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| Agenda Item | 5ii       |
| Report No   | CCC/12/26 |

# The Highland Council

**Committee:** Climate Change

**Date:** 12 August 2026

**Report Title:** Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Waste

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive - Place

## 1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The report provides an update on the work being progressed through the Waste Thematic Group.

## 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to **consider** and **note** the progress of actions by the Waste Thematic Group.

## 3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - Under current budgetary arrangements, the Council's Waste Service absorbs the full cost of collecting, disposing, and treating of waste generated by all Council services. This funding model does not help to incentivise behaviour change across services to reduce waste or improve recycling performance.

As previously reported to Members, funding awarded by the Scottish Government through the Recycling Improvement Fund has enabled significant enhancements to kerbside waste and recycling services across Highland. However, this funding did not extend to internal infrastructure within Council premises.

The paper outlines the various workstreams currently being led by the Waste Thematic Group. These workstreams span operational improvements, stakeholder engagement, and data monitoring, and will require coordinated input from multiple Council services to ensure successful delivery.

- 3.2 **Legal** - Since 2014, it has been a legal requirement for all organisations across Scotland to present paper, card, metals, plastic bottles and glass for recycling as set out in The Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012.

The Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024 sets a framework to support Scotland's transition to a zero waste and circular economy. The circular economy is a sustainable system where waste is eliminated by keeping resources in use, by re using, repairing and recycling creating economic, environmental and social benefits.

- 3.3 **Risk** - As the largest organisation and employer in the region, the Council is well placed to demonstrate best environmental practice in managing waste, resources and recycling. Delivering measurable reductions in waste and improvements in recycling will require ongoing engagement and behaviour change across all Council services.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – The effective management of waste is essential to the health and safety of all householders, staff and other service users.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** - There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

#### **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 This is a monitoring and update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

#### **5 Waste service change update**

- 5.1 The Highland-wide rollout of the twin-stream recycling service was completed in October 2025 when households and businesses in Lochaber transitioned to the new system. This means households, all Highland Council premises and Council business waste customers now benefit from the same standardised waste and recycling service across the Highland area.
- 5.2 The new system was designed to improve both the quantity and quality of recyclable materials collected at the kerbside and aligns with forthcoming national policy requirements. Paper and card are collected separately in blue bins, while plastics and metal containers are collected in green recycling bins. Food waste collection services were also expanded to households in Nairn, Easter Ross, Lochaber and Drumnadrochit.

- 5.3 The service changes continue to deliver positive outcomes. The Council's recycling rate for 2025 reached 45.1%. Since the introduction of the new waste and recycling services in April 2024:-
- Approximately 7,800 tonnes of residual (non-recyclable) waste have been diverted from disposal through increased recycling and waste segregation.
  - Approximately 2,500 tonnes of food waste have been diverted from disposal through separate collection and treatment.
  - Reduced contamination has enabled an additional 3,400 tonnes of recyclable material to be successfully processed through recycling facilities.
- 5.4 The success of the Highland-wide waste and recycling service transformation was recognised at the 2026 APSE Scotland Striving for Excellence Awards, where the Waste Services Team received the Gold Award in the Waste and Recycling category. The awards celebrate excellence and innovation across Scottish local government and recognise authorities that are delivering outstanding performance in waste and recycling, parks, fleet and grounds management services.

