

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	10
Report No	SCC/33/25

Committee: Sutherland County

Date: 1 December 2025

Report Title: Dornoch Common Good – Dornoch and District Community Association Application requiring Sutherland County Committee Approval

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Sutherland County Committee is invited to consider an application for £280,000 from Dornoch and District Community Association (DADCA) for Dornoch Common Good funding towards the development of a new community centre.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to recommend that Full Council approves the £280,000 application from Dornoch and District Community Association (DADCA) for the new community centre project, subject to match funding and required permissions being in place.

3 Implications

3.1 Resource

- Each year Sutherland County Committee, following consultation with Dornoch Community Council, sets the Dornoch Common Good budget, including an allocation for grants and contributions for community projects. The 2025/26 budget for grants and contributions was set at £60,000 per year.
- The long-term understanding between the Council and Dornoch Area Community Council is that larger sums for significant projects could be considered outwith that budget if there is sufficient balance available. The reserves have been built up over time in anticipation of receiving an application for a significant community project such as a new community centre.
- The balance of useable reserves in Dornoch Common Good Fund at 31 March 2025 was £318,520 meaning that the proposed £280,000 grant is affordable, however it will be necessary to limit future expenditure or projects until such time as the reserve has built up.

3.2 **Legal** – No implications

3.3 **Risk** – The following risks have been identified:-

- Risks relating to securing match funding and relevant planning permission. If approved, the Common Good award would not be issued until all other funding and permissions required have been confirmed and in place.
- Risk of project costs increasing beyond projected figures. It is for DADCA to manage this risk. Council risk is mitigated by capping the DCG contribution to £280,000.
- Ongoing running costs of new community centre. The bid includes running costs for the first year. Beyond that the feasibility study indicates the community centre will be self-financing, meaning there will be no further pressure on the Common Good fund.
- Risk to reserves. Currently the reserves are £318,520. If this application is approved, the reserves will reduce to £38,520. This will rise to £54,055 at 31 March 2026 if the proposed variation in the Dornoch Common Good Q2 Monitoring report to this committee is approved. Further mitigation of this risk could be managed through a reduced grants and contributions fund to reestablish reserves to cover liabilities and enable support to future significant projects.
- Risk of competing projects. Officers are aware of a feasibility study planned by Dornoch Area Community Interest Company for a sports and recreation facility which. This study could lead to another significant infrastructure project which will require funding. The risk will be mitigated by speaking to the community and establishing an agreed phased timeline for projects.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – No implications.

3.5 **Gaelic** – No implications

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 was completed on 11 November 2025 and the conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.

- 4.3.2 The Screening process has concluded that proposal has identified no negative impacts with potential positive impacts in relation to equalities, socio economic and climate change. Members are asked to consider the Integrated Impact Assessment Summary in **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.

4.3.3

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening/Full Assessment
Equality, poverty	Positive
Socio-economic	Positive
Human rights	Positive
Children's rights & well-being	Positive
Island and mainland rural	No negative impacts
Climate change	Positive
Data rights	No impact

5 Background

- 5.1 The Dornoch Common Good Fund is managed for the benefit of the residents of the former Royal Burgh. When funds permit, this includes providing funding to support projects and initiatives that deliver clear benefits to the residents of Dornoch including a wide range of community activities.
- 5.2 In November 2025, Highland Council received an application from Dornoch and District Community Association (DADCA) for £280,000.00 to support the development of a new community centre in the town.
- 5.3 The Dornoch & District Community Association (DADCA) is a Charitable company limited by guarantee (Company No. SC375856 and Scottish Charity No. SC013716) set up in March 2010, which exists to serve the local community by supporting social, cultural, and recreational activities. Its charitable purposes are:-
- to promote the benefit of the inhabitants of Dornoch and District without distinction of political, religious or other opinions, by associating the Local Authorities, Voluntary Organisations and inhabitants in a common effort to advance education and to provide facilities in the interest of social welfare for recreation and leisure time occupation with the object of improving the conditions of life for the said inhabitants; and
 - to secure the establishment, maintenance and management of a community centre.
- 5.4 DADCA over many years has explored plans for a new community centre to replace the existing 180-year-old social club building, which has served as the community's well used town hall for the past 13 years. DADCA commissioned a feasibility study in 2025 to assess the feasibility of a new, flexible, energy efficient community centre for Dornoch. The completed study was published in October 2025 and can be found at **Appendix 2**.

6 Proposal

- 6.1 DADCA has secured assets of £720,000 including a cash sum of £310,000. DADCA has requested £280,000 from the Common Good Fund as this required match is needed to secure funds from other sources. A contribution from the Common Good Fund to the overall project costs will demonstrate commitment from Highland Council and the Dornoch community and will evidence that £1.0M of the overall £1.7M required has been secured. It is further proposed that the Dornoch Common Good contribution should be capped at £280,000 to manage the CGF Reserves.

7 Costs and Funding

- 7.1 The cost of building a new community centre is estimated at £1.7M. A breakdown of costs as follows:-

Cost	Amount
Building	£1,540,000
Equipment	£100,000
Moving and Running costs for 1 st year of operation	£60,000
TOTAL	£1,700,000
Amount requested from Dornoch Common Good Fund	£280,000

- 7.2 The project will be funded as follows:-

Funder	Amount	Confirmed?
DADCA's own assets (see below for breakdown)	£720,000	Yes
Dornoch Common Good	£280,000	This application
Other funders	£700,000	No
Total	£1,700,000	

- 7.3 It is anticipated that DADCA contribution (£720,000) to the project will come from the following sources:-

- 6 self-build plots at Elizabeth Crescent
 - Four plots have already been sold for £330,000, less £20,000 for architect and legal fees, leaving a balance of £310,000.
 - Two remaining plots expected to sell for £160,000.
- Sale of the Social Club for £250,000 – third party has confirmed their intention to purchase the property.

7.4 Ongoing running costs

The feasibility study highlights that the expected income in the new community centre is projected to increase from £18,000 to £34,000, driven by new user groups, higher hall hire rates, and expanded capacity for large events. The operating expenditure remains broadly stable, rising only slightly to £29,000, despite the increased size and scope of the facility. The new centre is therefore forecast to achieve a surplus of £5,000 in the first year compared with the current deficit of £14,000. This demonstrates that the new facility would not only address community and accessibility needs, but also operate on a sustainable and self-supporting basis, strengthening its long-term viability.

The feasibility study highlights the expected income in the new community centre is projected to almost double from £18,000 to £34,000, driven by new user groups, higher hall hire rates, and expanded capacity for large events. The operating expenditure remains broadly stable, rising only slightly to £29,000, despite the increased size and scope of the facility. The new Centre is therefore forecast to achieve a surplus of £5,000 in the first year compared with the current deficit of £14,000. This demonstrates that the new facility would not only address community, and accessibility needs but also operate on a sustainable and self-supporting basis, strengthening its long-term viability.

8 Community Support

8.1 Community Council Support

Dornoch Area Community Council has been contacted for comment regarding this application. At the time of writing this report, the Community Council had not yet met to discuss the matter. A verbal update will be provided at Committee.

8.2 Wider Community Support

There has been extensive consultation with the Dornoch community for more than a decade about the concept of a new build community centre and its location. Five separate community engagement programmes have been conducted over that period, all attracting good response levels and consistently showing strong support for a new, purpose-built community centre. The 2025 feasibility study states that 87.5% of respondents said a new community centre is 'very important' or 'quite important'.

9 Benefits and Impacts

9.1 The study articulates clear opportunities for a new, purpose-built community centre to support a broader range of cultural, social and economic activities. The facility would offer more flexible space not currently available in existing venues across Dornoch, enabling growth in both community and visitor participation in activities and events.

9.1.2 DADCA has identified that the new community centre will bring significant benefits including:-

- a warm, welcoming, fully accessible space for all ages.
- energy efficient, low cost building for long-term sustainability.
- flexible rooms for several events at once.
- modern kitchen and social areas for community gathering.
- venue for cinema, drama and larger events.

- 9.2 The centre will also contribute to the local economy by creating jobs, supporting volunteering and attracting visitors to the area.
- 9.3 A letter of support submitted with the application articulates that through an increased offer of activities and events the new facility will help foster stronger community ties, reduce social isolation, and promote active citizenship.

