

Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Local Place Plan 2026



Prepared on behalf of:

Acknowledgements

**Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and
Achnacarry
Community Council**

Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO



Version: Sunday, 8 March 2026

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Commissioned by Community Council: 3rd February 2026
Endorsed by Community Council: 4th March 2026

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SUMMARY

Our approach is governed by the principle what we wish to build a thriving sustainable community and pass on to future generations a landscape that retains its character and continues to be much admired and visited. By a sustainable community we mean economically sustainable (employment and housing), balanced demographically, connected transport, promotes social and community well being and provides environmental stewardship.

This poses a significant challenge for Scotlands largest Community Council area, covering over 1000 sq Km's that is predominately rural and includes some of the most impressive landscapes in Scotland.

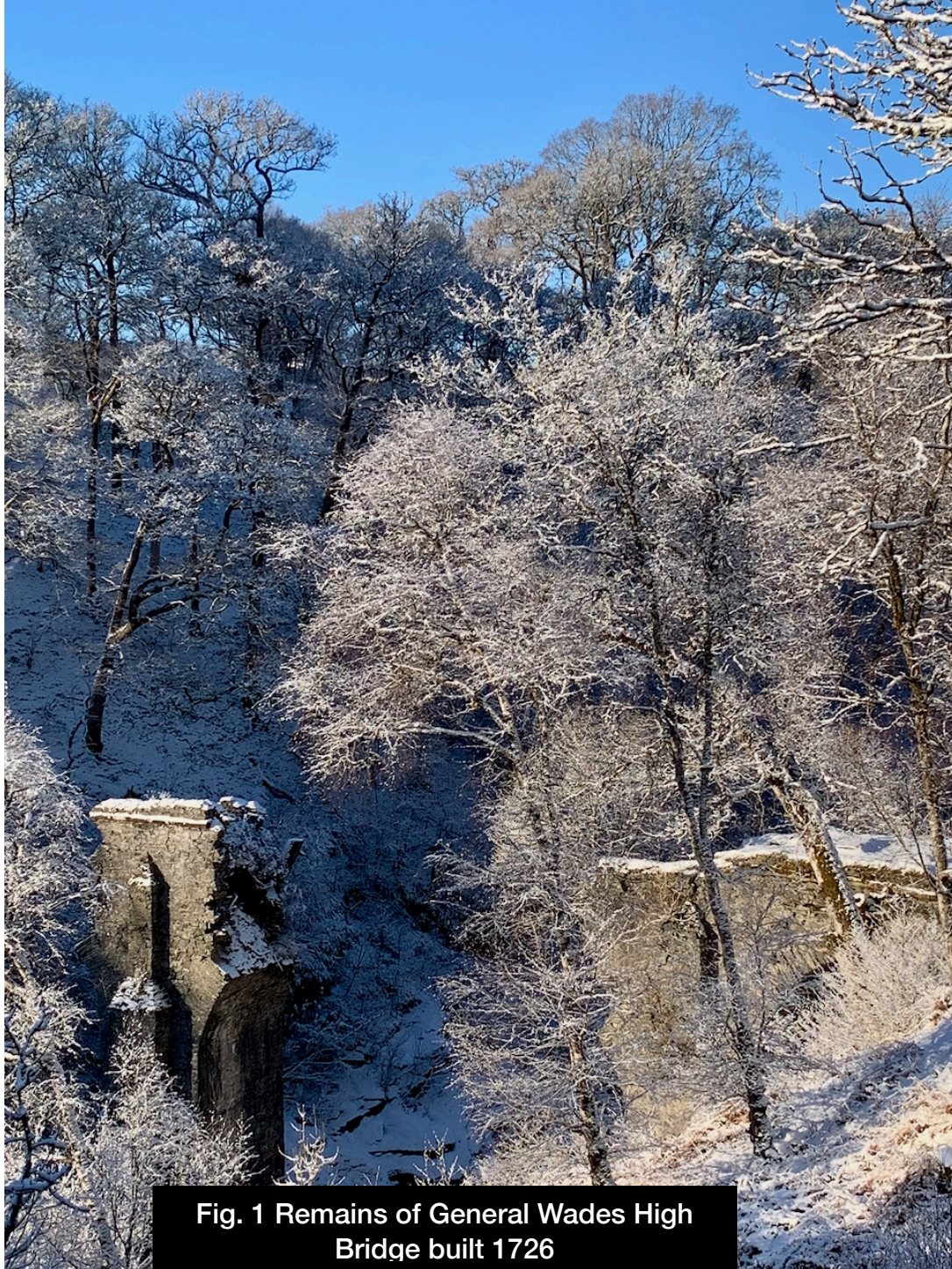
Two thirds of the 1648 people that live in the area live along the A86 corridor in three villages: Spean Bridge, Inveroy, and Roy Bridge. Any future expansion should be concentrated in that corridor, while maintain the the character of the villages. This is needed to minimise new new infrastructure, and maximising population to encourage the growth of support services (food retail, medical, educational needs, public toilets, etc.,).

The growth in second homes and the attractiveness of the area to people outside the area unintentionally drives up houses prices, making it difficult for young families and individuals to find homes. This in turn impacts the availability of tradesman and others but ultimately drives demographic instability. To address this more affordable houses are needed and support services for young families are urgently needed as are restrictions on second homes.

Careful environmental stewardship of this area is needed to maintain its attractiveness to visitors that provide much needed income. Unfortunately the area has been subject to blight caused by unauthorised clearance and sale of small plots, often damaging protected land. This has already resulted in Lochaber being known as an area where people have lost considerable amounts of money. If this goes on serious damage will be done to our landscape.

The Spean Bridge SCIO has been forwarding the objective outlined above via community buy-outs, including the development of a community garden to help develop well being in Spean Bridge and the redevelopment of the Roy Bridge School to provide affordable housing.

Upgrading the fibre broadband has resulted in an opportunities to attract digital nomads (people who work from home) into the area, providing additional jobs and income. People are already moving into the area with these skills, but connectedness including active travel is a major drawback.



**Fig. 1 Remains of General Wades High
Bridge built 1726**

Spean Bridge , Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Local Place Plan

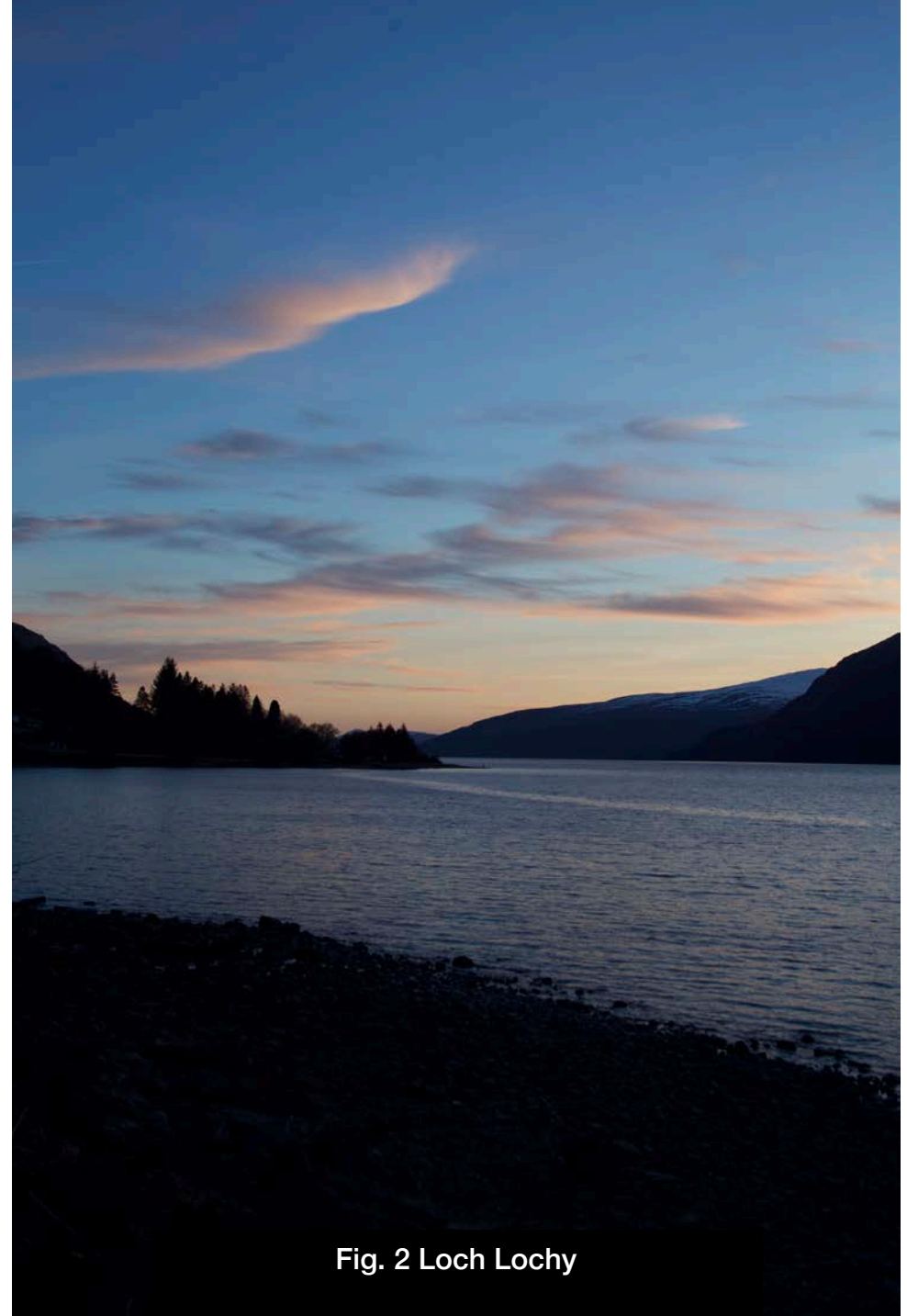


Fig. 2 Loch Lochy

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Summary

The Community Council area is the largest in Scotland covering about 1000 sq Km with approx. two thirds of its population of 1648 (2022) to be found along the A86 between Spean Bridge and Roy Bridge. It is an intensely rural area with Roy Bridge as the most deprived community locally. The Community Council is working hand in hand with the Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO to address local needs to bring this 5 to 10 year plan to life.

1. About Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Community

1.1 Community Council Area an Introduction

The Community Council Area spans a thousand square kilometres, making it the largest in Scotland covering some of the wildest and most beautiful landscapes in the Highlands with an average population density of around 1.6 people per sq Km. The majority of the area, after discounting for the A86 Corridor (see below) has population density of less than 0.5 person per Km. The area abuts no fewer than nine other community council areas (Fig. 3 below, detailed topographic maps are included in Appendix I A1.1 to A1.3). In terms of settlements there are two villages of which Spean Bridge is the largest followed by Roy Bridge, with the hamlet of Inveroy between. Hamlets are scattered across the area, including Achnacarry, Clunes, Gairloch,, Mucomir, Stronaba and Achnabobane, with isolated houses and farms more widely distributed.

The area is served by the A82 linking Fort William and Inverness via Spean Bridge and provides a major NE-SW route through the Highlands. Heading east from Spean Bridge the A86 provides a much poorer link to the A9 and the East Coast main line at Aviemore.

Train services are available on the West Highland line that runs from Mallaig to Glasgow. Within the council area there are stations at Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge, Tulloch and Corroul.

The area is also served by the intercity bus service between Inverness and Fort William, south to Glasgow and north west to Skye, plus a few sparse local services. However, the vast area contributes to ageing residents in deeply rural areas with no access to public transport feeling isolated.

