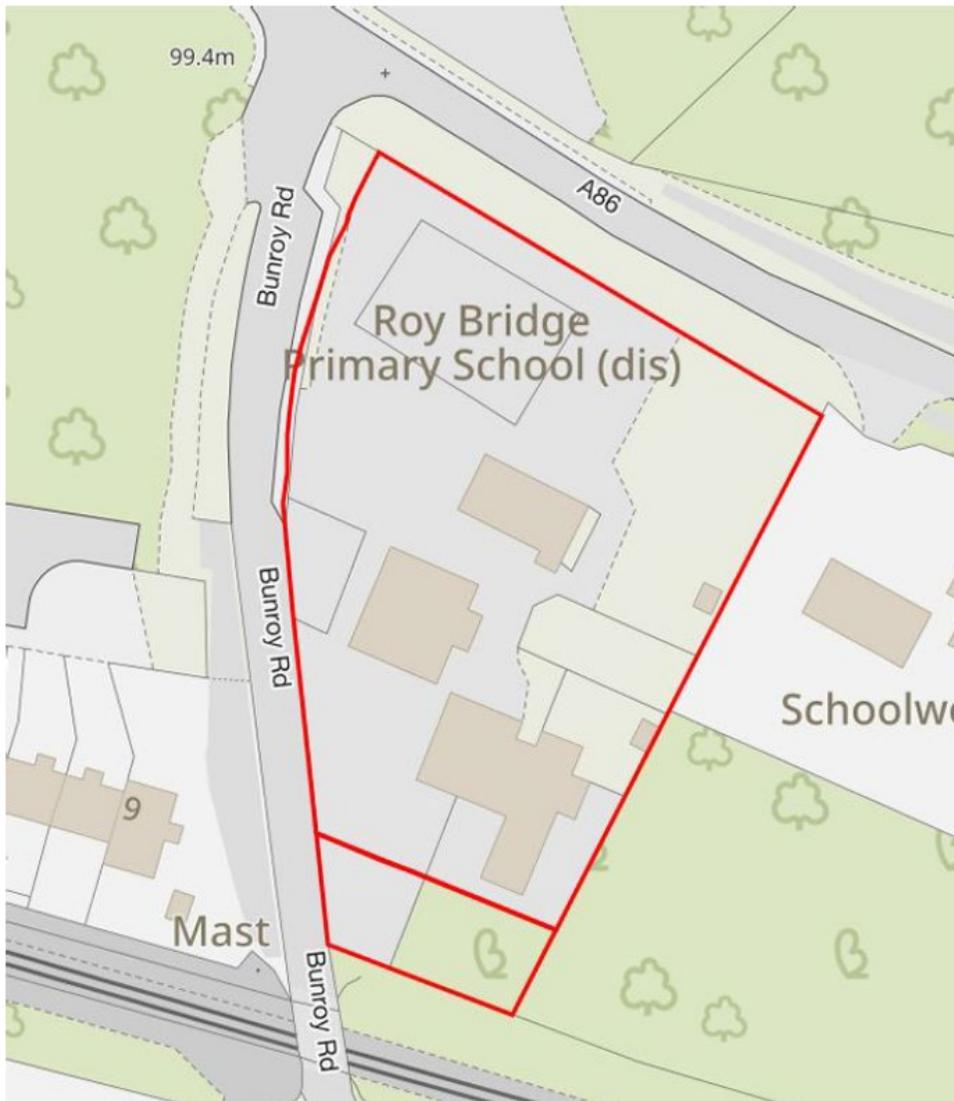
Consideration will also be given to the terms and conditions requested by the Community Asset Transfer Body and what equivalent terms may be appropriate.

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.



Photograph of Former Roy Bridge Primary School Site



Map of land at Roy Bridge Primary with areas requested for Community Asset Transfer highlighted.



Site Plan for proposed development

Proposal Outline:

Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO propose to purchase the former Roy Bridge Primary School (two parcels of land totalling 0.85 acres in all at Aberroy, Roy Bridge, Inverness-shire PH31 4AG) to create affordable housing and holiday accommodation.

*Note: 9 properties are proposed in total. 7 properties for affordable housing (the SCIO has stated that Lochaber Housing Association have indicated that they are interested in managing 2 of the completed dwellings, leaving 5 affordable housing properties to be managed by the SCIO), plus 2 one-bedroom apartments, initially for holiday letting by the SCIO to generate income/off-set costs/reduce housing rent.