10 Alignment with the Sutherland Area Place Plan

- 10.1 The proposed centre aligns with the following strategic themes in the Sutherland Area Place Plan:
- Health and Wellbeing
 - Community Capacity and Resilience
 - Employment and Economic Opportunities
 - Sustainable Local Development
 - Inclusive Access to Services

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

Date: 12 November 2025

Author: Fiona Richardson, Community Development Manager

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Impact Assessment Screening Summary
Appendix 2 – DADCA Feasibility Study

Integrated Impact Assessment Summary

Dornoch and District Community Association:
Application to the Dornoch Common Good Fund

Overall, the screening highlighted no negative impacts from the proposal but notes positive impacts of building a new community centre in a number of areas including equalities, socio-economic and climate change.

Equality, Poverty and Human Rights

The screening specifically notes the potential for positive impact on children and young people, older people and poverty. A new improved community facility will enable a wider range of affordable and accessible community support, events and activities.

The proposal states that a new community centre for Dornoch will support community wellbeing, inclusion and resilience and will provide space for a wide range of activities from youth programmes, events, older people support groups, cultural events, training workshops and local community groups meetings. The proposal aims to strengthen community ties, reduce isolation and promote active citizenship.

The proposal also sets out employment and volunteering opportunities.

Climate Change

The proposal sets out plans for a new energy efficient community centre with options for air source heating and solar panels for long term sustainability. The increased offer of activities and events in the town will support people to meet locally resulting in being less reliant on cars to travel further afield.

A new community centre for Dornoch Feasibility study on behalf of Dornoch and District Community Association

**A report by Maclean-Yuille Consultancy
October 2025**



The proposed Dornoch South Community Centre will be based on the successful design of Contin Community Hall, pictured here.

DORNOCH & DISTRICT COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

Scottish Charity No. SC013716 - Company Limited by Guarantee registered in Scotland No. 375856 - Registered Office: Rubhan Beag, Hilton, Dornoch, Sutherland, IV25 3PW

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1. Background

1.1 Purpose and Scope of the Feasibility Study

This report was commissioned by Dornoch and District Community Association (DADCA) to assess the feasibility of a new, flexible, energy-efficient community centre for Dornoch to meet the existing and future needs of the community and confirm whether a business case can be made to support this proposal. The study assesses community demand, economic and social benefits, financial feasibility, strategic fit, and potential risks. It examines alternative options, including refurbishment and redevelopment of the existing Social Club, and evaluates them against the preferred option of constructing a new centre at Dornoch South. The outcomes of this study provide the evidence base for progressing to detailed design, fundraising and business planning stages.

1.2 Overview of the Project

DADCA has, over many years, explored plans for a new centre to replace the existing 180-year-old social club building, which has served as the community's main venue for local events and activities for 45 years.

Since 2009, there have been four separate studies and community engagement programmes, plus various building condition reports, all with the purpose of assessing future options for a community centre. These included a new build and renovating the existing building. All previous reports and the community consultations consistently evidenced the poor condition of the current social club, the significant challenges faced in renovating a building of that age and an overwhelming preference for a new build centre to meet the needs of a growing, changing community.

Previous attempts to progress were hindered by funding and the lack of a suitable site. However, since 2019, DADCA has made significant progress on two fronts. The charity has assets of £750,000, including cash of £310,000 earmarked for the project, and a viable location has been identified at Dornoch South, on land owned by another community group, Dornoch and District Community Interest Company (DACIC). Subject to confirmation from the Scottish Land Fund and obtaining the required planning approvals, DACIC will proceed with the transfer of the land to DADCA for £1.

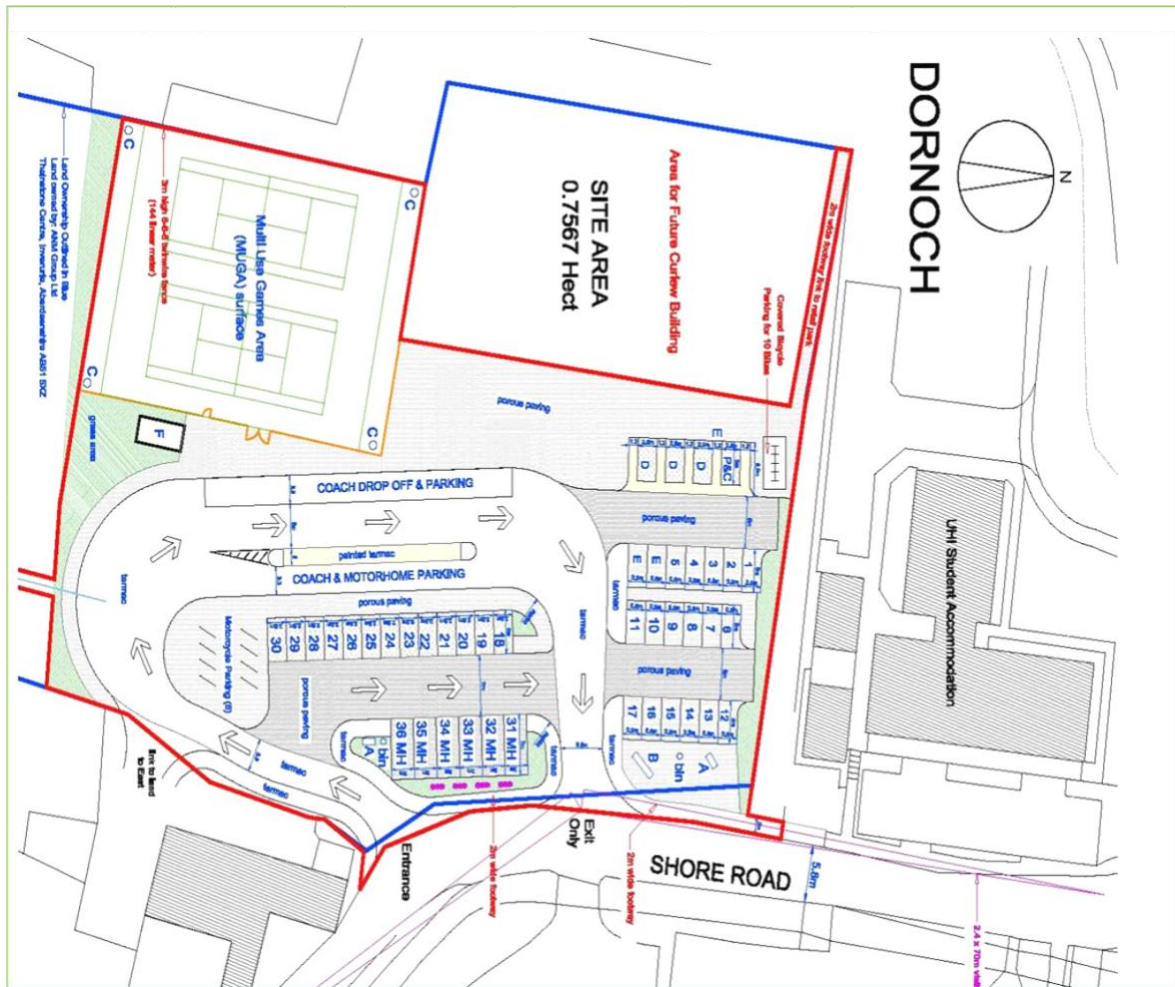


Figure 1: Preferred site for new community centre at Dornoch South

Local architect Jimmy MacDonald has prepared outline designs in consultation with DADCA (see Section 4), taking into account the findings from the community and stakeholder engagement process (see Section 2). An initial cost plan prepared by WSD Scotland estimates total capital costs in the region of £1.7 million — significantly lower than those identified in previous studies, including the 2013 feasibility study, which estimated build costs at around £5 million (in 2025 prices).

The building will be constructed using fibre cement panels fixed onto an insulated timber frame, ensuring high thermal performance, durability, and low maintenance. The costs are based on a building design and construction used elsewhere (specifically Contin Community Hall which opened in 2020).