Finally the iconic Caledonian Canal follows the Great Glen and cuts through the area at Gairloch, accompanied by the Great Glen way. The canal today is mostly used for recreational purposes, particularly in summer, with smaller volumes of commercial traffic throughout the year.

1.2 Landscape and setting

The Community Council area lies largely within the Great Glen formed as a result of lateral movement on the 1000km NE-SW trending Great Glen Fault over 400 million years ago. The fault with a total lateral movement of 100 - 200Km is still active today, although much less so than in the past. More recently, in the last half a million years during the Ice Age, the fault which represented a weak zone was widened and deepened by glaciers.

A large part of the area in the Spean Bridge - Roy Bridge and Glen Roy area forms part of the Parallel Roads of Lochaber SSSI. This single SSSI constitutes around 15% of the total area. Here the landscape has been extensively modified by the last significant ice advance in Scotland some 12000 years ago.

Other protected areas within the Community Council area include Glen Roy National Nature Reserve, Arkaig Pine Forest, and the All a'Mhuic Butterfly Reserve.

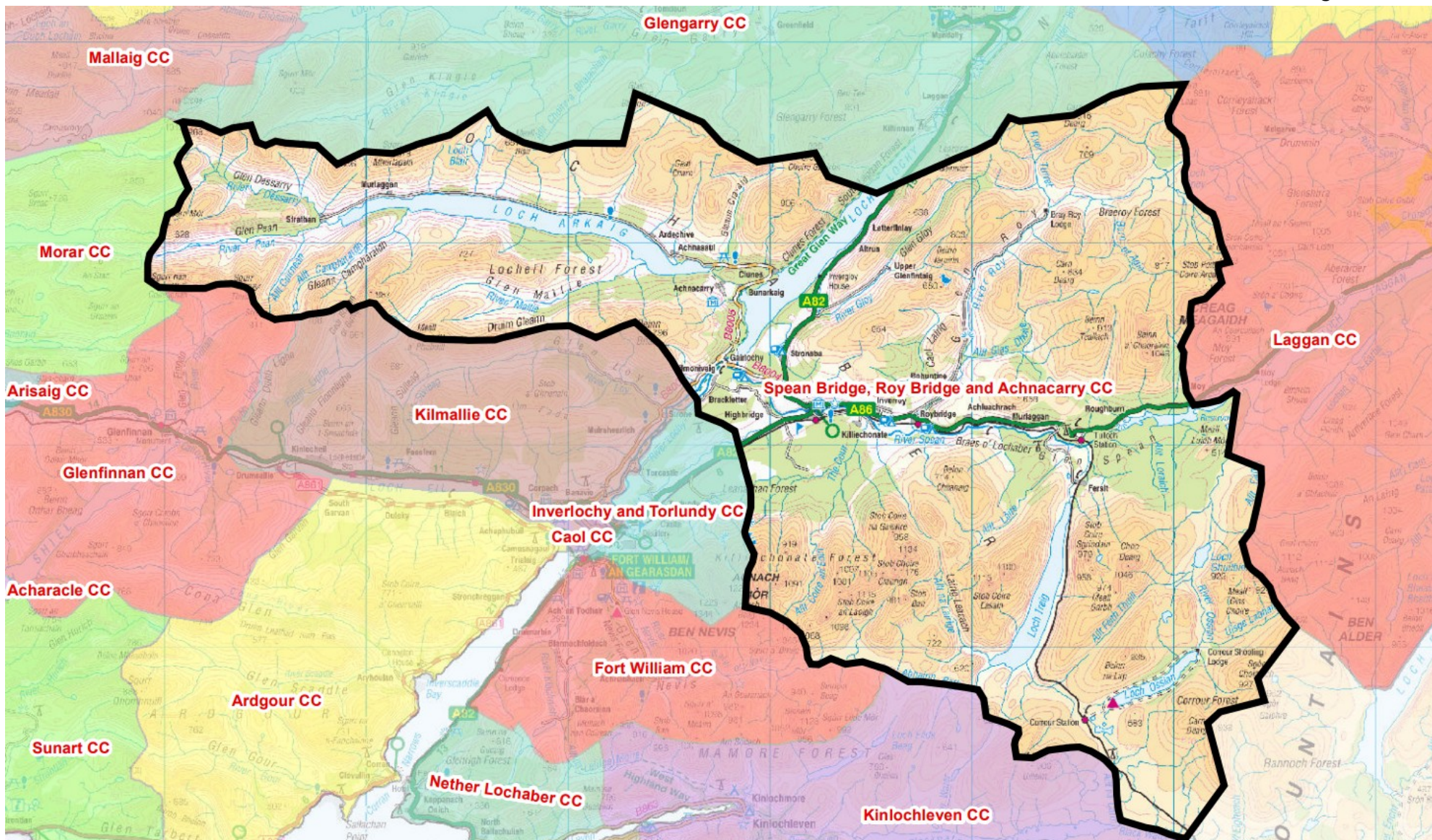


Fig. 3 Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Community Council area and adjacent Community Councils

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Fig. 4 Looking toward Corrou Station in the south east of the community council area.

The habitat of the area is dominated (See Appendix 2, Fig. A2.1) by blanket bog, temperate shrub heathland, non native conifer plantations, lesser volumes of broad leaf woodland, remnant Caledonian Forest and grasslands along the valley bottoms. Overall, the vegetation was damaged by the move toward sheep during the clearances, and the race to provide commercial woodlands that began during WW1.

Wildlife abounds outside built up areas, including an over abundance of deer, with otter, wild cats, voles, amphibians and birds including eagles, Osprey and Hen Harriers.

The council area is bounded by the mountains on the banks of Loch Lochy and Loch Arkaig in the north west and the Grey Corrie range in the south east. The area contains some 14 munro giving the area its mountainous feel. The ice age also created many freshwater lochs including Loch Arkaig in the west and Loch Ossian in the east. Many have, however, been deepened and extended by hydro schemes such as Loch Lochy, Loch Traig and Laggan, where the water levels are controlled by hydro-electric dams.

1.3 Settlements and demographics

The 2022 census estimates that the total population of the council area is 1648 in 748 households, and this has been approximately flat since 2011. There is estimated to be around another 275 people making regular use of second homes, and almost 10% of the housing stock is available for short term letting. The area's beauty and accessibility contribute to its appeal to the retired, boosted by our proximity to a regional hospital at Fort William. There are almost five times as many residents from the rest of the UK as the Scottish average. Unfortunately, new arrivals are often disappointed when they move here on the availability of services e.g. GP's in the village,

The main axis of settlement lies along the A86, from its junction with the A82 where Spean Bridge lies, east to Roy Bridge some 5.1 Km away. Between the two is the hamlet of Inveroy. Currently each village is separated from the next by open country. Within this the A86 Corridor is around 63% of the population, with a population density around 85 people per square Km.

The local economy has an over-reliance on the hospitality and accommodation sectors. This promotes a lack of job diversity which together with the paucity of affordable housing and lack of services is leading to depopulation of the younger generation that unless addressed will ultimately destroy the communities.

Detailed maps and satellite images of the major villages and hamlets is included in Appendix 3 (Spean Bridge Fig. A3.1 and photos A3.2, Roy Bridge A3.3 and photos 20-21, Gairloch and Mucomir A3.4 and photos A3.5, Achnabobane and Highbridge, A3.6 with photos A3.7-A3.8, Tulocha and Ferrit, A3.9, Stronaba, A3.10)

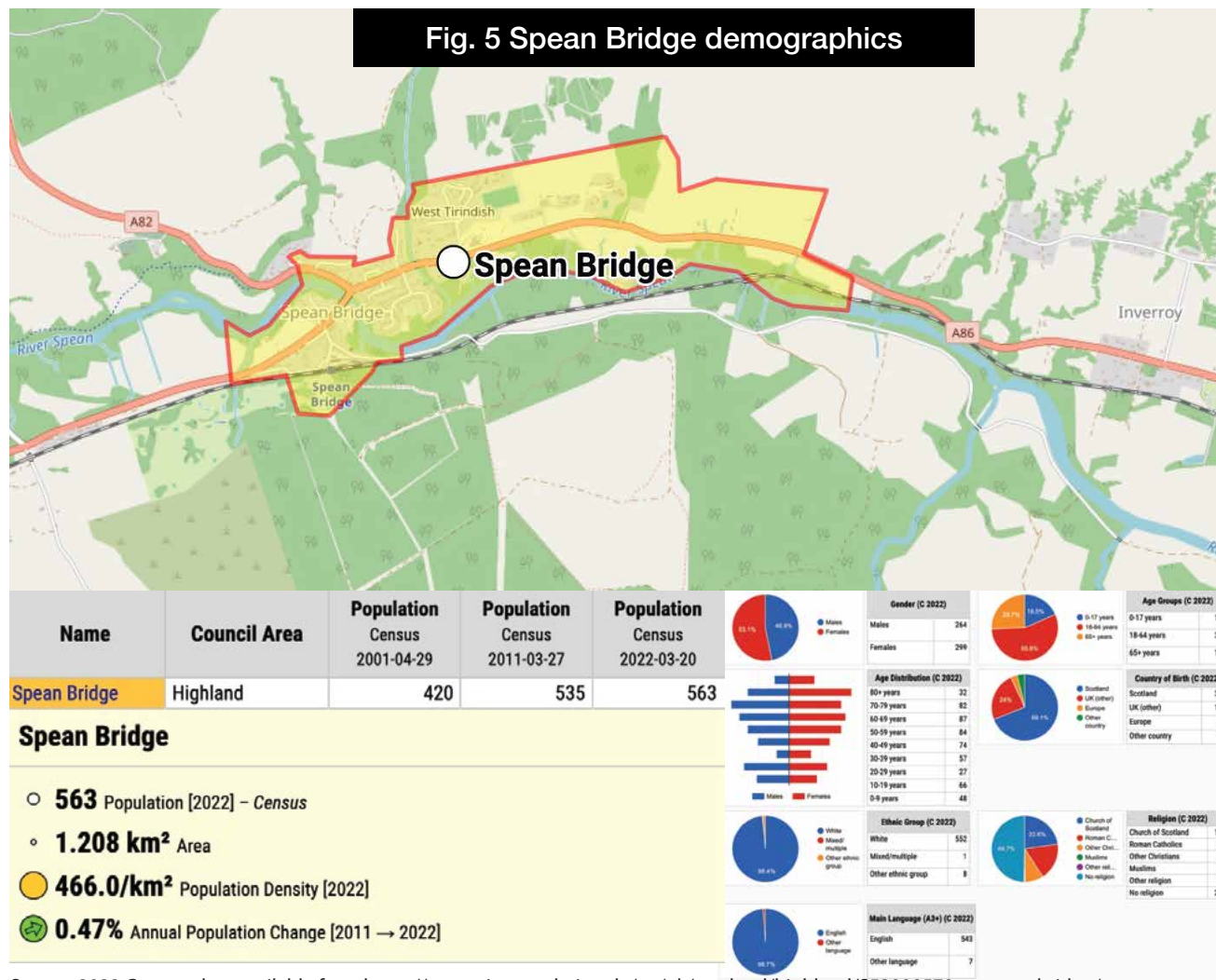
Outside of this axis, small hamlets exist at Tulloch, Fersit, Achnabobane (see A3.7 and A3.8, High Bridge, Mucomir, Gairloch (see A3.5) , Achnacarry and Clunes and beyond those individual farms or houses.

Spean Bridge (Figs. A3.1-A3.2) is the largest settlement in the council area and developed following the construction of the Telford Bridge across river Spean in 1819. Prior to the construction of the bridge the river was crossed by General Wades High Bridge (built 1736) several kilometres down stream. The demographics of Spean Bridge utilising the 2022 census data is illustrated in Figure 5, showing a relatively stable overall population of around 500 to 570 between 2022 and 2011, up from 420 in 2001.