ASSESSMENT AREA:	BENEFIT TO THE COMMUNITY		
Criteria	Evidence from Community Asset Transfer Body	Additional Evidence/Information	Assessment of Compliance
Economic benefits	Rental income from lease of the properties (long term and holiday lets). Grant income for development/building costs. A permanent accommodation asset can be used to generate ongoing revenue and assist the organisation to become more financially self-sufficient.	Through both construction and maintenance, housing offers employment opportunities to local communities, including purchasing of goods and services, often benefitting local Small and Medium Enterprises, helping to support local employment and retain wealth in communities. ¹	Moderate

¹ [Rural and islands housing: action plan](#)

		Affordable rural homes provide a resilient local workforce. ²	
Regeneration benefits	Renovation of existing buildings and ground that have been unused as a school for several years for community benefit – predominantly affordable housing for the benefit of the wider community.	<p>Attract new residents to the area, boosting local population and customer base.³</p> <p>The Highland Outcome Improvement Plan highlights the importance of housing⁴</p> <p>Lochaber Area Place Plan emphasises the need for quality housing in the Lochaber area. ⁵</p>	Strong
Health benefits	None stated by the applicant.	<p>Affordable housing helps to alleviate poverty, which also leads to better health. ⁶</p> <p>Safe and warm homes and good neighbourhoods improve physical and mental</p>	Moderate

² [National Housing Federation](#)

³ [Economic Appraisal of Community Asset Transfers](#)

⁴ [Highland Outcome Improvement Plan](#)

⁵ [Lochaber Area Place Plan](#)

⁶ [Public Health Scotland](#)

		health and wellbeing and build strong communities. ⁷	
Social wellbeing benefits	The proposed bungalow on the site will appeal to older tenants or those with impaired mobility, promoting enhanced social inclusion.	Housing plays a central role in shaping health and wellbeing, far beyond providing shelter. ⁸	Moderate
Environmental Benefits	Not aware of any restrictions on usage or environmental designations		Moderate
Tackling inequality	None stated by the applicant.	As a social determinant of health, better housing, greater security and affordability are key to addressing structural drivers of health inequality. ⁹	Moderate
Promotion of equality	The proposed bungalow on the site will appeal to older tenants or those with impaired mobility, promoting enhanced social inclusion.		Moderate
Benefit to the Community Assessment Summary:		<i>Rating – Moderate</i>	

⁷ [Housing to 2040](#)

⁸ [Housing, health and wellbeing: perfect partners](#)

⁹ [Public Health Scotland](#)

ASSESSMENT AREA:	CAPACITY TO DELIVER		
Criteria	Evidence from Community Asset Transfer Body	Additional Evidence/Information	Assessment of Compliance
Experience of organisation	<p>Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO was established in 2012. Their constitution was approved for asset transfer purposes by Scottish Government's Community Land Team on 6 March 2023 (Ref ZLA/15/1).</p> <p>The SCIO successfully fundraised £17,000 to replace playpark equipment in Spean Bridge in 2024.</p> <p>During 2023-24 the organisation set up and operated a Community Firewood Bank cutting, splitting, processing and delivering 25 tonnes of donated larch timber free of charge on request to any household in any area with a resident over age 75. More than 70 deliveries were carried out using trustee, member and volunteer labour. Professional assistance was sought during the processing stage.</p> <p>In January 2025 the Highland Council approved a separate ATR with the SCIO for the purchase of land in Spean Bridge for the creation of a community garden space.</p>	<p>Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO was registered as a charity from 25 June 2013.¹⁰</p> <p>The organisation has assisted with numerous initiatives and activities for community benefit in its locality including cycle and footpath projects; Covid-19 community response; purchase and stocking of tubs and planters for the villages of Spean Bridge and Roy Bridge.¹¹</p>	Strong
Access to appropriate advice and support	Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO are registered with OSCR (Scottish Charity		Strong

¹⁰ [OSCR Charity Details](#)

¹¹ [Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO Website](#)

	Regulator) and are members of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO).		
Have sought advice and support during application phase	<p>The SCIO has an up-to-date asbestos survey undertaken externally.</p> <p>A valuation has been undertaken by an external property consultancy firm.</p> <p>The group has liaised with The Highland Council Estates Service and the Housing Service is aware that the proposal has been developed.</p> <p>The group have connected with other organisations operating similar affordable housing projects in other similar locations in Highland.</p>		Strong
Appropriate skills within the organisation	Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO have a number of individuals who have wide ranging experience including administering projects, technical administration skills, funding application experience, science and environmental back grounds. ¹²		Very strong
Access and level of volunteer support	Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO has 12 trustees and 104 members from a community of approximately 1,585 permanent residents.		Very strong
Capacity to Deliver Assessment Summary:			<i>Rating – Very Strong</i>

¹² [Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO Trustees](#)

ASSESSMENT AREA:	LEVEL OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT		
<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Evidence from Community Asset Transfer Body</i>	<i>Additional Evidence/Information</i>	<i>Assessment of Compliance</i>
Community involvement in developing the request	<p>Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO undertook community consultation between July - October 2022 which revealed an appetite for this community asset transfer request. Its creation has therefore been identified as a community priority within their Community Action Plan (2023 – 2027).</p> <p>The results of a Housing Needs Survey, undertaken in April 2025 by the Highland Communities Housing Trust have shown that there is a clear need for affordable homes driven by the existing residents, home leavers and possible returners to the locality.</p>		Very Strong
Community support for the request	<p>The development of the former Roy Bridge Primary School was identified as a key priority from the consultation undertaken by the SCIO to inform their Community Action Plan. The action plan notes that 82% of respondents saw re-use of the school as an excellent (35%) or a good idea.</p> <p>Since the Action Plan's publication, the SCIO has set up a Steering Group drawn from the SCIO's trustees, neighbours to the site and former parents of children at the now closed school.</p>		Very Strong