Funding Summary

The total estimated cost of the project is £1.7 million. The anticipated funding is expected to come from the following sources:

- Six Self-Build Plots at Elizabeth Crescent: Four plots have been sold to date, generating £330,000. DADCA has covered architect and consultancy fees for this feasibility study from the proceeds of the four plot sales. The remaining £310,000 from those sales has been ring-fenced for the new community centre. The two remaining plots are expected to generate a further £160,000 when sold.
- Sale of the Social Club: £250,000 — this amount is guaranteed by a third party who has confirmed their intention to purchase the property.
- Common Good Fund: £280,000.

Together, these sources are expected to contribute approximately £1 million. The remaining £700,000 required to meet the total project cost of £1.7 million is anticipated to be secured through grant funding.

It should be noted that, apart from the funds already secured from the self-build plot sales, the remaining amounts are anticipated rather than guaranteed. The timing and confirmation of some grant sources are still to be finalised.

This study has six aims:

- To gather evidence to demonstrate whether there is community support for a new community centre.
- Assess what level of demand there may be for the proposed uses
- An appraisal of the development against criteria including cost, community impact, long-term sustainability and deliverability.
- An assessment of whether the existing hall could be redeveloped to accommodate community needs.
- Assessment of risk.

The main findings of this study will feed into a five-year business plan with financial projections, which will be provided as a separate report at the end of November 2025.

1.3 The Social Club – History, Refurbishment, and Current Challenges

The Social Club was originally built in 1845 as a school by McDonald & Leslie of Dornoch. Its current 'L-plan' design was added in 1885 by Andrew Maitland & Son of Tain. When the school moved to Evelix Road in 1911, the building became a reading room and recreation space for the "men and boys of Dornoch," managed by local trustees. A rear extension with a kitchen and toilets was added in 1979.

In 2014, DADCA purchased the Social Club on behalf of the community, providing a wide range of activities and affordable space for classes, social events, children's parties and business meetings.

Since then, there have been several small-scale projects to improve and upgrade the building where feasible. These have included

- Installation of a new kitchen.
- Various works during the Covid-19 pandemic were undertaken to extend the building's lifespan by at least five years. The works, completed in 2020, at a cost of approximately £20,000 (£35,000 in 2025 prices), included: new lighting, replacement blinds, some window replacements, plumbing improvements, new external doors, and repointing of external stonework.

Despite these upgrades, the Social Club continues to operate at a deficit due to its age, poor energy efficiency, and outdated design, which collectively limit DADCA's capacity to generate sufficient income to meet ongoing costs. The building's condition and its location also raise long-term concerns about its suitability as a community facility. These were highlighted in 4 previous surveys and the detailed Options Appraisal report in 2016. That report outlined the main options DADCA was considering for the running of a community building.

Table 1: Summary of building/condition survey reports on Dornoch Social Club

Date	Survey	Main issues
2008	Initial building survey carried out by S.C Mackintosh	Building in need of considerable care and maintenance and which led to DADCA commissioning further surveys (detailed below) covering building structure, disabled access and energy usage and conservation
2009	Disabled access carried out by the Sutherland Access Panel	The survey findings concluded that access to the Social Club was poor (in some cases dangerous) and that access to the building itself fell far short of 2009 minimum standards. Some of the recommendations were easily implemented, (e.g. portable ramps for wheelchair users, colours and step markings for the visually impaired). However, many of the problems were more challenging to address without major works. These included the steep access path to the building, the width of fire doors, access to toilets and presence of stairs.

Date	Survey	Main issues
2010	Energy audit, carried out by On-Site Generation.	The report recommended insulation which was installed and has helped reduce the thermal heat loss from the building. However, the report also concluded that due to the building being located within the Dornoch Conservation Area (1) it was not possible to fit either Solar PV or Solar Thermal roof panels on the south facing roof. Heat pumps were ruled out as being inappropriate for a building of this type and the report concluded that if the building continued to operate as a social club, it would not be possible for DADCA to take advantage of renewable technologies to reduce running costs and its carbon footprint.

Given the age and condition of the Social Club, significant further investment will be required over the next 5–10 years to ensure it remains a safe and usable space for the community. To maintain the building fit for purpose over the next decade, it is estimated that a total of £10,000 per year will be required. This includes:

- Major periodic works: pointing, woodwork, eaves, soffits, and internal redecoration, averaged at £3,500 per year (2025 prices)
- Regular annual maintenance and repairs: day-to-day upkeep and minor fixes, estimated at £6,500 per year (2025 prices)

This combined annual budget ensures the building remains safe, functional, and suitable for community use, while highlighting the ongoing financial pressures and limitations of the current facility

Table 2: Challenges and Implications of Existing Social Club Building

Challenges	Implications
Location	Poor accessibility, visibility and limited car parking. The building is also situated in a designated conservation area. Specific consents may be required for works to the building. This may place a limit on potential refurbishment work.
Limited parking facilities	Only 10 spaces
Maintenance Costs	High and rising, particularly for heating and repairs.

Capacity	Too small for larger groups or events. Restrictions on weddings, concerts, theatre productions, and cinema screenings. Only small-scale, low-key events possible.
Facilities	Outdated décor and basic amenities, including limited toilet facilities.
Financial Pressure	Declining income combined with rising costs creates an unsustainable situation.
Risk of Closure	Without additional funding, the Social Club cannot remain viable.

These challenges are consistent with findings from the 2019 feasibility study.

Energy costs since 2019

The table below highlights annual heating costs for the social club, showing the financial impact of maintaining comfortable temperatures in a less energy-efficient property.

Table 3: Energy costs of Dornoch Social Club (£)

Year	Cost (£)
2025	£3,478 (up to September 2025)
2024	£3,686
2023	£5,976
2022	£4,279
2021	£2,925
2020	£2,132
2019	£2,982

Energy costs have doubled since 2019, reflecting both price inflation and the inefficiency of the building fabric.

Figure 2: Dornoch Social Club – Exterior View

View of the Social Club showing the main entrance and L-plan structure.



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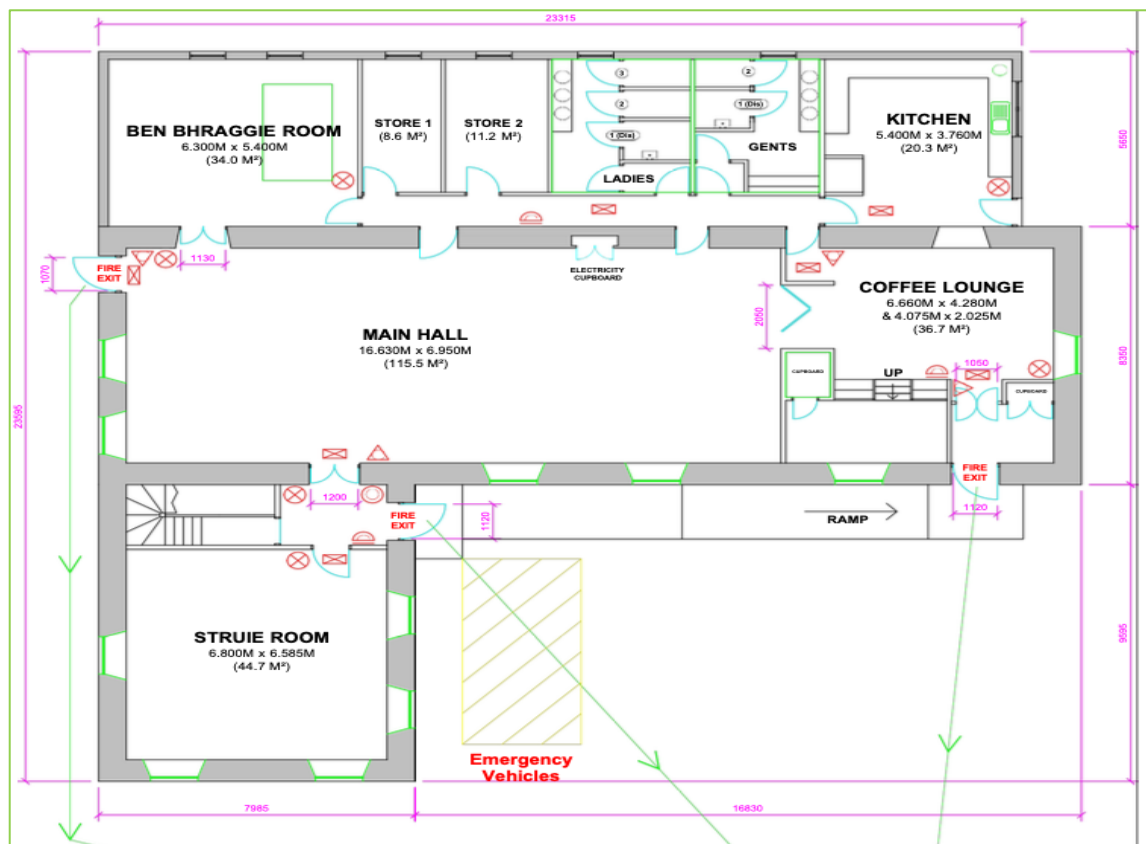
Figure 3: Social Club Kitchen

Photograph of the kitchen area, highlighting the facilities for community use.