## **6 Waste Audits**

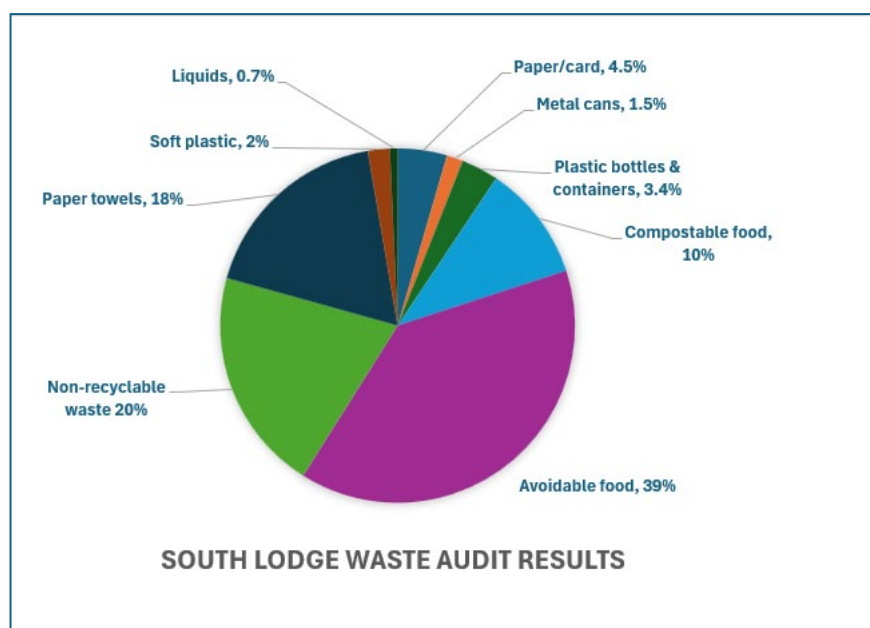
- 6.1 Waste audits continue to provide valuable information on the quantity and composition of waste generated within Council buildings. Following audits at Kingussie High School, Inverness Royal Academy and Council Headquarters, two additional audits have been completed at primary schools to establish a broader evidence base and identify opportunities to improve recycling performance and reduce disposal costs.

- 6.2 South Lodge Primary School, Invergordon (Spring, 2026)

South Lodge Primary School has approximately 150 pupils.

The waste audit identified that food waste accounted for almost 50% of the contents of non-recyclable waste bins, with much of this comprising avoidable food waste from school lunches.

Encouragingly, recycling rates for paper, cardboard, plastics and metal containers were higher than those recorded in the secondary schools audited to date, indicating strong engagement with recycling practices within the school.



### 6.3 Auldearn Primary School (November 2025)

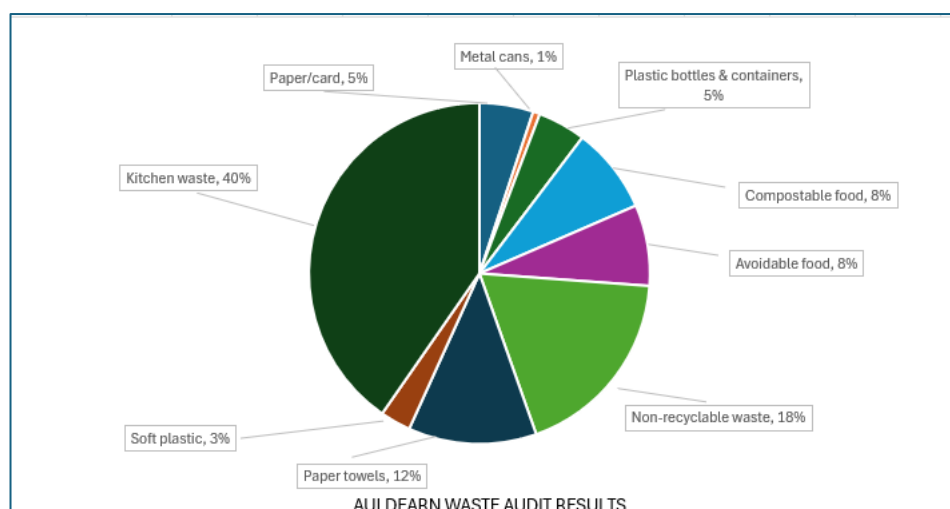
Auldearn Primary School has approximately 199 pupils, with a further 45 children attending the nursery on the same site.