	<p>A Public Information Evening was held at Roy Bridge in September 2024 introducing the community to the project, with speakers from Arisaig Community Trust and the Communities Housing Trust.</p> <p>In March 2025 the SCIO hosted a Drop-In Event at Roy Bridge Memorial Hall over an afternoon and early evening, once an indicative site plan and perspectives had been drawn up as part of the Feasibility Study.</p> <p>The SCIO has regularly updated the community on progress via the SCIO's own Facebook Group (551 members), as well as on their website (www.srascio.scot) and by posting to the Roy Bridge Community (737 members) and What's On in Spean Bridge (1,000 members) pages.</p>		
Level of Community Support Assessment Summary:		<i>Rating – Very Strong</i>	

ASSESSMENT AREA:	SUSTAINABILITY		
<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	<p>The organisation estimates their costs on acquisition as outlined in the bullet points below (there is nothing to indicate contrary to this outline):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal Fees (as quoted) £2,260 • Acquisition costs at: £100,000 or £75,000 (depending on status of lease) - funded by: Scottish Land Fund and SCIO reserves. • Build costs: £2,740,000 <p>The SCIO anticipates that the development costs will be met by a combination of grants from the Rural Housing Fund, SSE Renewables and HIE (for non-residential elements and associated infrastructure), as well as loan finance if required. Other funding opportunities will be explored as they arise. The construction phase will not go ahead until all funding is fully secured. Lochaber Housing Association have indicated to the SCIO that they will fund 2 units.</p> <p>The organisation’s estimated annual running costs (on completion of the development, assuming the SCIO retains three long-term letting properties and the two holiday lets):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property management fees £2,800 • Maintenance £7,500 		Moderate

- Insurance £2,500
- Changeover costs £3,750
- Provision for voids £1,170
- Sinking fund for repair and refurbishment £10,000

Ongoing running costs £27,720 pa

The SCIO estimates rental income at:

- Plot 1: 2-bed detached bungalow at £435pcm = £5,220 pa
- Plot 2: 2-bed semi-detached house at £475pcm = £5,700 pa
- Plot 3: 2-bed semi-detached house at £475pcm = £5,700 pa
- Ground floor 1-bed holiday apartment at £485pw, 25-week season = £12,125 pa
- First floor 1-bed holiday apartment at £485pw, 25-week season = £12,125 pa

Income total £40,870 pa
(with any surplus available for loan repayments if required)

The organisation has stated that their accounts, assessed by OSCR annually, show consistent reserves of around £50,000 over the past three years. They also have recurring income from micro hydro schemes of circa £9,500 per annum, with index-linked rises.

<p>Governance – sustainability of the organisation</p>	<p>The Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO was established in 2012. By the end of 2021 the SCIO had begun to receive long-term Community Benefit from two hydro-electricity schemes at Nevis Range and Allt Mhuic for their expected lifetime as well as short term (3 years) benefit from a windfarm just out of area.</p> <p>Trustees meet on a quarterly basis and have links with the Community Council e.g. regarding Place Planning.</p>		<p>Very strong</p>
<p>Sustainability Assessment Summary:</p>		<p><i>Rating – Strong</i></p>	

ASSESSMENT AREA:	RESOURCING		
Criteria	<i>Evidence from Community Asset Transfer Body</i>	<i>Additional Evidence/Information</i>	<i>Assessment of Compliance</i>
Value of asset	<p>Market value (vacant possession) £210,000 Market value ((Subject to the Occupational Lease) £160,000</p> <p>The valuation was commissioned externally by the SCIO, March 2025.</p>		Strong
Legal title and relevant information		TBC Confirmed by Estates service that the titles have been checked by the Terra Tracker Team	Moderate
Current use of the asset and potential impact	<p>An attached schoolhouse is currently leased by a charity but is included within the asset transfer proposals.</p> <p>If vacant possession over the whole site is not available, the SCIO propose taking over the Council's interest as landlords.</p> <p>The school has been closed since 2017. and is currently costing the Council in the region of £2,000 per annum to maintain.</p>	The Scottish Government in its response to the proposal to close Roy Bridge Primary School, requested that Highland Council works with the community to explore how to make best use of the former Roy Bridge Primary School.	Moderate

Requested purchase/discount value	<p>53% discount – capital receipt of: £100,000 (with vacant possession) or £75,000 (if lease in place)</p> <p>The proposed price reflects the benefit to the community as well as “market norms” of £10,000 per plot for the 7-dwelling affordable housing project. There are also significant costs in the demolition of the canteen building and removal of the demountable unit. An asbestos survey of May 2025 is provided with the application.</p>		Moderate
Ability of organisation to pay	<p>The SCIO was successful with a Stage One application to Scottish Land Fund towards the costs of the Feasibility Study for the project and has applied to Scottish Land Fund (outcome anticipated early September 2025) as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage Two grant towards price £95,000 or £71,250 • Stage Two grant towards legal fees £2,260 <p>A contribution from SCIO reserves of £5,000 or £3,750 is expected.</p>		Moderate
Resourcing Assessment Summary:			<i>Rating – Moderate</i>