Figure 4: Internal Layout of the Social Club

Floor plan showing the arrangement of rooms, kitchen, toilets, and main hall areas.



1.4 Income and Expenditure

The latest accounts (31 March 2024) show a deficit of approximately £14,000, primarily due to the building's age and design, which limit its capacity to generate sufficient income to cover running costs. Donations have played an important role in sustaining operations, totalling £5,863 in 2024 and £38,934 in 2023. Since 2022, an individual donation has provided support towards running costs; however, this funding has now stopped, leaving the Social Club financially unsustainable in its current form.

Regular user income

Currently, the social club hosts the following regular groups, with their respective monthly income outlined below:

DADCA Booking by Regular Group						
Affiliated Group Bookings (10% discount)						
Group	Cost	Hours	Total	Total Per Session	Times per Month	Total Price
DDCF Main Session	£15.00	3.50	£52.50	£47.25	3	£141.75
DDCF Afternoon Booking	£9.00	1.50	£13.50	£12.15	3	£36.45
DDCF Evening Booking	£7.50	1.50	£11.25	£10.13	3	£30.38
DDCF Saturday Booking	£7.50	2.00	£15.00	£13.50	1	£13.50
Senior Indoor Bowlers	£15.00	2.00	£30.00	£27.00	8	£216.00
Dornoch Firth Art Group	£9.00	2.00	£18.00	£16.20	0	£0.00
SKAS	£9.00	2.00	£18.00	£16.20	4	£64.80
WLC	£15.00	2.00	£30.00	£27.00	3	£81.00
Young Curators Club	£7.50	1.50	£11.25	£10.13	4	£40.50
Ascension Tang Soo Do	£15.00	1.00	£15.00	£13.50	4	£54.00
Princes Pilates	£15.00	1.00	£15.00	£13.50	4	£54.00
Pilates with Moira	£15.00	2.25	£33.75	£30.38	3	£91.13
Social Dancers	£15.00	1.50	£22.50	£20.25	4	£81.00
East Sutherland Camera Club	£15.00	2.00	£30.00	£27.00	1	£27.00
Cinema Club	£15.00	4.50	£67.50	£60.75	1	£60.75
Quiz Night	£15.00	2.00	£30.00	£27.00	1	£27.00
						£1,019.25

Figure 5: Current social club monthly income from regular users

The total annual income generated by regular users is approximately £12,000.

Summary Income and Expenditure for 2024 (£'000)

Income	Social Club
	£'000
	2024 actual
Hire of Hall regular users	12
Donations and other income	6
Total	18
<u>Expenditure</u>	
Cleaning	10
Accounting and Administration	8
Heat and Light	4
Repairs and Maintenance	6
Insurance etc	4
Total	32
Surplus/(Deficit)	-14

The ongoing financial pressures, physical limitations, and energy inefficiencies of the existing Social Club continue to constrain its viability. Despite ongoing maintenance efforts, the building's condition, restricted site, and rising operating costs demonstrate that further refurbishment would not deliver long-term sustainability. These challenges reinforce the need to reconsider alternative development options, ensuring Dornoch has a modern, accessible, and financially viable community facility for the future.

1.5 About DADCA

The Dornoch & District Community Association (DADCA) is a Charitable company limited by guarantee (Company No. SC375856 and Scottish Charity No. SC013716) set up in March 2010, which exists to serve the local community by supporting social, cultural, and recreational activities. It has a board of 8 volunteer directors who, collectively, have experience of both business and community enterprise including finance, management and community engagement. DADCA also has 260 members, including the directors, drawn from the local community and regular users of the social club.

Its charitable purposes are:

(a) to promote the benefit of the inhabitants of Dornoch and District without distinction of political, religious or other opinions, by associating the Local Authorities, Voluntary Organisations and inhabitants in a common effort to advance education and to provide facilities in the interest of social welfare for recreation and leisure time occupation with

the object of improving the conditions of life for the said inhabitants, and
(b) to secure the establishment, maintenance and management of a community centre

Beyond managing the Centre, DADCA ensures local groups and residents have access to a welcoming, flexible venue that enriches community life.

DADCA also plays a central role in organising popular local events, including:

- Summer Community Markets on the Cathedral Green
- Tabletop and Car Boot Sales at the Social Club
- Fibre Fest in March, celebrating all things fibre at various locations throughout Dornoch
- Festival Week in August, offering family-friendly events for locals and visitors
- Seasonal Celebrations such as Bonfire Night, St Andrew's Fair, and Hogmanay

DADCA holds a current Public Entertainment Licence for the hall from Highland Council.

1.6 Dornoch and the local area

Covering 53 square miles, Dornoch parish brings together the Royal Burgh of Dornoch, the former fishing village of Embo, and almost twenty crofting townships and hamlets. Dornoch is the parish's largest settlement and the county town of Sutherland. Once the seat of the Diocese of Caithness, it is also home to Scotland's smallest cathedral.

Figure 6: Map of Dornoch



Dornoch is located approximately 41 miles from Inverness and 83 miles from Wick, with access via the A9 (around 2 miles from the town). Public transport is limited: the nearest train station is in Tain (about 9 miles away) on the Inverness–Thurso/Wick line, and bus

services through Dornoch are infrequent, with a few daily connections to Inverness, Thurso, and nearby towns. There is also a small airstrip south of the town for light aircraft. Overall, Dornoch is more easily accessed by car than by public transport.

Figure 7: Mid-2020 population settlements

Table 16: Mid-2020 population estimates for settlements and localities

	All ages	0-15	16-64	65+
Brora	1,210	198	647	365
Dornoch	1,430	186	748	496
Golspie	1,290	207	748	335

Source: National Records Scotland

Population data from mid-2020 highlights the settlements across the parish (see Figure 7.) Unlike the surrounding area, Dornoch has seen its population grow rather than decline, a trend that is expected to continue. The town is listed as being a ‘highest priority’ for affordable housing development in The Highland Council’s Strategic Investment Plan 2025 – 2030. Significant housing developments over the last four years, such as Deans Park, are complemented by planned housing at Dornoch North, cited in the Sutherland Plan as meeting the ‘expansion needs of the community’.

Dornoch is also an important tourist destination. While exact visitor numbers are not available, tourism-related businesses indicate that visitor numbers are growing. The local caravan site can accommodate up to 2,000 people in the summer and is often full during the main visitor season. According to Dornoch Heritage Society, which owns and operates Historylinks Museum, 27% of museum visitors in 2024–25 were from overseas, 40% of whom came from the United States.

Golf tourism is a key economic driver. A study commissioned by Royal Dornoch Golf Club in 2024 estimated golf tourism contributes more than £5m annually to the local economy.

Major employment sectors in Dornoch include tourism-related services such as accommodation and food services; public services, including healthcare and social work; construction; retail; and agriculture and forestry, which continue to play an important role in the wider regional economy (see Figure 8).