The village has a station on the West Highland line with four trains in each direction per day, including the sleeper to London. It is also served by an inter-city bus service to Fort William and Inverness, in addition to sparse local services.

The economic activity in the village relies heavily on visitor traffic, lying as it does at a major junction, with hospitality, and accommodation being significant sectors. The Monument, one of the most visited tourist sites in Scotland being a Spean Bridge , Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Local Place Plan

Fig. 5 Spean Bridge demographics



Source: 2022 Census, data available from https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/scotland/highland/S52000570__spean_bridge/

significant visitor draw. Currently, the monument has no facilities. The area is also hub for walkers.

In terms of facilities, Spean Bridge has one small Spar supermarket, the Woollen Mill, that has a public toilet (the only one in the council area), and pharmacy. The village has a village hall, used for community events and classes, two churches and a rural fire station. The village is also home to the only primary school and nursery with 87 primary school pupils and 17 in the early learning centre drawn from the community council area.

Commercial activity includes a micro brewery, a builder, two cafes and a restaurant. Only the Woollen Mill cafe is open all year round. In addition, there are two hotels, the larger one the “Ox Hotel” is not currently in use, with its most recent use being as a Cannabis factory. There are numerous B&B’s/pods providing accommodation in the village.

Most people living in the village provide local services, work in the tourist industry or commute to Fort William.

At the eastern end of the village is an unauthorised development. This is off the road connecting the A86 to the Spean Bridge’s sewage plant. This area, was previously an area of oak woodland abutting in part the north bank of the River Spean. The area was divided into small plots, trees cut down and hardstandings created. Buyers of the plots have constructed huts or placed camper vans and caravans on the site. Failure of Highland Council to act quickly has allowed the plot community to grow with plots still for sale. At this moment it remains unresolved much to the angst of rate paying residents.

Along the A82 toward Fort William is the hamlet of Achnabobane (See Fig. A3.6-A3.8). This has largely grown up in an unplanned way on the Parallel Roads of Lochaber SSSI. In the last 10 years many plots have been cleared and hardstandings created without planning permission on the SSSI and sold. This has been done with no thought to any contribution to affordable housing needs or infrastructure needs, let alone the destruction to the SSSI. Since 2019 Highland Council, and long before that the residents and Community Council, have tried to stop further development. Today, however, plot sales go on and new planning applications come in. This will be further discussed in challenges.

North East of Spean Bridge along the A82, the population density drops abruptly at the end of the village. Beyond are isolated houses, B&B’s, holiday lets and farms plus two small settlements of Stronaba (population 2022 of 81 in 38 households, See Figure A3.10) and Letterfinlay (population 2022 of 28 in 10 households). The latter also has the Whispering Pines Hotel (Blacksheep).

Roy Bridge (Fig. A3.3 and photos Fig. 20-21) with a 2022 population of 281 (132 households) is to be found at bridge over the River Roy shortly before it joins the Spean.

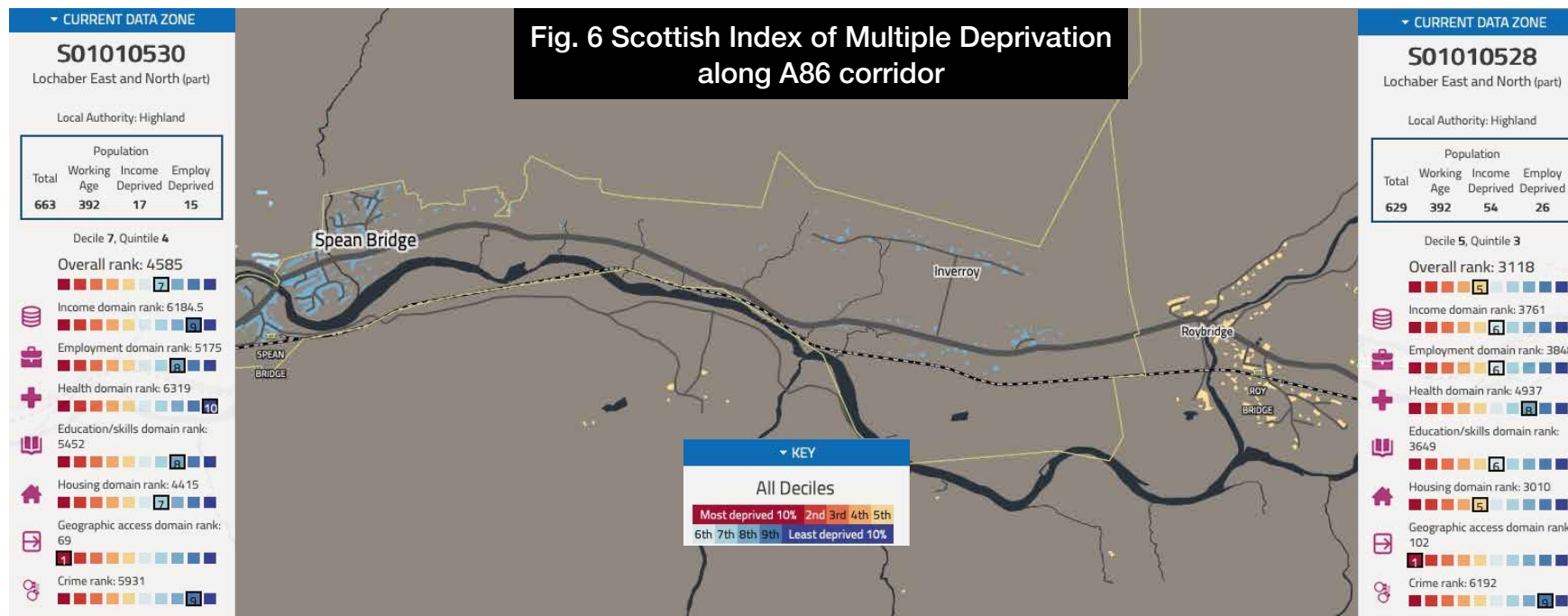
Economically the village is again heavily reliant on the tourist trade with two hotels both open April to October, a bunk house, chalet parks and numerous guest houses. The small cafe in the village has been through a number of tenants/owners and is struggling. Outside of the tourist season there is no place for residents to socialise. There is also work in micro-hydro schemes and forestry.

The school has been closed and is in the process of being redeveloped for affordable housing. Children now attend the Spean Bridge primary school. Other facilities include a village hall and a church.

The 2020 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation points to the Roy Bridge area as being relatively more deprived than the rest of the community Council area (see Figure 6). Roy Bridge’s score is dragged down by significantly lower relative income, employment, skills and greater demand for housing. This will be examined later in the “Challenges” section.

Glen Roy and the famous “Parallel Roads of Glen Roy” is a nearby and much under promoted attraction and opportunity for Roy Bridge. It offers a spectacular, although sometimes frightening drive in to highly scenic Glen Roy with its views of ice age landforms.

Further along just off the A86 eastwards lies the relatively isolated hamlet of Tulloch (population 63 in 26 households, 2022, See Figure A3.7), while along the A86 are isolated houses, B&B’s and one hotel.



Gairloch (Fig. A3.4 and A3.5) with a population of 79 (32 households) is built on the north bank of the Caledonian Canal where there are a series of locks and extensive moorings. Again, tourism is the heart of the economic activity of the local community, with nearby holiday parks, short term rentals and second homes. Other activities include, fish farming and the base for a vehicle recovery company.

Although facilities, including a campsite for those undertaking the Great Glen Way, are available at the canal locks, toilets and showers, these facilities are only available to those with passes issued by the Canal Authority. There are no community assets as such, although the population would like to take over ownership and maintenance of the “red telephone box”.

There is an infrequent, Monday to Friday bus service to Fort William that also goes to Achnacarry and Clunes along the B8005.

Achnacarry, population 55 (households 27) in 2022, also host the Clan Cameron Museum and Achnacarry Castle, seat of Cameron of Loch Eil.

Beyond Clunes, along Loch Arkaig the sparse population is engaged in forestry, fish farming and tourism.

Along the A82 toward Inverness are the small communities of Stronaba and Letterfinlay, the later has a hotel open all year. Between the two lies Glen Loy which also has a few houses.

The dependence of the area on tourism belies two significant and growing problems. Firstly, staff retention and recruitment, at least partly driven by the belief of many local inhabitants that this is not a significant career path, and the shortage of affordable housing is a hurdle to retaining staff. Secondly, there is a lack of facilities e.g. toilets (for instance beware walking outside of the grassed off area at the Commando Monument).

East and south of Roy Bridge and stretching to Rannoch Moor is the Corroul Estate consisting of 57,000 acres and includes Scotlands remotest station. The estate is owned by the Corroul Trust whose principle trustees are Lisbet Rausing and Richard Oldfield. The estate is not accessible by public roads. The centre of the estate contains Corroul Lodge near the eastern end of Loch Ossian. The lodge when not used by the owners is available for rent. There are eight other properties on the estate. Power is provided by its own hydroelectric facilities that also feeds into the National grid. The estate is undergoing extensive rewilding (<https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/2018/02/corroul-estate/>) with major culls in the deer population. The estate has in the past supported activities in Roy Bridge. It is served by a train station with 4 trains each way to Glasgow or Fort William and has a regular Monday to Saturday bus service.

1.4 Key Community Resources

Within the Community Council area there are a number of important shared resources either for the village in question or the total area.

Spean Bridge

Scottish Fire and Rescue North, Community Response Unit
Manned by volunteers and in need of an equipment upgrade.

Pharmacy (MhorHealth)
Providing minor medical advice, travel clinic and prescription services.

Spar Supermarket
Only food shop in the Community Council area

Spean Bridge , Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Local Place Plan

Provides 7 day opening

Spean Bridge Community Centre
Widely used by local organisations, including SCIO and Community Council for AGM's.

Kilmonivaig Church and Hall
Church contains the stain glass war memorial for the area.
Hall is extensively used by the local community and the Community Council for meetings.
St Joseph's RC church

Roy Bridge

Roy Bridge Memorial Hall
Used by local community with seating for 120.
St Margarets Church
Cile Choirll RC Church

Achnacarry

Village Hall
Achnacarry Forest School
St Syrians Church

1.5 History and attractions

During the medieval period the area was at the heart of Clan struggles. In the 16th Century Ewen "Dubh" Cameron moved his home from Tor Castle which was deemed too near Oliver Cromwells garrison at Inverlochy Castle and his enemies Clan Campbell and Clan Macintosh, into the Achnacarry area between Loch Lochy and Loch Arkaig. The new house being built in 1655.

Clan struggles continued in our area, and the last Clan battle was fought at Mulroy near Roy Bridge in 1688 between Clan MacKintosh and highland government forces against the combined forces of Clan Cameron and Clan MacDonald of Keppoch. The battle was a victory for the MacDonalds and Camerons. Today it is commemorated by a roadside cairn along the road into Glen Roy just outside of Roy Bridge.

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The early Jacobite risings (1689, 1715 and 1719) led to the construction of military roads across the Highlands between 1726 and 1737. One of these roads, so-called “Wades Road” crosses the area as it linked the garrisons in Inverness and Fort Augustus with Fort William. The road, which is today not more than a rough track crosses the River Spean at High Bridge built in 1736. The remains of the bridge can still be seen (photo opposite Contents) and can be reached along a short walk along the banks of the Spean from Spean Bridge.

It was here, on 16th August 1745 that the first skirmish of the Jacobite rebellion of the 45 was fought when a small force of MacDonalDs of Keppoch ambushed and forced the surrender of two Royal Scots companies.