The audit identified that food waste represented 74% of material placed within non-recyclable waste bins, with the majority originating from kitchen operations.

The findings highlight the need for further work to:-

- understand the types of food waste being generated within the school kitchen; and
- determine the extent to which the nursery provision contributes to overall food waste volumes

As with South Lodge Primary School, recycling rates for paper, cardboard, plastics and metal containers were higher than those observed in secondary schools.



#### 6.4 Kingussie High School Update

The school has been taking part in a pilot since September 2025, serving food from the canteen in reuseable lunch containers, rather than single use packaging. Before the pilot started, single use packaging accounted for 9% of the waste stream; a follow up waste audit showed a reduction in this material stream down to 5% which is really positive.

There have been some losses of the reusable containers and further engagement with the pupils will be provided, to remind them to return these items rather than taking them away or throwing them in the bin.

Standard crockery (plates and bowls) have also been used by the Catering Team at the school to serve food on which is also working well. There have not been any additional hours to accommodate increased labour from washing up.

Since the introduction of the new recycling infrastructure, the amount of recycling from the school has not yet increased. Waste Services and CCFM have a meeting planned at the start of the new academic year, to identify solutions to address issues with contamination of the recycling, location of the recycling bins along with refining roles and responsibilities to increase recycling rates.

Further engagement with the pupils will also be delivered to help establish and embed consistent recycling habits across the school.

#### 6.5 Inverness Royal Academy

Progress continues at Inverness Royal Academy through collaboration between Waste Services, Catering, Cleaning and Facilities Management (CCFM) and the school's management team.

The Waste Aware Team has delivered workshops and interactive sessions covering:-

- reducing waste consumption;
- food waste;
- ultra-fast fashion; and
- the benefits of recycling

During the 2026/27 academic year, new recycling infrastructure will be trialled within the school to make it easier for pupils to recycle plastic bottles, cans, paper and card.

#### 6.6 HQ, Inverness

No further audit activity has been undertaken at Headquarters since the baseline assessment. However, lessons learned from the audit continue to inform wider plans to improve recycling infrastructure and expand food waste collection services across Council buildings.

## **7 Recycling infrastructure**

- 7.1 Waste audits undertaken across primary and secondary schools have identified significant quantities of recyclable materials continuing to be disposed of within non-recyclable waste bins. Analysis of the audits completed to date suggests that approximately 75 tonnes of recyclable materials per year, including paper, card, plastic bottles and metal cans, could potentially be diverted for recycling across the school estate.
- 7.2 The findings have highlighted that, whilst many schools are performing well, opportunities exist to improve access to recycling facilities within school buildings and grounds. The audits have also demonstrated the importance of combining infrastructure improvements with pupil and staff engagement to maximise participation and recycling performance.
- 7.3 Proposals have therefore been developed to improve recycling infrastructure across Highland schools. The proposals include internal and external recycling facilities, classroom recycling containers, behaviour change activities and ongoing monitoring to support increased recycling and reduced waste.
- 7.4 The estimated cost of providing enhanced recycling infrastructure across the school estate is approximately £120,000. Given the scale of the school estate and the opportunity to improve recycling performance whilst supporting compliance with waste legislation and the Council's climate ambitions, the Waste Thematic Group continues to explore potential funding opportunities to support delivery of this work.

## **8 Food waste in schools**

- 8.1 Food waste remains one of the most significant waste streams generated within Council premises, particularly across the school estate.
- 8.2 The waste audits undertaken to date indicate that food waste typically accounts for between 35% and 75% of the waste produced by schools, with generally higher percentages recorded within primary schools than secondary schools.
- 8.3 The Food in Schools Project recognises that food waste is influenced by a range of interconnected factors extending beyond food preparation alone. Potential contributing factors include:-
- supplier contractual arrangements;
  - compliance with nutritional standards;
  - menu choice;
  - pupil preferences;
  - time available to consume meals; and
  - levels of supervision and support within dining environments

- 8.4 To better understand these influences, Waste Services and the Catering Team are developing a programme of monitoring and analysis within a representative sample of schools.