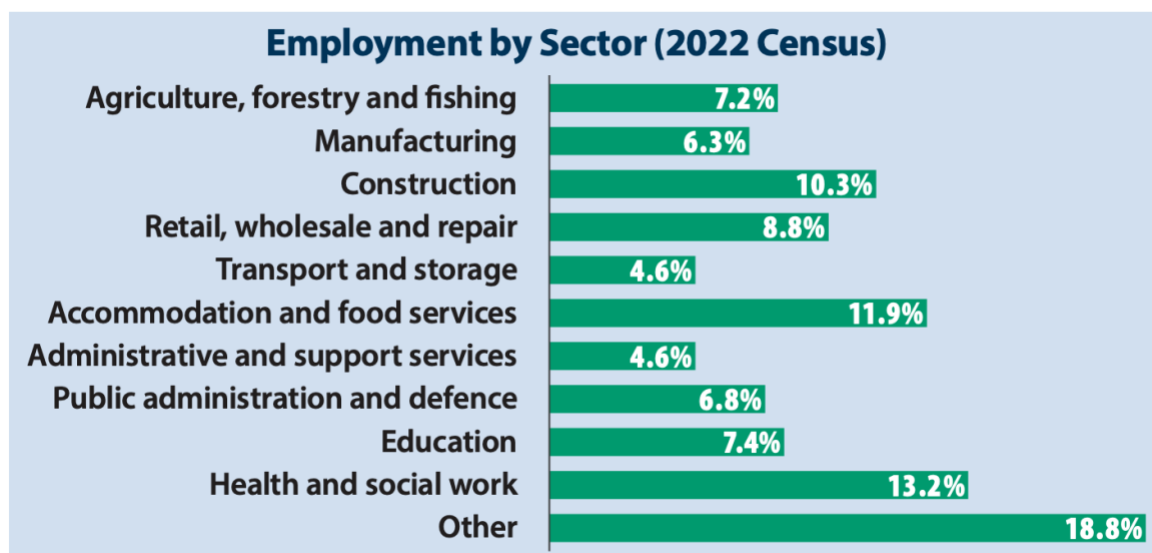


Figure 8: Dornoch: Employment by Sector (2022 Census)

2. Community and stakeholder consultation

There has been extensive consultation with the Dornoch community over more than a decade about the concept of a new build community centre and its location. Four separate community engagement programmes have been conducted over that period, all attracting good response levels and consistently showing strong support for a new, purpose-built community centre.

Table 4: Community survey responses 2009 - 2015

Date	Number of responses	Support for a new build community centre in Dornoch.
2009	389	54%
2013	580	75%
2015	534	93% (for a new building centre and involving transfer of land at Meadows Park to community ownership).
2019	13 stakeholders, 49 community members	Consensus was the need for a flexible, modern facility. 85% supported a new centre with curling barn.

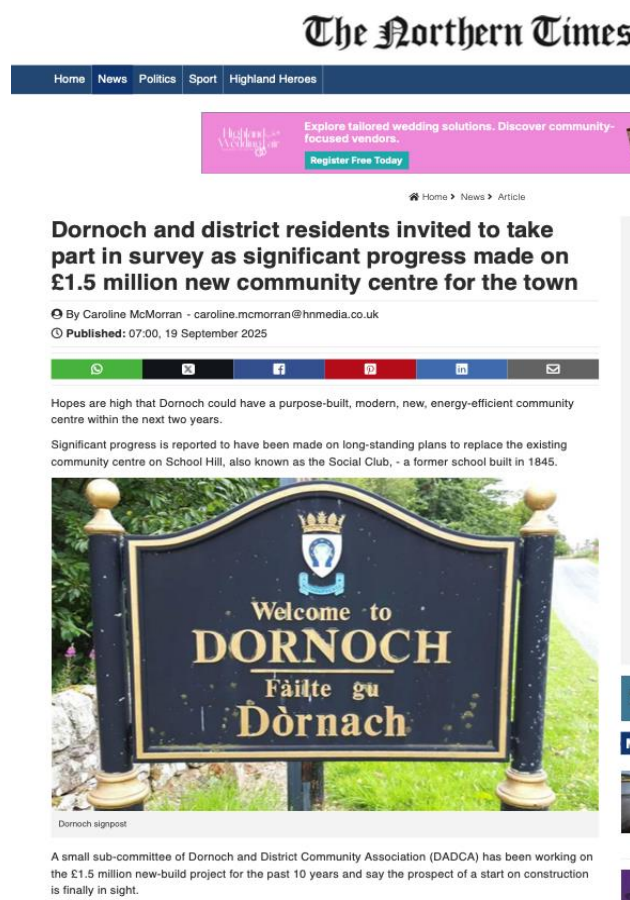
In addition to the surveys, four feasibility reports have assessed future options for the social club. These were:

- 2008 Feasibility Study for a New Community Centre by Phillips Aitchison Ltd with Jefcoate Anderson Architects Ltd.
- 2014 Feasibility Study (update) produced by DADCA as part of an unsuccessful funding application to the Big Lottery.
- 2016 Options Appraisal, produced by DADCA
- 2019 Project Curlew Feasibility Study. This was a major study to develop land in Dornoch to accommodate a new community centre, curling facility, car/coach parking, multi-use games area (MUGA) and golf driving range.

2.1 Overview of the 2025 Consultation Process

The 2025 community and stakeholder consultation took place between 15 – 30 September 2025. The process involved an online community survey, which was also made available in paper format at five local locations - the Social Club, the Chemist, Dornoch Stores, Dornoch Bookshop and Dornoch Hub. Promotion was undertaken through social media and an article in the *Northern Times* (see Figure 9 below).

Figure 9: Article in the Northern Times, 19th September.



A separate short survey was issued to regular hall user groups, with the option of a telephone interview as an alternative. Additional feedback was gathered through phone and email interviews with various local stakeholders. A full list of respondents is provided in the Engagement Findings report which is a separate document.

Table 5: 2025 Engagement Summary

Engagement Type	Responses
Community Survey online responses	113
Community Survey Paper responses	7
TOTAL	120
Regular hall user group responses	10 out of 14
Stakeholder interviews	9 organisations
Total responses as a % of total population	9.72%

This comprehensive consultation provided a strong evidence base for assessing both the need for a new facility and the community's priorities for its design and management. It also builds on the findings of the four earlier consultations.

And although engagement levels with the 2025 consultation were lower than anticipated, the findings align closely with the results of all previous surveys. The lower response rate may suggest a degree of consultation fatigue within the community, which may feel its views on a new community have been repeatedly sought and given, over many years.

After more than a decade of engagement, the community's aspiration for a new community centre remains unchanged, providing a robust evidence base for planning and design decisions.

A community ballot planned for early November will ask residents whether they support the proposal for a new community centre in Dornoch at Dornoch South. The results will help shape the business plan.

2.2 Summary of Community Engagement Findings

Level of Local Support

- 87.5% of respondents said a new community centre is “*very important*” or “*quite important*”.
- Only a small minority viewed it as unimportant, confirming strong overall community backing.

Current and likely usage

- 38% use the existing Social Club only a few times a year.
- 37% use it regularly (weekly, fortnightly, or monthly).

- 25% rarely or never use it, highlighting the potential to increase participation with improved facilities.

Survey results indicate that a new, improved community centre should significantly increase participation compared with the existing Social Club.

Table 6: Likely Use of a New Community Centre (with Improved Facilities)

Frequency of Use	% of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Weekly	40.17%	47
Monthly	29.91%	35
A few times a year	22.22%	26
Rarely	4.27%	5
Never	3.42%	4

Table 7: Key Priorities for a New Centre:

Priority	% of Respondents
Parking	78.8%
Larger hall for bigger events	74.9%
Good kitchen facilities	68.6%
Energy efficient design	66.7%
Ample storage	43.2%

Likely use of a new community centre:

Responses suggest a new community centre should attract higher use levels than the current social club.

Other Priorities: Accessibility improvements, child- and family-friendly facilities, flexible multi-use rooms, modern AV/digital technology, and sustainable, low-carbon design.

Main Issues with Current Social Club:

- Outdated facilities and limited accessibility.
- Steep car park, unsuitable for disabled users.
- Poor heating and lighting, especially in winter.
- Inadequate toilets and limited storage.

2.3 Regular User Group Feedback

Overview:

14 regular user groups were contacted, of which 10 responded (71%). These include arts, sports, social, and faith-based groups.

Frequency of Use:

7 of 10 groups use the hall weekly, indicating high dependency on local facilities.

Key Limitations Identified:

- Very cold during winter months.
- Sloping, limited car parking.
- Poor accessibility for older people and those with mobility issues.
- Dated and inadequate toilets and kitchen.
- Outdated projector and no sound system.
- Limited or no Wi-Fi connectivity.
- Insufficient storage.