Ultimately, it resulted in the destruction of Cameron of Loch Eil’s house at Achnacarry when government troops destroyed it in 1746. The land was confiscated, being returned to the family in 1784. The present house was not built until 1802.

Loch Arkaig is the site of the legend of Prince Charlie’s gold, delivered by two French ships in 1746 and believed to be hidden around the loch.

Crossing the River Spean between High Bridge and Spean Bridge is the remains of the Spean Bridge to Fort Augustus railway branch line opened in 1903. The line across sparsely populated areas of Scotland following the Great Glen was never a success. Passenger services stopped in 1933 and it finally closed in 1946.

The branch line was not the only railway in the area. In 1925 the “Lochaber Narrow Gauge Railway”, also known as the Puggy line, was opened to support the hydro-electric development. The 40 Km line ran from Loch Laggan to Loch Linnhe across the southern part of our area. The line only closed in 1977.

Perhaps the best known landmark in the area is the Commando Monument a few Km’s along the A86 north of Spean Bridge. It commemorates commando forces around the world, and links the Commando training depot established Spean Bridge , Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Local Place Plan

at Achnacarry in 1942 to Spean Bridge. The statue unveiled in 1952 overlooks part of the training area, and the route marched by would be Commandos from Spean Bridge Station to Achnacarry. Along the side of Loch Lochy there are many remnant of those training grounds such as the concrete landing craft.

Many visitors to the area come for the beautiful views, walks, hikes and climbs. These can include the Munros on the north side of Loch Lochy or the Grey Corries in the south.

Over much of the area lies the Parallel Roads of Lochaber SSSI that includes Glen Roy. It is internationally important, one of the top 200 geological sites in the world, but virtually unknown in the Community Council area.

The history, and natural resources of the area are some of the great unrealised opportunities for the area.

1.6 Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Community Council and Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO)

In essence, these are two separate bodies, the Community Council is an officially recognised statutory body representing the area:

- Holds operational funds but cannot own assets
- Principle Activities are liaison with Highland Council, NHS Highland, BEAR (trunk roads), Network Rail, Police Scotland and Complaints handling
- Statutory right to be consulted in Planning
- Meets monthly with Summer AGM
- Councillors publicly elected for 4 years
- Approves SSE Micro-grants up to £500

Community Councillors are unpaid volunteers elected by the people of the community council area for a period of 4 years. The most recent elections being 2024.

In 2012 the Community established this SCIO when the prospect of community benefit from micro hydro schemes locally first arose. This body is

governed by a board of Trustees (<https://srascio.scot/>).Its initial income was modest as schemes were slower than anticipated to bring to fruition. However, by 2020 the SCIO had begun to receive long-term Community Benefit from two hydro schemes at Nevis Range and Allt Mhuic for their expected lifetime as well as from a SSE windfarm just out of area at Stronelairg, the latter for three years only. Occasionally, welcome donations from individuals and local stakeholders have been made, as well as from the Scottish Government's Supporting Communities Fund in 2020-21 in recognition of the SCIO's outstanding contribution to local resilience during the most challenging months of the COVID pandemic.

Wishing to be more ambitious with future projects, the community was canvassed on preferred options during a four-month Community Consultation. The SCIO aims to deliver maximum benefit to deserving, sustainable projects having established there is an appetite within the community for such activities. The Community Council with the assistance of the SCIO's Trustees and all residents within our area, are keen to deliver the following key objectives establish by the Consultation:

- Encouraging sustainable development
- Relieving poverty
- Advancing education
- Preserving buildings and sites of historical importance
- Supporting recreational facilities
- Protecting the environment
- Improving connectivity between the different areas of the community

The community was fortunate to receive funding to employ a part-time Community Development Officer initially over a four-year period from January 2022 to December 2026 from Highlands and Islands Enterprise for 50% of the costs. This has now been extended to 2028? utilising further donor funding.

Today, although different bodies, the Community Council and SCIO are working in tandem to build a thriving community.

Summary

A number of community consultations have been undertaken together with the SCIO, from a wide ranging survey to define an action plan in summer 2022 to specific surveys on affordable housing developments in Roy Bridge. The results of all of these have been rolled together into this document.

2. Community Consultation

What	When	Purpose	Target	Response	Results
Community Survey	August to October 2022	Define action plan	832 residential addresses	385	Spean-Bridge-Roy-Bridge-and-Achnacarry-SCIO-Final.pdf
Create Community Action Plan Consultation	2022	Drop in sessions at Roy Bridge Memorial Hall, Achnacarry Village Hall, Spean bridge Community Hall	Engagement of residents		See above
Create Community Action Plan Consultation	2022	Engage small businesses at Kilmonivaig Church Hall	Engage small businesses		See above
Create Community Action Plan Consultation	2022	Specialised engagement sessions	We also sought views from the churches, youth and sporting groups and primary school children.		See above

What	When	Purpose	Target	Response	Results
Community Action Plan Final Results					See above
Online Housing Needs Survey carried out by the Communities Housing Trust	Feb. 2025	Help define housing needs for Roy Bridge School redevelopment	Roy Bridge residents and others	90	Apply to SCIO
Online survey on behalf of the Spean Bridge Primary Parent Group	March 2025	Determine demand for pre-school and after-school "wraparound" care	Spean Bridge school parents group		Apply to SCIO
Affordable Housing Needs	June 2025	Online survey to determine demand for affordable housing at Roy Bridge School	Potential Roy Bridge affordable Housing clients		Apply to SCIO

The table shows the consultations run by the SCIO and that have been used as the basis for this place plan. The first which formed the basis of the action plan was launched in August 2022. Today, consultations are used as and when a need is identified.

One strong message from the community outside of the questions used in the survey, is that the villages along the A86 corridor are not and do not want to be thought of as dormitory villages for Fort William. In other words, the community wishes to have its own economic basis for its existence.

The initial analysis showed that the responses can be grouped into a number of themes:

Theme 1: Connectivity

An overwhelming desire to see our three settlement centres better connected via safe routes for walking or cycling was the overriding priority, with a staggering 98% of survey respondents seeing this as an excellent (71%) or a good idea.

Cycle and footpaths were named in 94 out of 237 replies as the “one big thing” to tackle with grant funding, almost eight times as popular as the second favoured option, a footbridge at Spean Bridge – itself on the same theme.

The safety of residents and visitors on our roads and pavements, especially alongside the A82 and A86 trunk roads, also emerged as a concern, including traffic calming measures in Spean Bridge.

An East-West community bus service, not only operating a potentially viable Fort William to Aviemore route twice weekly (48% saw this as an excellent idea) but also linking Gairloch, Achnacarry, Bunarkaig and Clunes with Spean Bridge was also popular.

Theme 2: Housing

The magnificent Lochaber scenery, our proximity to Fort William and the explosive popularity of staycations and second homes in the West Highlands have propelled housing prices well beyond the budget of younger, locally based individuals and families. Many would like to stay and support the school but simply cannot afford to live here.

Theme 3: Roy Bridge School

Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Local Place Plan

Mothballed in 2017 after the new cluster school opened in Spean Bridge, the decision to permanently close Roy Bridge Primary School was finally taken by Highland Council in October 2022. This outcome was endorsed by the Scottish Government in December 2022, on condition that “Highland Council should work with the community to explore how to make best use of the former Roy Bridge Primary School”

This applies to the buildings and grounds not leased to Taigh na Sgoile, already in charitable use. This was a popular project during the Consultation, with 82% seeing re-use as an excellent (35%) or a good idea. Given that only a third of our community is based in and around Roy Bridge, this level of response suggests that the argument for a thorough appraisal of options for the site is therefore particularly compelling.

Theme 4: Environment

Many respondents (45%), businesses and accommodation providers felt that the centre of Spean Bridge could benefit from a good tidy-up, as well as re-landscaping and additional litter bins around the Woollen Mill, Spar shop, postal sorting office and the Spean Bridge Hotel. Similar improvements were also echoed in the “one small thing” responses, as well as within “other ideas”. Our primary schoolchildren also felt strongly on this issue. Some residents wished to go further, floating a community buyout of the Spean Bridge Hotel, described within the national press recently as “an eyesore”. However, it would require a significant initial and ongoing investment and maybe a change to more community focussed management by an experienced operator may well come about through simple economics. Meanwhile, a community garden in Spean Bridge combining allotments, open space and a riverside walk is already becoming a reality, with 92% of responses in favour of its creation, including 46% citing it as an excellent idea.

In summary, 385 community survey responses were analysed together with the outcomes from the wider consultation to glean the projects which were most popular.

In addition to the above specific priorities for the community we cannot ignore some of the wider generic issues that the community, and particularly

the Community Council, is constantly having to deal with both within and without their monthly Council Meetings. Councillors regularly receive both written and verbal complaints from residents, visitors and concerned individuals further afield, such as those purchasing land via Auction Websites, sight unseen without doing due diligence, within the Community Council area. There are an ever-increasing range of unsolicited issues but the most frequent and urgent matters that require ongoing attention include:

- Planning Applications to build on the Hinterland to the West and East of Spean Bridge and between Upper and Lower Inverroy without regard to the legally established restrictions in those defined areas.
- Unlawful damage by property owners and property developers to the Parallel Roads SSSI that runs west to east through the Community Council Area.
- Specific to Achnabobane, the levelling of sites by individual plot owners with the subsequent unauthorised erection of pods and placing of caravans.
- Illegal felling of forestry and, where authorised, failure to restock in accordance with granted permissions.
- Illegal clearing of land and construction of non-authorised structures and access roads to them which destroys the natural habitat and scenery that visitors come to see.
- Lack of enforcement of Enforcement Orders by the issuing authorities.
- Speeding traffic through Spean Bridge and Roy Bridge and along the A86 Trunk Road that joins them.
- An ever-increasing flow of Planning Approval Applications from across the whole Community Council area for:
 - o Siting of Pods and Static Caravans for letting without consideration of the consequent impact on traffic flow and pressure on local services caused by an increase in short-term visitors.
 - o Mobile Telephone aerial pylons.
 - o Hydro Dams and associated access and infrastructure.
 - o Electricity distribution pylons.

Summary

The Community Vision is to create a thriving sustainable communities focused on the A86 corridor, with an initial focus on building the economically active population by supporting the construction of affordable housing where possible , enhancing active travel and utilising the planning process to protect the environment where appropriate.

3. Community Vision

Many of the items from the consultation speak to the wish for a sustainable community (Fig. 7). By this we mean a community:

- That is balanced in terms of employment and housing
 - Sufficient affordable housing
 - Limits on second homes
- Economically sustainable
 - Employment opportunities in the local area
- Balanced demographically
 - Not a retirement community
- Connected to travel
 - Active travel opportunities
 - Connected to nearby communities
 - Opportunities to reach the wider world
- Environmental stewardship
 - Maximise use of renewable energy
 - Use of community benefit for the community
 - Respect protected land
- Social and Community (well-being) focus
 - Support for families
 - Community well-being
 - Resilient community

- Facilities for use of residents

Fig. 7 Building Sustainable Communities



The objective is to provide stewardship to the land, in other words to live in the landscape and pass it on to future generations in the same or better state than it is today.

Feeding the Community vision into planning

In the area of the community council this translate into some tangible actions.

Focus new infrastructure in areas of existing infrastructure. Building new infrastructure takes land, costs money and in the long term support takes further money. The burden for the maintenance and possibly the costs falls on the rate payer, who does not have infinitely deep pockets. Consequently, focusing new infrastructure on the villages with existing infrastructure helps reduce long term costs. This suggest a few compact villages with shared utilities.