The work will involve monitoring food waste generated at lunchtime within school canteens and dining halls. Leftovers from specific menu choices will be separated and weighed, with the resulting data analysed alongside other relevant factors to identify trends and improve understanding of food waste within schools. The findings will be used to inform targeted interventions aimed at reducing food waste.

- 8.5 An initial monitoring exercise was undertaken at Tarradale Primary School.

During a single school day:-

- Approximately 18 kg of food waste was generated from school lunches.
- This equates to an estimated 90 kg per week.
- Packed lunch waste accounted for only 1 kg, consisting mainly of soft plastics such as crisp packets and plastic trays, with very little food waste observed.

The pilot has demonstrated the value of collecting more detailed information on food waste generation and will help shape the wider monitoring programme.

## **9 Expansion of food waste collections across Council premises**

- 9.1 The Waste Aware Team is progressing the next phase of food waste service expansion within Council premises.

- 9.2 From the 2026/27 academic year, food waste collections will be extended to additional primary and secondary schools located in areas already served by household food waste collections, including:-

- Nairn;
- Easter Ross;
- Lochaber; and
- Drumnadrochit

This expansion will provide approximately 30 additional schools with access to food waste recycling services, nearly doubling the number of schools able to separate food waste from kitchens and dining areas for recycling.

- 9.3 The service will also be introduced to additional Council offices and operational buildings, including:

- County Buildings, Dingwall; and
- The Charles Kennedy Building, Fort William

This will enable more Council staff to recycle food waste while at work and further support the Council's wider waste reduction objectives.

## 10 Next steps

- 10.1 The Waste Thematic Group is progressing a number of workstreams to improve waste management practices across Council premises. This includes:-
- developing a corporate approach to waste management across the Council estate, including clear roles and responsibilities;
  - developing policies and processes for the reuse, redistribution and responsible disposal of electrical equipment and other Council assets;
  - supporting the development of Net Zero Design Standards to ensure circular economy and resource efficiency principles are embedded within new build and refurbishment projects;
  - ensuring waste prevention, reuse and resource efficiency considerations are reflected within procurement and asset management practices; and
  - identifying opportunities to make better use of resources across the organisation and reduce the volume of materials sent for disposal.

## 11 Highland Reuse & Repair Fund

- 11.1 The Highland Reuse and Repair Fund was established to encourage the reuse and repair of items and avoid them being sent for recycling, treatment or disposal.
- 11.2 Following the successful launch of the fund in 2025/26, 12 projects were awarded funding totalling £273,117. A further £300,000 was allocated to the fund for 2026/27, with a second funding round opening in April 2026. The second round attracted strong interest from community organisations and social enterprises across Highland, resulting in 17 projects receiving a further £272,902.
- 11.3 Across the first two funding rounds, £546,019 has been awarded to 29 projects, supporting a diverse range of initiatives that will increase repair and reuse capacity, divert materials from the waste stream, and deliver environmental, social and community benefits across Highland.
- 11.4 Further details of the funded projects are provided within **Appendix 1**.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 13 July 2026

Author: Imogen Percy-Bell, Principal Waste Management Officer  
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Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Highland Reuse & Repair Fund Projects