Strengths Identified:

- Central location and affordability.
- Bright spaces (especially Struie Room).
- Heritage and community familiarity.

Priorities for a New Centre:

- Meeting rooms (7/10 groups).
- Kitchen and catering facilities (7/10 groups).
- Social and flexible areas (7/10 groups).
- Improved staging, sound and lighting equipment.

Preferred Hall Size:

56% of respondents preferred a hall twice as large as the current one (approx. 240 sqm, 160 seating capacity), enabling larger events and flexible use.

Future Needs:

Groups anticipate growth in attendance and would expand activities if modern, accessible facilities were available. Examples include film nights, youth clubs, photography workshops, and arts activities.

2.4 Stakeholder Interviews

Nine local organisations including Dornoch BID, Dornoch Cathedral, Dornoch Area Community Interest Company, Fibre Fest, UHI and the Royal Dornoch Golf Club. Across all interviews, there was strong and consistent support for the proposed new community centre, with stakeholders recognising its potential to meet growing community needs and enhance local facilities.

Themes Identified:

- **Demographics:** Younger families moving into town, highlighting need for child-friendly facilities.
- **Accessibility and Costs:** Parking charges at Dornoch South could deter users; local or free parking schemes suggested.

- Facilities: Desire for flexible event spaces, meeting rooms, a soft play area, and improved lighting.
- Collaboration: Stakeholders welcome coordination with existing venues to complement, not compete with, other facilities (e.g. Cathedral events, Hub activities).

3. Market research and assessment of need

3.1 Overview

This section analyses the current provision of community facilities in Dornoch area, identifying gaps and opportunities that justify the development of a new community centre. It draws on engagement findings, demographic trends, and comparative examples from similar rural communities to assess need, demand and long-term sustainability.

3.2 Local Context

There is strong community and stakeholder support for a new, purpose-built community centre in Dornoch. Key priorities for the facility include adequate parking, a suitably sized hall, and energy-efficient accessible building.

While Dornoch is experiencing growth in both visitor numbers, new housing developments and commercial projects such as the new distillery and new Gold Club, the provision of suitable facilities for local community groups has not kept pace. As a result, residents are “left behind” with limited access to suitable spaces and facilities for meetings, social events and cultural activities.

3.3 Impact of Poor Public Transport

Dornoch’s limited public transport provision presents a significant barrier to community participation and access to facilities. Infrequent services, limited evening timetables, and the lack of direct connections to surrounding settlements restrict opportunities for older residents, young people, and those without private transport to engage in social, cultural, and educational activities. This contributes to social isolation and reduces community cohesion, particularly during the winter months when travel is more challenging.

The proposed new Community Centre, located centrally within Dornoch, would help to mitigate these issues by bringing a wide range of activities and events together in one accessible location. By reducing the need for residents to travel for leisure, learning, or social opportunities, the Centre would promote greater inclusion, local engagement, and community wellbeing.

3.4 Opportunities and Future Demand

Market engagement and community consultation indicate clear opportunities for a new, purpose-built community centre in Dornoch to support a broader range of cultural, social, and economic activities. The facility would provide space and flexibility not currently available in existing venues, enabling growth in both community participation and visitor engagement.

Survey results confirm that a new, improved community centre would lead to significantly higher participation compared with the existing Social Club. Weekly use is projected to rise from 16.7% to 40.2%, while the proportion of residents using the facility *rarely or never* would fall from 25% to just over 7%. This clearly demonstrates strong latent demand for modern, accessible, and well-equipped facilities capable of meeting a wider range of community needs.

Beyond increased local usage, stakeholder engagement has identified several specific opportunities that the new centre could capture:

- **Live Music and Events:** The owner of the Coach House Bar and Restaurant, who also operates a small events company, currently hosts live music across various Sutherland venues due to the lack of a large performance space in Dornoch. A new hall could host such events locally—at least monthly—drawing audiences from Brora, Golspie, Tain, Bonar Bridge, and further afield. The closure of the Ironworks in Inverness (2023) presents an opportunity for Dornoch to attract mid-sized touring acts and popular bands seeking alternative venues, supporting local businesses and tourism. A recent live music event at the Social Club operated at a loss because of capacity constraints; however, organisers stressed the importance of attracting high-profile acts to enhance local cultural opportunities. The University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) has also indicated potential use of the new centre for training events once or twice a year.
- **Drama/theatre:** Both Luke Watson from DACIC and Stephen Mackintosh, who runs a local sound business frequently involved in live events, mentioned that Eden Court had shown interest in bringing performances to Dornoch, but these opportunities couldn't be taken forward due to the lack of a suitable venue. The new community centre would make it possible to host such events, opening up exciting new cultural opportunities for the town. Dornoch once had an active amateur dramatics group, similar to those still thriving in other Highland towns and villages. The new community centre will be designed to accommodate live theatre and drama productions, although additional staging may be required for some performances.
- **Festival Use:** Events such as the Whisky Festival, which currently rely on multiple venues or marquee hire, could be consolidated within the new centre—reducing costs, improving logistics, and strengthening Dornoch's profile as a cultural and entertainment destination.
- **Large dining events:** One of the key features of the new community centre will be its capacity to hold dining events for up to 150 people. Its location, immediately adjacent to Dornoch Cathedral, makes it an ideal venue for

weddings and other major celebrations. This potential is reinforced by the experience of the Seaview Centre in Balintore, which successfully operates at a similar level of catering activity.

3.5 Review of existing facilities

Dornoch currently offers several community meeting spaces across the village, each serving specific functions, but none can meet the full range of community needs. For example, the West Church Hall and the Cathedral have usage restrictions and are not licensed premises.

The new Community Centre would provide significant additionality by offering a modern, flexible, and fully accessible space capable of accommodating multiple activities simultaneously while capitalising on the opportunities and future demand identified above. Its design would enable large-scale events, performances, and conferences, alongside regular community use, something not currently possible within existing facilities. Moreover, the inclusion of a licensed area, modern amenities, and improved accessibility would ensure that the new Centre complements rather than duplicates or displaces existing provision.

West Church Hall: Owned by the Church of Scotland, the hall is an established community venue with sufficient bookings to maintain its current operations and therefore does not see the proposed new community centre as a competitor. The hall comprises an upstairs meeting room accommodating 40–50 people, a smaller room for 8–10 people, and a store area with a photocopier for church use. Toilet facilities include three ladies' toilets, one men's toilet, two urinals, and one disabled toilet at the back. The hall is heated by an oil system, which is expensive to run and does not allow for individual room temperature control. Parking is provided by Highland Council-owned spaces, so the hall does not bear maintenance responsibility. Key lessons for a potential new Dornoch hall include the importance of flexible room sizes for a variety of events and independent climate control for comfort and efficiency.

Dornoch Cathedral: Currently holds an entertainment licence from the Highland Council to host up to six events per year. To expand cultural activity and generate additional revenue, the Dornoch Gatherings initiative has been launched, showcasing music, literature, speakers, and arts events. The programme is led by a steering group of local business leaders, including representatives from the Dornoch BID, Eagle Hotel, and Links House, with Rachel Campbell-Hardiman as programme director.

A new community centre will complement the Cathedral by extending Dornoch's cultural calendar, providing a venue for smaller-scale or follow-on events such as workshops, talks, rehearsals, and community arts, thereby supporting and broadening the impact of Dornoch Gatherings while offering flexible, modern facilities for a wider range of events.

Dornoch Hub: The hub is owned and managed by Dornoch Area Community Interest Company (DACIC) in what was the former police station. Following a complete

refurbishment, it opened as the Dornoch Hub in May 2021 and provides hot desks, conference, shop, gallery space and community rooms for hire. It also houses a gym, and the former police hostel has been converted to accommodation for seasonal workers from the tourism sector. Some community groups use it for meetings e.g. Dornoch BID uses for its board meetings. The Hub's management team is keen to continue working with DADCA and signpost potential users to the existing social club/new community centre. Initial discussions are also underway between DADCA and DACIC regarding the future management of the new centre, with a proposal under consideration for DACIC to manage the facility alongside its existing buildings and activities.

3.6 Case Studies from Other Community Halls

Balintore Seaboard Centre

Overview: Built in the early 2000s, the Seaboard Centre is a modern, attractive building in a coastal location. It includes a 270 sq. m hall with a permanent stage, plus a café and post office.