Within the W-E axis of population (Spean to Roy Bridge), in order to maintain the character of the three villages, minimising additional infrastructure and protecting the environment, notably the banks the Spean, requires clear buffer zones between villages that are not developed.

The opportunities for development that exist within Spean and Roy Bridge must be dedicated to affordable housing in order to support economic activity in the area. This will also provide housing for younger people and families, addressing the demographic issue. Clearly, to maintain a stock of affordable houses requires that such dwellings cannot be sold on as second homes or used to downsize so that larger houses can be sold on as second homes or short term rentals. Affordable houses, also need to be of a high standard to reduce energy costs. Consideration, however should be given to the opportunities to site new shops or medical facilities within these areas too. To achieve commercial viability for these and provide the services residents need whether locally or within the village, it will be necessary to increase the permanent population along the A86 corridor (Spean Bridge to Roy Bridge).

The discussions over the redevelopment of the Roy Bridge School by the SCIO are relevant here, where the rental of a few units for short term lets may provide a source of funding to reduce the long term maintenance costs.

Maintaining three nuclear villages along the A86 corridor also highlights the importance of providing active travel routes between them and improving connectivity both in terms of public and private transport. The choke point of the Telford Bridge for pedestrians is also a concern.

The need to have demographically balanced population requires action. The proportion of young families need to grow. This is partly addressed by increasing the proportion of affordable housing. This is only part of the equation, as increasing the number of young families also requires an increase in jobs available in the area, support services (childcare, medical etc.,) and local/national travel. Increasing the job availability together with affordable housing offers options for local youngsters that either do not want to move away or want to return. The opportunity here is to attract the relatively well off digital nomads to the area. These are often young people/couples who can work remotely from anywhere. The widespread availability of high speed internet connections make this a real possibility, but would need a strategy to attract such people.

Protecting the environment, translates into using as much brown field land as possible for building, notably in rural areas.

The principles outlined above, are broadly similar to those enunciated for the Community Council in the 2019 adopted [West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan](#) and the principles of [National Planning Framework 4 \(NPF4\)](#).

One of the principle differences with NPF4 lies around new tourist accommodation. At the current time, and for the medium term future the lack of tourist infrastructure in terms of toilets, over night parking, shops etc negates building further tourist accommodation. This is especially true as the village already hosts one large hotel (“Ox Hotel”) that is largely derelict. Similar derelict hotels are to be found in Caol and Fort William. Increasing tourist accommodation in the local community puts strain on local services, but where it can be done, associated with individual residences, without damaging the environment or landscape (views) it could be carefully considered.

3.2 Differences with the 2019 adopted West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan and 2023 National Planning Framework 4

In framing this discussion there are a number of important sources that require attention.

National level: 2023 National Planning Framework 4

West Highland and Island level: 2019 Adopted West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan

Highland level: Highland-Wide Local Development Plan, including the proposals map.

The 2019 adopted “West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan” lists as the “Placemaking Priorities for the Community Council area as:

- Promote a high standard of siting and architectural design for the sites that front the villages' tourist routes.
- Support the consolidation of both settlements so that they retain their small village identities and attractiveness.
- Keep the villages as compact as possible so that their facilities are still walkable.
- Allow the option of local employment therefore reducing commuting by retaining business components within the mixed use sites.
- Ensure that all development sites contribute to internal village connectivity in terms of active travel connections to facilities, and retention and enhancement of green networks. Promote woodland crofts in the wider area.

Much of what is included in the priorities above aligns with our vision in outline. In detail, however, we find it lacks the specificity needed as will be discussed below.

The 2012 Highland-Wide Local Development Plan (see appendix for relevant part of the Proposals Map and Vision and Strategy Map) has much to recommend it but unfortunately little has happened and in this area, things have gone backwards. For instance the growth of renewables has resulted in growing numbers of large loads being transported along the A86 and A82 creating delays. As more of these large projects are agreed piecemeal so the problems will multiply particularly along the A86. Unfortunately, it is also in this area that has suffered significantly from destruction of precious protected land despite the aspirations of the plan.

National Planning Framework 4 published in February 2023 provides an additional set of guidelines that puts another lens through which to view our area which is closer to our vision.

This discussion would also not be complete without consideration of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2024 that governs SSSI's which cover something like 15% of the total area.

Of NPF4 specific policies that impact the Community Council Area are:

- Policy 3 – Biodiversity
- Policy 4 – Natural Places
- Policy 5 - Soils
- Policy 6 – Forestry, woodland and trees
- Policy 7 – Historic assets and places
- Policy 11 – Renewable Energy
- Policy 13 – Sustainable transport
- Policy 15 – Local Living and 20 minute neighbourhoods
- Policy 17 – Rural Homes
- Policy 18 – Infrastructure First
- Policy 24 – Digital Infrastructure
- Policy 29 – Rural Development
- Policy 30 – Tourism

This is all in addition to the objectives of “Sustainable Places” and “Liveable Places” outlined in NPF4.

The policies and guidelines have a strong alignment with the sentiments put forward in this Local Place West and get the full support of the Community Council. By themselves, however, they do not provide the joined up thinking and action needed to create a sustainable community. This will be illustrated with a few examples.

The centre of population in this area lies along the A86 Corridor. The proposals to maintain the character of the three villages along this route as suggested by the 2019 adopted “West Highland and Islands Plan” fits with local thinking. From an aesthetic view point it maintains the attractiveness of the area to tourism while enabling the concentration of infrastructure (Policy 18) in areas where it already exists which makes a great deal of sense. The distances between Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge is such that it would be ideal for the 20 minute neighbourhood concept (NPF4 Policy 15) but there are no plans for active travel connections between the villages. Two of the villages, Roy Bridge and Inveroy have no retail facilities, the only shops in the area being at Spean Bridge. The lack of active travel promotes car usage (conflict with NPF4 Policy 13), and furthermore results in a lack of retail competition. NPF4 Policy 28 supports such local retail developments but despite past proposals no new grocery outlets have materialised despite the local population and visitors being high enough to support at least one other outlet.

The core of creating a sustainable community is the availability of affordable housing and local employment. NPF4 Policy 17 on rural housing is helpful in this context, but it remains more attractive to developers to build houses that will either attract the economically inactive moving to the area or those looking for second homes. The need for affordable homes has been highlighted in the survey carried out by the Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO. Without more affordable housing and supporting facilities (retail, childcare,...), together with restrictions on the numbers of AirB&B's and second homes the A86 corridor risks ever increasing house prices only affordable to e.g. rich retirees. The requirement on developers to deliver 25%

Spean Bridge , Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Local Place Plan

a certain fraction of affordable housing in any new development is insufficient to meet the needs. In this area each development is relatively small and so the numbers of affordable houses are correspondingly small and this have little impact. Furthermore many developments are either piecemeal or less than 4-5 houses so do not meet thresholds.

Policy 30 on Tourism is problematic in this area. Without the facilities (roads, toilets, retail outlets etc.,) to support increasing numbers of tourists it is difficult to argue for any change in numbers. The Commando Monument for instance, one of the most visited sites in Scotland has zero facilities of any kind. Furthermore, within Spean Bridge there is already a large unused hotel that is slowly becoming derelict. The current levels of tourism are sustainable but only with further investment particularly in roads. Outside the A86 corridor, additional tourist accommodation, particularly on green field sites impacts on other NPF4 Policies such as 3,4,6 and 7.

The current levels of tourism is already threatened by a crisis in road traffic. The number of proposed Pump Storage Hydro Schemes and wind farms requires vastly increased road traffic on the A86 and A82. The A86 is already recognized by Transport Scotland as not meeting A road standards. The Community Council is already being warned by hauliers of the delays this will cause, and it not difficult to imagine the mayhem a major incident at the Telford Bridge choke point could cause. The area desperately needs a joined up strategy for the transport of heavy equipment and the upgrading of roads to accommodate what may be a 20 year development. Otherwise, its highly likely tourism will suffer significantly as travel becomes difficult.

As the Community Council area is largely wild, there is strong support for Policies on Nature, protecting the environment and rewilding including policies 3,4 6 and 7. Controls on rural housing and development policies 28 and 29 are also supported. The contrast with what is happening on the ground is dramatic! With 15% of our area being a SSSI and most of the rest being woodland or wild land, the lack of enforcement action is jaw dropping. The issue first appeared in the press centred on Achnabobane in 2009 (<https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-herald-1130/20100807/281556582120187?srsltid=AfmBOoqL7HseMAu6k4K7Su6zUi6aRn8GO8EAl2plb4e7zYi44J6ygOqe>)

Version: Sunday, 8 March 2026

), and has been continuing since and continues in the news (<https://www.scotsman.com/hays-way/warning-issued-over-increase-in-misleading-land-sales-in-the-highlands-5313024>). To date, despite a Nature Conservation Order at Achnabobane the growth of this activity continues across the Highlands. It does not take much effort to find buildings on SSSI or other protected land with no planning permission or are completely different from the permission given. Small plots being sold to unsuspecting buyers who are losing a great deal of money. Until there is real enforcement action nothing will change as the perpetrators feel no pain. This is not helped by the Nature Conservation Act 2024 which appears to have many holes. For instance, a seller is required to tell a buyer of land that they are purchasing land on the SSSI but there is no penalty for not doing so.

Finally, let us illustrate an opportunity that is hampered by the lack of joined up thinking. Policy 24 on digital infrastructure offers the opportunity to attract digital nomads looking for a better life to the area. Within this area it is slowly happening and possibly accelerating since the pandemic. However, when many of these have children reaching school age a dilemma sets in. They are looking for top quartile education which is not available and is resulting in a drift away to areas that provide the educational needs of their children. If the educational standards were available here it is likely those people would stay.

In conclusion, NPF4 and Highland Councils aspirations for the area are excellent starting points. They do however, require further refinement based on this local place plan as previous efforts are now outdated and are not prioritised to address the main issues facing the Community Council.

Summary

Areas recognised for development in Spean Bridge and Roy Bridge are also endorsed by the Community Council, and an additional opportunity is being realised at the Roy bridge School site. For all of these sites, the Community Council would like to see a predominance of affordable homes, ideally mixed with supporting facilities. Unfortunately, the widespread sale of small plots without planning permission is threatening the integrity of the planning process and destroying national/international assets.

4. Land use

4.1 Identified development land - Spean Bridge

The Figure 8 identifies 6 areas: SB01-“Transport Workshops”, “SBO2 -Haulage Depot East of Hotel”, “SB03-North of Nursery”, “SB04-Haulage Depot”, “SB07-North of Bridge Cafe”, and SB08-Burn Bank”.

While noting the important caveats from Highland Council in the West Highland and Islands Local Development plan for these sites, that are very valid, the preference of the community would be for the sites to be used for affordable homes to address the housing shortage and build the economic viability of the village. Where possible, local businesses and other commercial usage should be considered against the objective to build a sustainable community.

The plan for SB08 as put forward have been a large disappointment as the planned shop has steadily decreased with time to the point of extinction. In previous planning applications on sites in Spean Bridge for mixed development, decisions have been extremely slow and the community has lost out on new Co-OP when the developer pulled out because of delays in granting planing permission. A balance needs to be found between the needs/wishes of the community as expressed here and the speed of decision making.

On the map showing potential development sites in Spean Bridge the Community Garden is highlighted. This will be discussed in more detail under the section on Progress.