## Appendix 1

### Highland Reuse & Repair fund projects 2026-27 (April 2026 round)

| Organisation                       | Project Title                                          | Project Description                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Grant Offer |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Dornoch Firth Group                | Central and East Sutherland Repair & Re-use Hubs       | Enhance sustainability and community engagement across East Sutherland by awareness raising, providing collections, and leveraging the collaborative strengths of three local Men's Sheds and existing Repair Cafés.       | £21,858     |
| Flip of the Coin CIC               | Second Life Studio – Creative Reuse & Skills Programme | Upskilling local people to recycle, refurbish, and repair furniture, as well as creatively upcycle clothing, transforming items that would otherwise go to landfill into functional, attractive pieces with renewed value. | £26,640     |
| Strathspey Pedal Initiative CIC    | Bike Reuse Programme                                   | Community-led waste reduction by providing a local facility for free bike recycling. A dedicated reuse mechanic would manage donations and sales and refurbish donated bikes.                                              | £19,872     |
| Wick Players                       | Repair, Reuse, Perform: Wick Players Wardrobe          | Strengthening our wardrobe department through the purchase of essential equipment to support repair, reuse, and creatively upcycling costumes for our productions.                                                         | £3,260      |
| Thurso Community Café              | The Salvage Shop                                       | Community skills workshops, an expanded pre-loved shop and the collection and re purposing of un-wanted items.                                                                                                             | £15,685     |
| Lairg and District Learning Centre | Lairg Make and Mend: Community Textile Repair Café     | Drop-in sessions and workshops focusing on textiles and on finding simple, practical ways for people to reduce textile waste in their everyday lives.                                                                      | £11,362     |
| Kilchoan Community Shed            | Kilchoan Community Shed                                | Purchase of tools for a new community shed in Kilchoan, offering 3 drop-in sessions per week to undertake repair, repurposing and making activities, plus a monthly repair café.                                           | £4,011      |
| Inverness Tool Library             | Repair and Maintenance Project                         | PT Repair Coordinator to support volunteers and develop a comprehensive in-house maintenance and repair service.                                                                                                           | £17,772     |

| Organisation                 | Project Title                                                 | Project Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Grant Offer     |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Aban                         | Gear Hub Phase 2 Project 'Fit for the Future'                 | Expansion of free to access Outdoor Gear Library, improved donation process and increased sales, pop up Repair Service.                                                                                                                                                                             | £38,720         |
| Blythswood                   | New Chapters Highland                                         | Expand and streamline existing reuse work with a group of adults with learning disabilities and their carers, preparing and scanning second-hand books, DVDs and CDs for online resale or recycling.                                                                                                | £24,000         |
| TYKES Young Carers           | Young Carers Enterprise Project                               | Supporting young carers to design, develop and deliver social enterprise activities through the TYKES charity shop, repairing and upcycling donated items, while building confidence, practical skills and recognised achievements that improve employability and future progression opportunities. | £19,982         |
| Seaboard Memorial Hall Ltd   | Repair Café & Reuse/Recycle Initiative                        | A monthly Repair Café session with a programme of practical workshops and demonstrations to promote repair and reuse skills.                                                                                                                                                                        | £4,228          |
| Creative Lochalsh            | Still Running Bike Repairs / Scribble and Giggle Paper Making | Bicycle repair, servicing and recycling at regular monthly clinics, including preparing bikes to pass on to those in need. Paper making workshops from waste cardboard.                                                                                                                             | £3,830          |
| Learn and Create Limited     | Mend and Trend                                                | Reducing clothes waste by teaching repair and upcycling skills through equipment hire, workshops and skills development.                                                                                                                                                                            | £6,372          |
| Go Golspie Development Trust | Go Golspie Repair Cafe and Sustainability Workshops           | Fortnightly Repair Café and regular sustainability/upcycling workshops.                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | £10,280         |
| Urram SCIO                   | Ardgour Reuse Hub                                             | Re-opening the old village shop as a re-use hub / 2nd hand shop.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | £30,432         |
| Clach Cycle                  | Community Bike Workshop                                       | Monthly maintenance sessions, and bi-weekly fix your own bike sessions, supervised by a qualified mechanic and providing workshop space and tools.                                                                                                                                                  | £14,598         |
|                              |                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>£272,902</b> |