Management & Staffing: Initially volunteer-run with limited use, the Centre's bookings improved significantly after a full-time manager was appointed. It now combines strong volunteer support with a paid staff team of approximately 12 people across café, post office, administration, and cleaning.

Community Role: The Centre is closely integrated into local life, managing assets such as campervan facilities, the town newsletter, and the nearby John Ross Centre. This engagement secures generous community donations (approx. £20,000 per year).

Income Generation: Campervan services (waste disposal, showers, laundry) generate goodwill and around £4,000 per year in donations. In-house catering and bar services, supported by board expertise, allow competitive hall hire (£1,000–£1,500) while maintaining strong profit margins. Bar takings often exceed £2,000 per event.

Key Lessons for Dornoch:

- Professional management is vital to move beyond volunteer limitations.
- Diversified income streams (café, post office, campervan services, donations, catering, bar) underpin financial sustainability.

Contin Hall

Overview: Contin Hall is a modern community facility featuring a main hall (18m × 8m) with underfloor heated hardwood flooring, plus a smaller meeting room (4.5m × 3.3m) and a large, fully fitted kitchen with serving hatch.

Facilities & Capacity: The main hall accommodates approximately 120 people, while the small meeting room holds up to 10. The smaller room can operate independently,

with separate access, kitchen, and toilet facilities. A hearing loop is installed in both rooms.

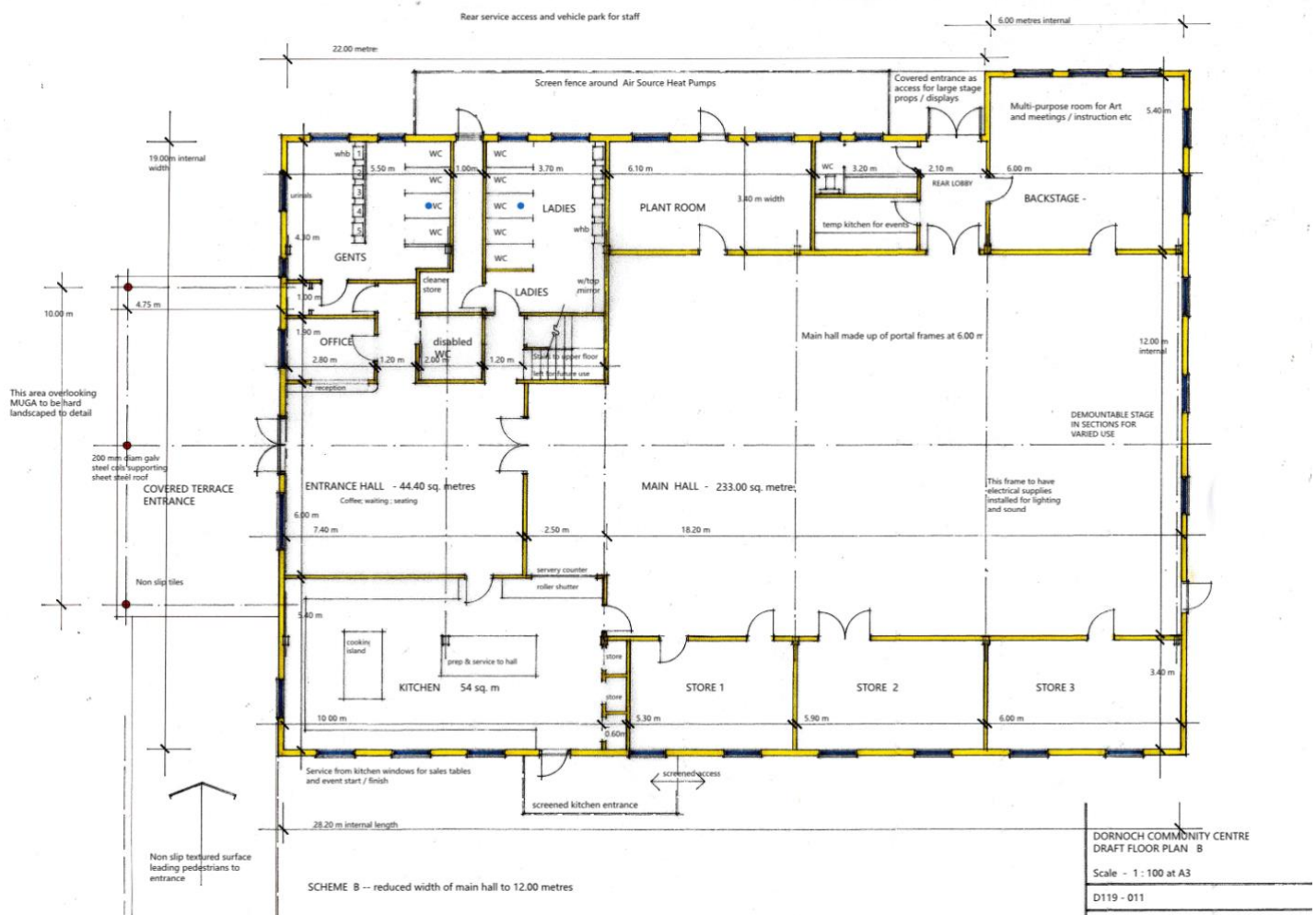
Other Features: The hall includes a terrace with scenic views and equipment for hire, such as a bouncy castle for children's parties.

Key Lessons for Dornoch:

1. Flexibility of space increases usage: providing both large and small rooms allows multiple events to run simultaneously.
2. High-quality catering facilities drive demand: a commercial-standard kitchen enables in-house or third-party catering and enhances hire potential.
3. Comfort and accessibility matter: features such as heating, good acoustics, and hearing loops make the hall welcoming and inclusive.

4. Architects – conceptual designs

Local architect Jimmy MacDonald has prepared draft conceptual designs for the proposed community centre, developed in collaboration with DADCA and informed by community and stakeholder feedback (see Section 2). The design proposes a main hall nearly twice the size of the existing Social Club Hall, with seating for around 160 people compared to the current capacity of 80—directly addressing one of the most frequent requests from users. It also includes enhanced storage space, another key priority identified through consultation. Overall, the designs reflect the community’s vision for a modern, flexible, and energy-efficient facility that will serve as a long-term social, cultural, and recreational hub for Dornoch and the wider area.



5. Feasibility appraisal of proposed new build development option

A range of development options for Dornoch's community facilities have been examined in previous studies, most recently in 2019. However, given changes in community needs, local development activity, and construction costs, it is timely to revisit these options to confirm the most feasible and sustainable approach going forward.

Option 1: Upgrading and refurbishment of the current social club

Feasibility

- Refurbishing existing building is typically around 20% more expensive than a new build and still retain the problems of location and limited parking.
- The limited footprint of the site restricts any significant extension, meaning the building will continue to face size-related constraints.
- Sits within the Dornoch Conservation Area as defined by Highland Regional Council in 1974 (although it is not a listed building) which again limits what can be done.

Income generation

- The social club would have to close for the duration of any works. The dual effect of this would be no income and the loss of a community meeting space.

Community support

- Very low levels of support for keeping the existing building, as evidenced by previous consultations.

Risk

- The location and footprint of the building do not allow for expansion. It is also in a conservation area and subject to specific planning permissions.
- Concerns about the south wing of the building which is unstable
- Challenge in attracting funding.
- Current parking and access issues would not be improved.
- Additional space created would be limited.

Operating costs

- Retrofitting old buildings can be challenging. The social club already runs at a deficit, and the expense, feasibility and limitations of the site are highly unlikely to produce any significant savings to operating costs.
- While some older buildings can be fitted with energy efficient heating systems, because the social club sits within a conservation area, it would not be possible to solar PV or solar thermal panels on the south facing roof.

- Earlier surveys show the installation of energy efficient heating systems would not be possible in a building of this type meaning operational costs are likely to remain unchanged.

Social and environmental impact

- Would not meet community aspirations stated in previous consultations.
- Provision of additional community activities would be limited.

Business model

- DADCA owns and operates the building

Option 2: Demolish current social club and build new community centre on the plot

Feasibility

- Indicative costs for demolishing the current social club and building on the site is in the region of £1.8m.
- Attracting finance for this option is likely to prove more challenging.
- Limited opportunity to increase income.