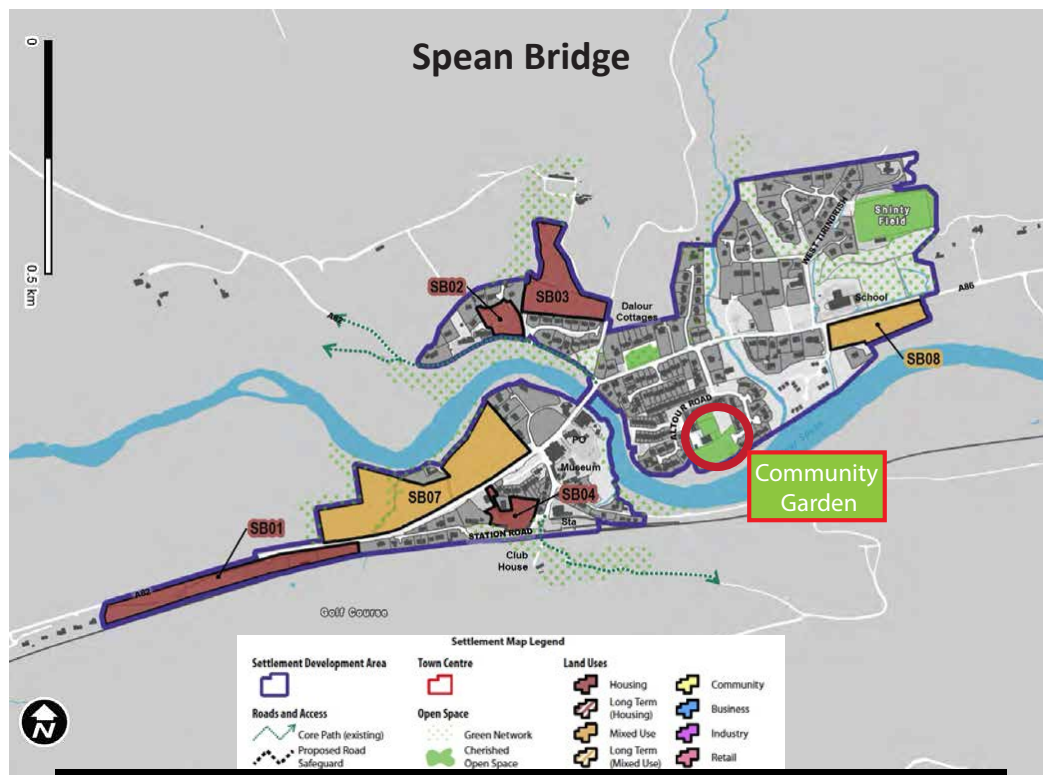


Fig. 8 Differences between the adopted 2019 West Highland and Islands 2019 Local Development Plan and Community Council views 2026
Note Community Garden in green

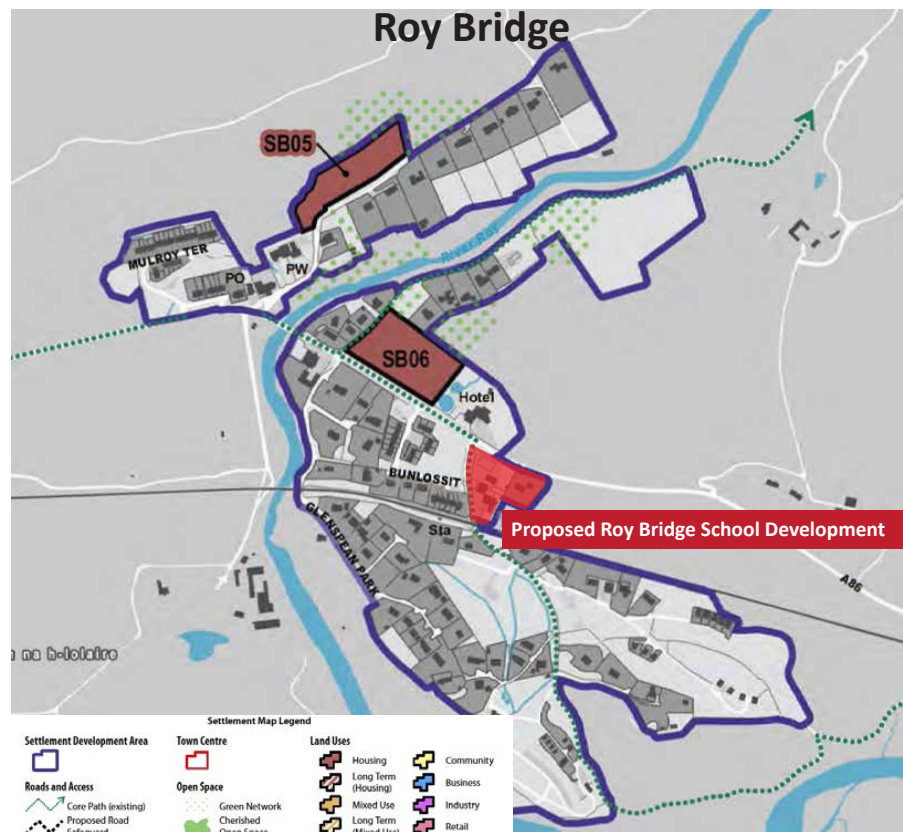


Fig. 9 Differences between the adopted 2019 West Highland and Islands 2019 Local Development Plan and Community Council views 2026
Note Proposed Roy Bridge School Dev. in red

4.2 Identified development land - Roy Bridge

In Roy Bridge the 2019 adopted West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan identified two areas SB05-Glen Roy, Roy Bridge and SB06-West of Stronlossit Inn (see Fig. 9). The areas are designated for housing, and beyond recognising the residents would also like a shop (which may not be

commercially viable) the Community Council would agree whole heartedly with these designations subject to the caveats laid out in our vision.

On the map a third area is identified, the old Roy Bridge School (in red). Following a community buyout by the SCIO this area is now planned for redevelopment as affordable housing while preserving the old school house. This will be discussed in more detail under progress to date.

4.3 Amendments for the Plan

	Designation in Adopted Highlands and Islands DP 2019	Area (ha)	Indicative Housing Capacity	Amendments Sought and Reasons
Spean Bridge - SB01	Housing	2	20	Affordable Housing preferred
Spean Bridge - SB02	Housing	0.5	5	Affordable Housing preferred
Spean Bridge - SB03	Housing	1.7	20	Affordable Housing preferred
Spean Bridge - SB04	Housing	0.6	10	Affordable Housing preferred
Roy Bridge - SB05	Housing	0.9	10	Affordable Housing preferred
Spean Bridge - SB07	Mixed Use (Housing, Community, Business/ Tourism)	4.4	35	Mixed housing, with good proportion of affordable houses, and community support services including e.g. surgery or retail

	Designation in Adopted Highlands and Islands DP 2019	Area (ha)	Indicative Housing Capacity	Amendments Sought and Reasons
Spean Bridge - SB08	Mixed Use (Housing, Business, Retail)	1.1	10	Mixed housing, with good proportion of affordable houses, and community support services including e.g. surgery or retail
Roy Bridge - School	NEW		7 and 2 holiday flats	SCIO planning to develop the site to provide affordable housing and decrease maintenance costs via income from holiday lets.

4.4 Unauthorised Developments a blight on our landscape

Planning for the community in the Community Council area is challenged by unauthorised developments in at least three locations: Achnabobane, Sewage Farm Lane and Inverroy. In all cases the land, most often protected in some way, is purchased, divided into small plots, cleared and hard standings created and sold often via auction houses and often implying that planning

permission is either not required or is easily obtained. This is now happening across Scotland with examples from Loch Lomond National Park, Inchbae, Orkney and elsewhere. The business model for this activity was born at Achnabobane possibly several decades ago but is yet to be stopped.

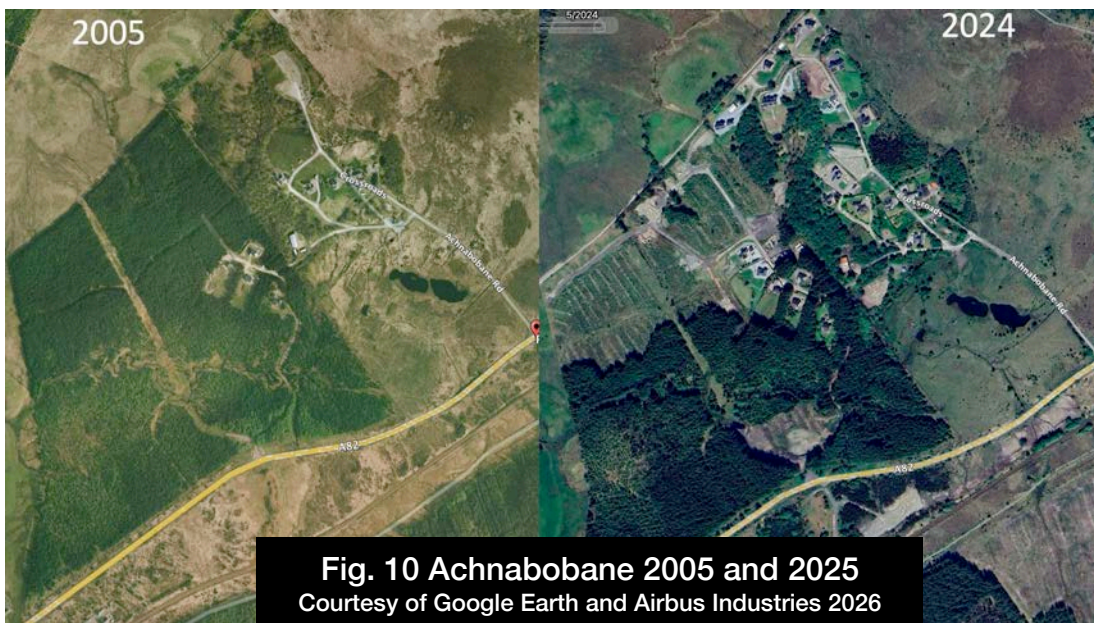


Fig. 10 Achnabobane 2005 and 2025
Courtesy of Google Earth and Airbus Industries 2026