### Highland Reuse & Repair fund projects 2025-26

| Organisation                          | Project Title                              | Project Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Grant Offer |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Strathspey Works – Granttown Remakery | Revive and Reuse - in the Circular Economy | Teaching key employability and life skills through repair, reuse, and upcycling. Assisting young people, young adults with a learning-disability and the unemployed, teaching work skills, developing confidence and independence, and supporting individuals into work. Reducing the amount of waste going to landfill through repairing, refurbishing and reselling items.                                                                                                           | £29,350     |
| ILM Highland                          | Rescued and Ready                          | Reuse and repair of small domestic items. Employing an electrician to undertake checks and repairs, setting up workshop space, running repair skills sessions, and extending community engagement to schools and community groups.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | £40,700     |
| New Start Highland                    | Reuse Revolution                           | Launch the Highland's First mattress collection and reuse centre, run repair and up-cycling class each week, hold 3 swap shops, monthly 'knit and knatter' and promote volunteering opportunities.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | £49,330     |
| Rag Tag and Textile                   | RagTag's Skills Café                       | Start a Skills Café open to the public offering textile-based reuse and repair skills using donated goods, garden activities including growing vegetables and composting, and skills and resource sharing with other charities and community groups.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | £11,833     |
| Lochaber Environmental Group          | Fort William Bike Shed                     | The Fort William Bike shed Project is based on the principles of circular economy. Through bike reuse and repair, we support community members and hard to reach groups to overcome barriers to cycling.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | £26,304     |
| Golspie Youth Action Group            | GYAP Circular Economy Project – Phase One  | After the sudden closure of the Charity shop in Golspie, there has been public demand for a replacement. The Youth Club (GYAP) intends to run the charity shop for the benefit of the youth club and wider community. We aim to employ a part time project officer to support the planning and delivery of projects that focus on sustainability and reuse/repair Phase One covers the priority 'Skills for Sustainable Living' and would involve the delivery of a Library of Things. | £29,740     |

| Organisation                                    | Project Title                                                                                       | Project Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Grant Offer     |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Green Hive                                      | Developing and diversifying local social enterprise activities to support reuse and repair in Nairn | Development and delivery of an accredited vocational skills programmes for people experiencing barriers to employment. Offering skills programmes that develop repair, mending and creative reuse capabilities. Upcycling and extending the life of different materials, including plastics, fabrics and textiles, and bicycles. Building local capacity and making a contribution to reduced household costs. | £24,906         |
| Inverness Darkroom                              | Futureproofing: Making the Inverness Darkroom Sustainable                                           | The darkroom is a voluntary organisation promoting skills in analogue photography. The project will promote the collection, repair and use vintage equipment and out of date consumables, teaching repair skills and traditional techniques to members of all ages.                                                                                                                                            | £2,000          |
| Lochbroom & Ullapool Community Trust Ltd (LUCT) | New Broom Depot                                                                                     | Creating a donations depot, to compliment and support the established work of the New Broom – the Trust’s preloved charity shop. This depot would receive donations, sort, clean, mend and store them ready for sale at the New Broom. It would also be a workspace for larger textile reuse projects and workshops.                                                                                           | £46,239         |
| Transition Black Isle                           | Black Isle Repair Café (BIRC)                                                                       | Repair Cafe and Sustainable Skills Workshops to reduce waste, extend the life of everyday items and empower people with the skills and confidence to repair rather than replace.                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | £4,820          |
| Thurso Community Development Trust              | “Beyond the Bin” Upcycling Workshop Program                                                         | Thurso Community Development Trust (TCDT) is seeking funding to deliver a community-centred upcycling workshop programme designed to reduce waste, build practical skills, and strengthen environmental awareness through creative and accessible hands-on learning.                                                                                                                                           | £5,625          |
| Lochaber Environmental Group                    | Fort William Repair Cafe                                                                            | LEG require funding for 6 additional repair cafe sessions between March 2026 and April 2027 along with 1 specialized outdoor gear repair cafe aligned with the Fort William mountain bike festival                                                                                                                                                                                                             | £2,270          |
|                                                 |                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>£273,117</b> |