Income generation

- If the new community centre were to be developed on the current Social Club site, the limited available space would constrain building size and layout and restrict opportunities to generate income.

Community support

- Community not consulted on this option.

Risk

- Unlikely to be permitted by planning regulations.
- If the new community centre were to be developed on the current Social Club site, the limited available space would constrain building size and layout.
- A new build on the current site doesn't change the location at the top of a steep hill and limited parking both of which are unsuitable for disabled users.

Operating costs

- A new build centre gives opportunity to make some savings in this area through an energy-efficient air source heating. Solar PV/thermal are unlikely because the site is in the conservation area.
- However, due to the geography of the site, building a larger hall – as supported by the community – would be an enormous challenge. With no additional space income levels may stagnate.

Social and environmental impact

- The social and environmental impacts are likely to be limited. There would be no centre at all for the community to meet in during any building works and building on the same site footprint would not meet community needs/aspirations for a larger hall.

Business model

- DADCA owns and manages the building.

Option 3: Development of a new community centre at Dornoch South.

Feasibility

- Indicative costs for the new centre are in the region of £1.7m.
- DADCA has reserves of £310,000 towards the project and with the potential for more on the sale of existing assets. This baseline will be used to lever in additional funding.
- DADCA has contracted with an experienced fund raiser to research and write funding applications.

Income generation

- The 2025 community engagement provides evidence that a new, larger hall would attract both new users and additional bookings from existing ones.
- Local businesses have indicated they would use the new facility, as there is currently nothing suitable in Dornoch which means that they must go outside the area.

Community support

- A new-build centre has attracted consistently high levels of community support over more than a decade.

Risk

- Failure to attract sufficient funding for the capital development in what is a competitive funding landscape.
- Failure to properly engage with succession planning to ensure there are sufficient people with the right skills to manage the new facility.

Operating costs

- Running costs, particularly energy, of the existing social club are high. A new build centre gives opportunity to make significant savings in this area through an energy-efficient air source heating and solar PV.

Social and environmental impact

- The commercial sector in Dornoch is performing well with new developments including housing and a multi-million-pound distillery and visitor centre to be built at Dornoch South. But the pace of these developments, which attract more

people to the town both to live and visit, isn't matched with the provision of community facilities. The development of a new community centre, in the same location as some of these other developments, would enable the community to capitalise on this season of regeneration in the town.

- The proposed location adjacent to the MUGA (Multi-Use Games Area) provides additional opportunities for partnership and income generation. For example, the new community centre will have a covered terrace overlooking the MUGA which will provide sheltered outdoor space for spectators and informal gatherings, with potential for catering from the commercial kitchen. This proximity would encourage greater use of both facilities.
- The provision of a larger building with enhanced seating capacity will mean local people having to travel less to attend events and meetings. This aligns with Scottish Government targets for local planning and 20-minute neighbourhoods.
- It also creates potential for a new community centre to become a regional hub for the Highlands.
- Employment creation with one new post of a centre manager
- The impact of a new centre will allow existing users that have outgrown the social club to expand e.g. Fibre Fest and attract uses – e.g. the Young Curators Club and as venue for regional events.
- Minimal displacement is expected, as existing venues are unsuitable for current needs and supportive of a new facility.

Business model

- Option 1: DADCA owns and manages the building.
- Option 2: An 'in principle' agreement, currently for DACIC to manage all day-to-day operations and facilities of the Centre on DADCA's behalf, leveraging its existing staff and significant experience, with DADCA paying an annual management fee and benefiting from maximised usage and income for reinvestment in community activities.

Conclusion

Re-examining the options in light of current circumstances confirms that developing a new community centre (Option 3) remains the most viable and future-proof solution. While refurbishment or redevelopment of the existing Social Club site would face major physical, financial, and regulatory constraints, a purpose-built facility at Dornoch South offers greater flexibility, lower operating costs, and stronger alignment with community aspirations. The location also supports wider regeneration in the town; complements planned developments and provides capacity for future growth in community activity.

Full financial projections over five years will be provided in the business plan. However, indicative, high-level figures in the section 6 below suggest a financially sustainable new centre due to lower maintenance costs and higher usage.

6. Financial Overview

(High-level figures for feasibility study – detailed projections will be included in the business plan)

A financial comparison between the current Social Club and the proposed New Community Centre (at 2024 prices) demonstrates a significantly stronger financial outlook for the new facility.

Table 8: Annual Income and Expenditure – Current social club versus new community centre (2024 prices)

	New Community Centre	Social Club
	£'000	£'000
	Estimate (Year 1)	2024 actual
<u>Income</u>		
Hire of Hall regular users (1)	14	12
Hire of Hall new users (2)	6	0
Conferences, large group bookings, concerts, theatre etc. (3)	8	0
Donations and other income	6	6
Total	34	18
<u>Expenditure</u>		
Cleaning (4)	12	10
Accounting and Administration	8	8
Heat and Light (5)	4	4
Repairs and Maintenance (6)	1	6
Insurance etc	4	4
Total	29	32
Surplus/(Deficit)	5	-14

Key Assumptions

The projected increase in usage from the engagement findings has clear financial implications. Higher levels of community engagement as well as increased usage from existing user groups would generate greater and more consistent income through hall hire, events, and regular bookings.

1. Hire of Hall (Regular Users): Hourly rate increases from £15 to £16 to reflect the improved quality of the new facility.
2. Hire of Hall (New Users): The larger, more flexible layout will attract additional user groups and allow multiple bookings simultaneously.
3. Large Events and Bookings: The main hall will be capable of accommodating conferences, concerts, and theatre performances, creating new income streams.
4. Cleaning Costs: Increased slightly due to the larger floor area and higher level of use.
5. Heat and Light: Solar panels will offset some energy costs. However, calculating a precise figure for how much this might be is not possible at this stage. While any surplus electricity generated by the solar PV system will be sold back to the grid, the closure of the Feed-in-Tariff in 2019 means energy companies now set their own tariffs at a significantly lower rate, typically around 15 pence per unit of electricity. Factors such as daylight hours, the angle of the sun and cloud cover also impact the maximum performance levels of solar PV. It will take time, once the new centre is built, to gain a clear picture of what energy costs will be.
6. Repairs and Maintenance: Minimal allowance included as the new building will initially require little maintenance.

Financial Summary

The financial comparison highlights the substantial improvement in performance expected from the new Community Centre compared with the existing Social Club.

- Total income is projected to almost double from £18,000 to £34,000, driven by new user groups, higher hall hire rates, and expanded capacity for large events.
- Operating expenditure remains broadly stable, rising only slightly to £29,000, despite the increased size and scope of the facility.
- The new Centre is therefore forecast to achieve a surplus of £5,000 in the first year compared with the current deficit of £14,000.

This demonstrates that the new facility would not only address community, and accessibility needs but also operate on a sustainable and self-supporting basis, strengthening its long-term viability.

7. Conclusion, recommendations and next steps.

For a significant period – 17 years – the Dornoch community has attempted to replace a dated school building, one which was never designed as a town hall, but which has served that purpose, with a modern, energy-efficient community centre. There is an ample body of evidence, built up over many years, that while the current social club has served as a busy, popular base for local groups, the building's age, condition and limited capacity mean it now loses money.

A 180-year-old building can no longer serve the needs of a community whose population has grown and changed and where the commercial sector is enjoying a period of regeneration.

A new centre, which has consistently had overwhelming community backing over the years, has the potential for much greater impact, allowing existing groups to grow, new groups involving different, unreached sectors of the population to start and potentially create employment.

After several unsuccessful attempts to get a new community centre project off the ground, there is finally a moment in time for Dornoch when critical factors - notably a site and nearly half the necessary finance which could lever in additional funding – are now in place.

Recommendations and next steps for taking the project forward.

- Development and implementation of a fundraising plan.
- The main finding of this report to feed into a five-year business plan with financial projections.
- Ongoing marketing of the redevelopment project to retain community interest and keep the profile high.
- Confirmation from the Scottish Land Fund (SLF) regarding the sale of the land at Dornoch South from DACIC to DADCA for £1.
- Agreeing the partnership approach with DACIC regarding the potential provision of facilities management and operational services for the new centre.