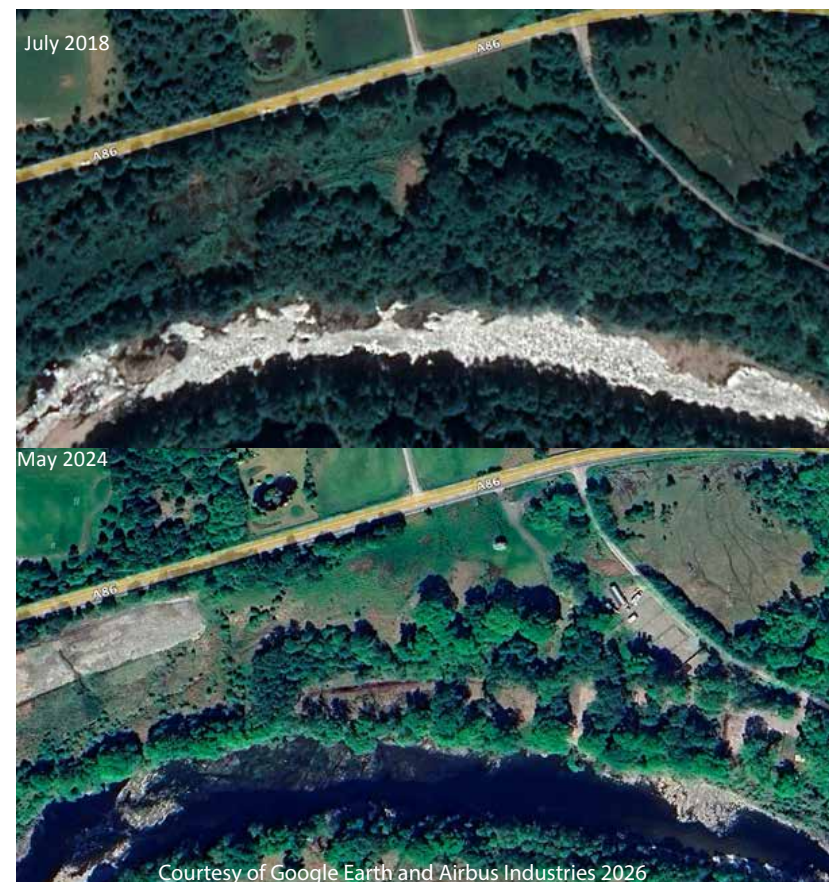


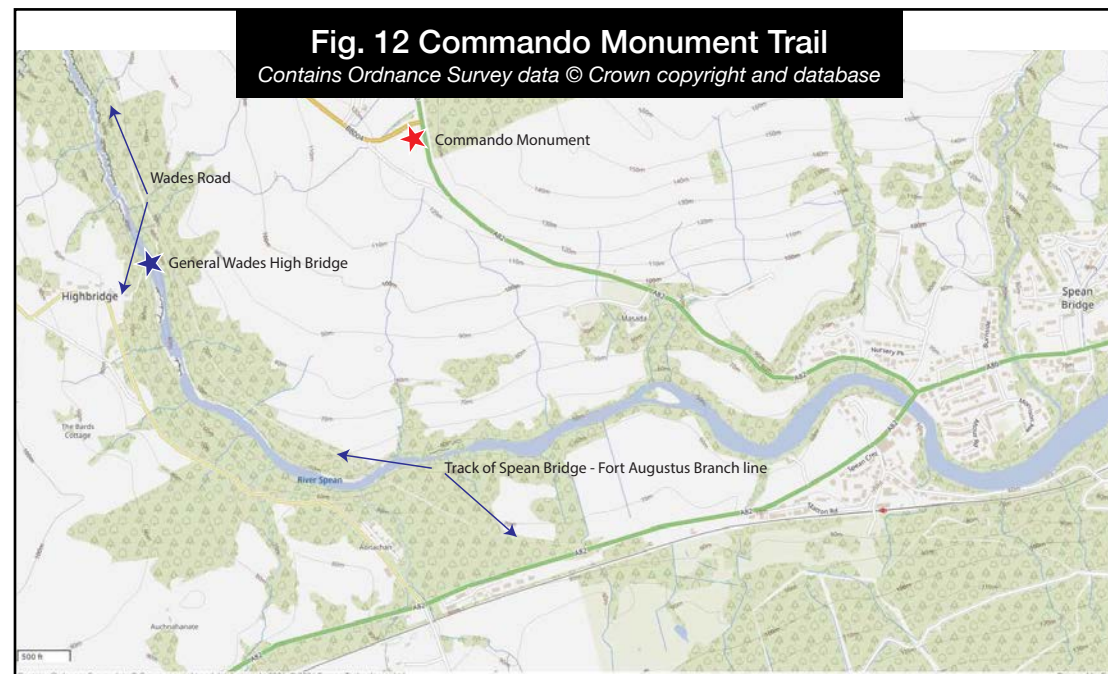
Fig. 11 Sewage Farm Lane, Spean Bridge, 2018 and 2024

Achnabobane (Fig. 10) lies largely on the Internationally renowned Parallel Roads of Lochaber SSSI. The area has been developed since the early 2000's in largely piecemeal fashion. Initially plots were identified and planning permission sought while Section 75 agreements were put in place to protect what remained. In 2009/10 the scandal reached the Scottish Papers in a series of articles in the Herald illustrating how families were losing large sums of money on so-called land investments. Residents fought the development of the area with the assistance of the Community Council, but in around 2019 development and clearance accelerated and plots began to appear on auction houses as Lifestyle plots. Highland Council tried and failed to stop developments in 2019. Finally, the Scottish Government at the request of Nature Scot placed a Nature Conservation order on the area still under development in 2025 to stop any further damage. The picture on the left shows the scale of the damage between 2005 and 2024. Some of the building particularly on the right hand side of the picture was done with planning permission but some only after Section 75 agreements to protect the area were set aside. The area in the top left and just above the A82, plus some of the buildings in the centre is land cleared without planning permission. Nature Scot have said that these developments have to stop but today you can still buy small plots and sometimes even house plots for which you are never likely to get planning permission. Many people have lost a lot of money since 2009 and nothing has been done. For this discussion, one has to wonder why planning permission was ever granted for houses on the SSSI at Achnabobane over the 25 yrs period since this started?

A second area (Fig. 11) of concern lies on the eastern edge of Spean Bridge, it is often referred to as Sewage Farm Lane as a track owned by Scottish Water leads down to the local sewage works. The satellite pictures on the left show the damage done between 2018 and 2024, although plot sales continue to this day.

The third area is crofting land at Inveroy. The land has not been decrofted, and like the other two sites has been divided up into small plots and sold on to owners who believe they can build on the land.

This is now happening across Highland Council's area, and as far north as Orkney and as far south as Ayrshire, and co-ordinated action is needed to stop it before damage across the region becomes irreversible.



4.4 Land of special significance to residents

Commando Monument - River Spean - High Bridge Trail (Fig. 12)

Within the boundaries of the Community Council are a number of areas that are of special significance. Perhaps both the top of the list and the most well known is the triangle that runs from the Commando Monument, to Spean Bridge along the A82, and along the north bank of the River Spean to the Highbridge. The monument is one of the most visited tourist sites in Scotland, despite having no facilities beyond a car park.

The Commando Monument (featured on the front page) commemorates the Commando training area that existed around Achnacarry Castle during the WW2. Thousands of soldiers from the UK and its allies, including Norway, Poland, France and Belgium, trained in commando warfare in Lochaber. It sits on a high point just off the A82 as the road climbs out of Glen Spean. The bronze statue of three commandos by Scott Sutherland was dedicated in 1952 and is now a Grade A listed site. A small Remembrance area also commemorates more recent conflicts. There is now a plan to create a visitor centre at the site.

From the monument a circular path runs to the Highbridge, site of the first shots of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion, and along the remains of the Spean Bridge to Fort Augustus branch line back to the A82. It provides residents and visitors with a walk through woodland with abundant wildlife past sites of historic interest. The walk is illustrated in the map below.

On the hills south of Spean Bridge lies oak woodlands of Killiechoate Community Woodland (Fig. 13) and beyond that the commercial conifer forest that (see map below) area stretches from Leanachan north to the River Spean. The woodlands have many paths for walkers and provides an exercise area for residents and is much appreciated by walkers and hikers.

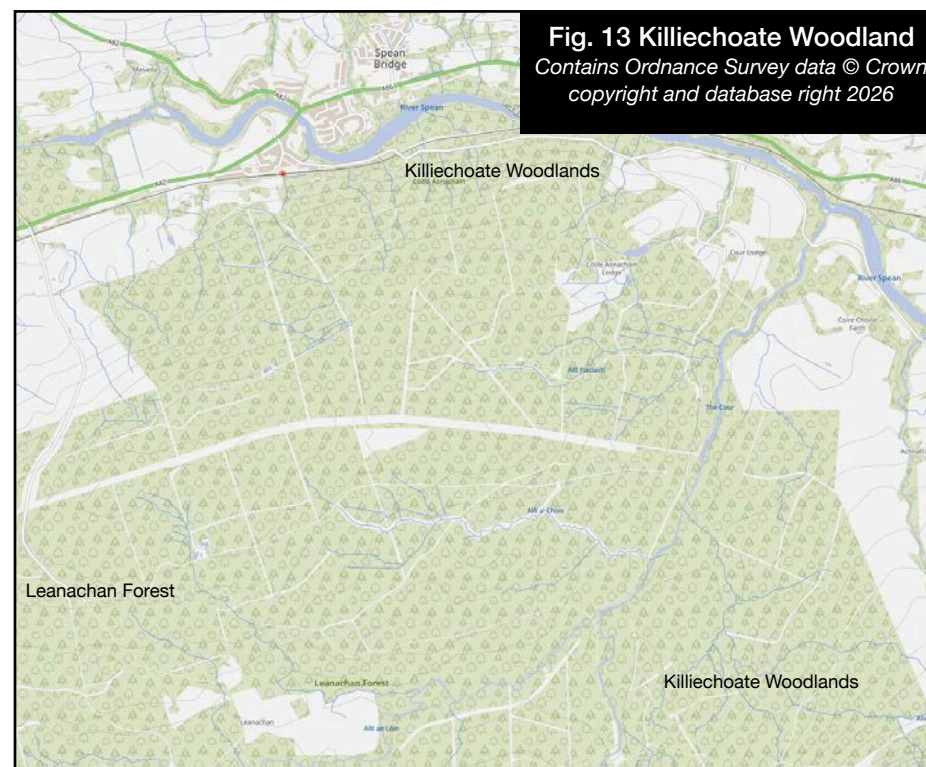


Fig. 13 Killiechoate Woodland
Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2026

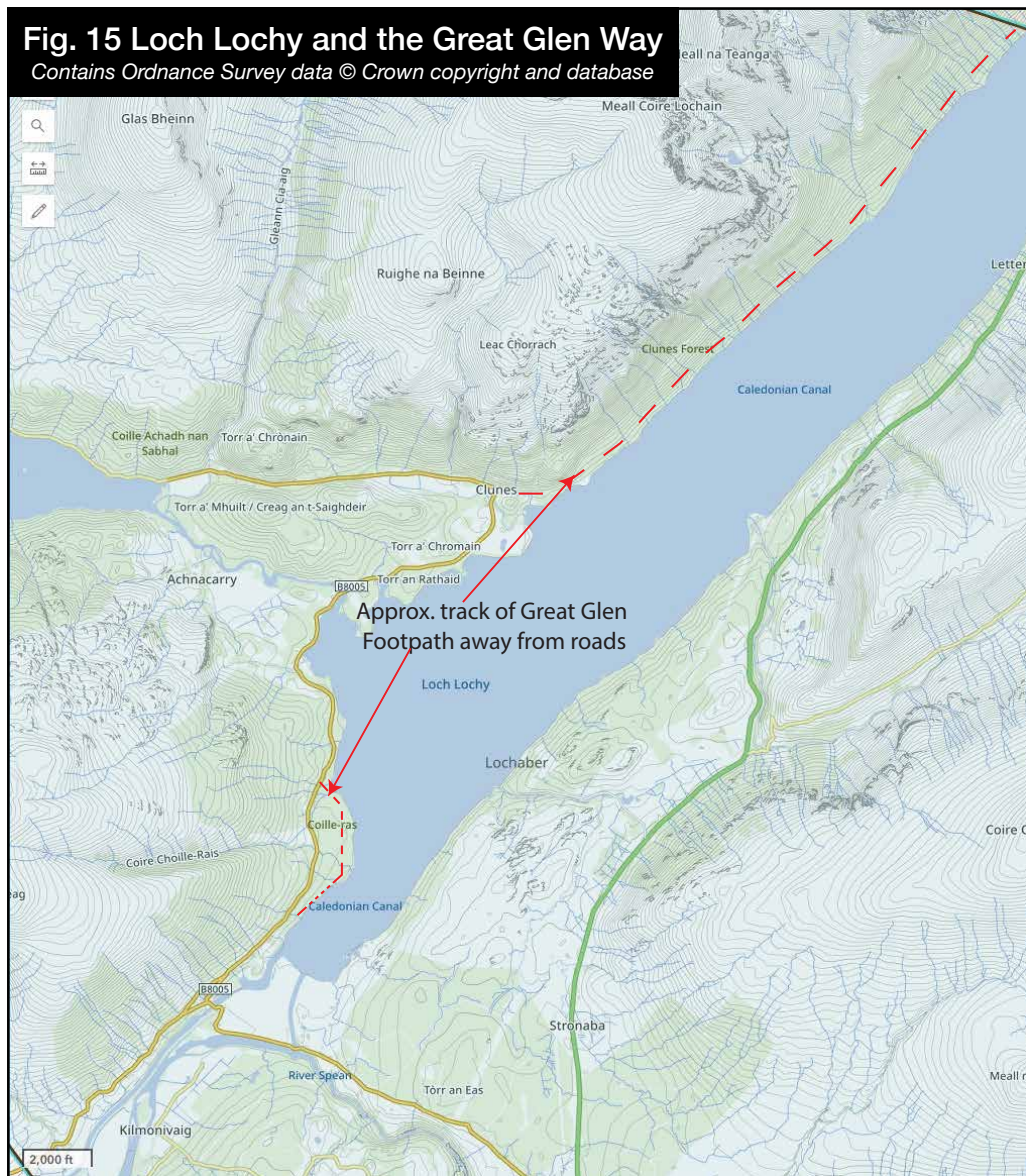


Fig. 14 Loch Lochy from the Great Glen Way

On the western shore of Loch Lochy (Figs. 14 and 15) is a portion of the Great Glen way that runs from Gairloch North East along the shores of the loch. The conifer and patches of oak woodlands along the path for several Km's on the northern side provide a beautiful walk, with loch views, wildlife and history provided by the link to the Commando training area and the Camerons. The long distance path is extensively used by visitors in spring and summer and is very popular with locals throughout the year. The Cameron Museum is within striking distance of the walk. Also in the area is the

Fig. 15 Loch Lochy and the Great Glen Way

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famous Skipinnish Oak, a 400-to-1,000-year-old sessile oak that was Tree of the year in 2024.

Spean Bridge , Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Local Place Plan

Within the Community Council area Loch Arkaig (Fig 16), is the highlight for those interested in wildlife and is perhaps one of the wildest areas of the Highlands. One the southern shore of the Loch is the Woodland Trust's Loch Arkaig Pine Forest (<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/woods/loch-arkaig-pine-forest/>) one of the last remaining fragments of the Great Caledonian Forest that once covered much of the Highlands. The Pine Forest covers 1,027 hectares (2,537 acres) in size and consists of two blocks of native Caledonian pinewood: Glen Mallie and the Gusacht. There are also patches of native oak woodland.

The forest contains a great variety of wildlife including red squirrels, pine martins, otters, red deer, wild boar and potentially wild cats, plus eagles and other bird life. It is also home to rare mosses.

Loch Arkaig is famously home to a breeding population of Ospreys (<https://ardechive-locharkaig.co.uk/loch-arkaig-osprey-cam>) that can be seen around the loch and beyond.

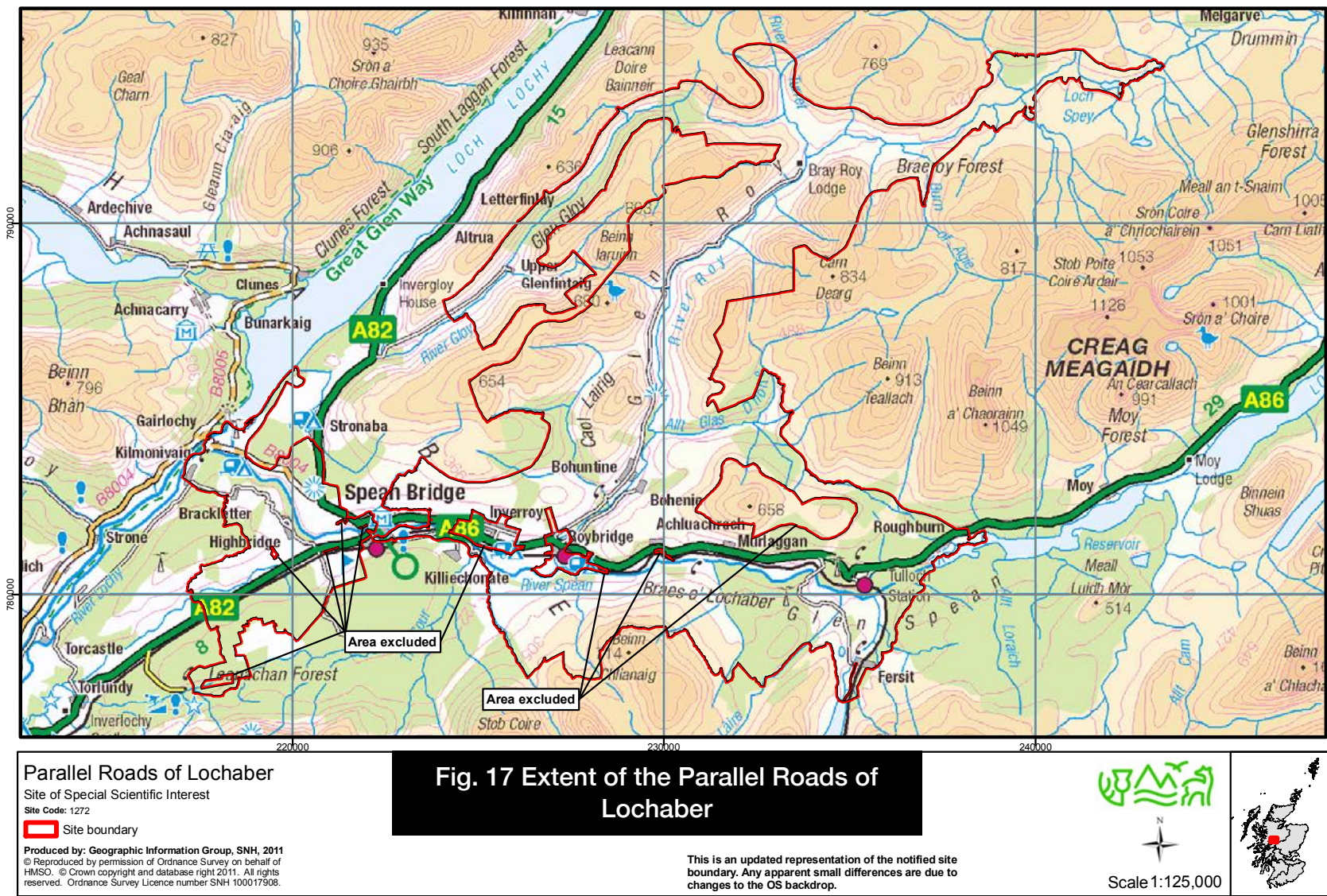
On the northern shore of the loch there is the Chequered Skipper butterfly reserve (<https://www.highlandenvironmentforum.info/directory-project/chequered-skipper-reserve-loch-arkaig/>).

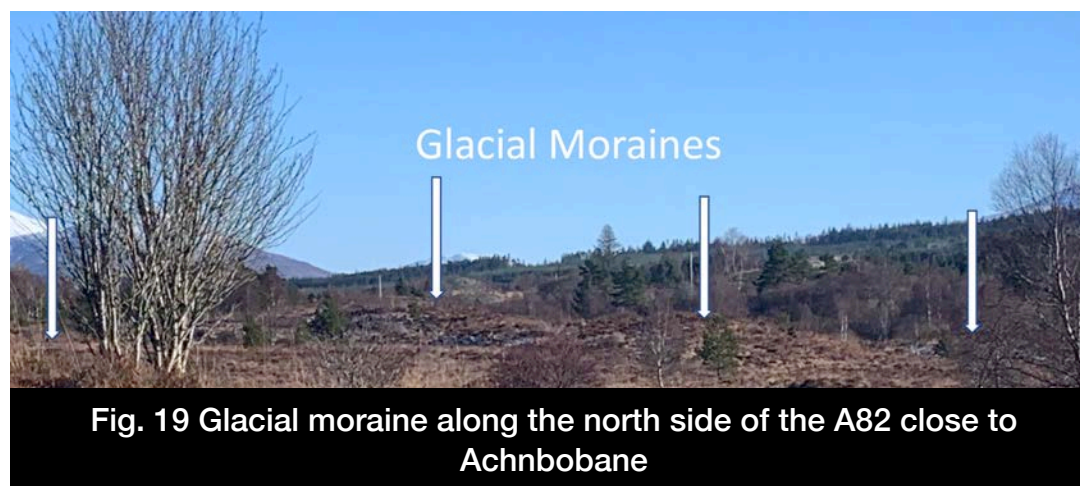
Overall, the landscape and wildlife of Loch Arkaig make it a very special place.

Within the Community Council area lies the Internationally renown Parallel Roads of Lochaber Site of Special Scientific Interest (Fig. 17) , considered to be one of the 200 most important geological sites globally.

The outline of the area affected is given in the map on the next page. The area includes Glen Roy, most of Glen Gloy, the portion of Glen Spean south of Roy Bridge and the Brakletter-Achnabobane-Leanachan Forest area. The SSSI covers a large area of 14496.39ha. The land was first designated under the 1949 act as the Parallel Roads of Glen Roy, and then re-notified in 1981 as the Parallel Roads of Lochaber incorporating the Glen Roy National Nature Reserve. Further renotification under the 1981 Act occurred in 1988, and

[www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016787825000409?](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016787825000409?ref=cra_js_challenge&fr=RR-1)
[ref=cra_js_challenge&fr=RR-1](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016787825000409?ref=cra_js_challenge&fr=RR-1)





Summary

The Community Council and SCIO have made progress in a number of areas including acquisition of a site for a community garden in Spean Bridge, and the Roy Bridge School where seven affordable housing units are planned. Other initiatives are underway e.g. resilience planning.

5 Progress



Fig. 20 Roy Bridge School

Roy Bridge School (Figs. 20-21)

The Roy Bridge school was mothballed in 2017 after the new cluster school opened in Spean Bridge and permanently closed in October 2022. This outcome was endorsed by the Scottish Government in December 2022. The

Community Council with the support and later leadership of the SCIO have pursued acquiring the disused Roy Bridge School as a site for new affordable housing. One of the most important things they learnt during the initial consultations with residents was that they would like to retain the original Victorian School building and the play area. In all subsequent plans these wishes have featured strongly.



Fig. 21 Muga

The project has progressed rapidly and today preparation is underway to submit a planning proposal to Highland Council for the site, and discussions are underway on the funding and need for partners going forward to deliver the homes.

In outline:

- Information Evening with the CHT and Arisaig Community Trust in September 2024
- £33,000 Feasibility Study in Spring 2025 funded by Communities Regeneration Fund, Scottish Land Fund and SSE Renewables
- Community Drop-In Event with the CHT and Kearney Donald in March 2025
- Acquired via Community Asset Transfer for £75,000 from Highland Council in October 2025, underwritten by Scottish Land Fund
- Scheme for 7 new affordable dwellings for rent and 2 cross-subsidising holiday apartments
- Long lease of community rooms at *Taigh na Sgoile* surrendered to us in December 2025
- Pre-Application Enquiry positive, proceeding to planning over 2026
- Project overseen by Trustee Steering Group, with 12 meetings since June 2023

The SCIO is now in the process of contracting architects to prepare a planning proposal (Fig. 22) for Highland Council to consider and identifying sponsors for the next phase. The current plans for the site are shown opposite, note the leased area has become available as *Taigh na Sgoile* have surrendered their lease.

Within the old Victorian School building the plan is to have short term holiday let accommodation to help fund maintenance on the affordable houses. Some form of community area is also planned. Seven affordable houses are thought likely, but their exact specification in terms of numbers of bedrooms is still being discussed.

The SCIO is extremely grateful to Highland Council for all their help in making this project possible and for funding from HIE, Rural Housing Fund, SSE Sustainable development fund and others.

Spean Bridge , Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Local Place Plan

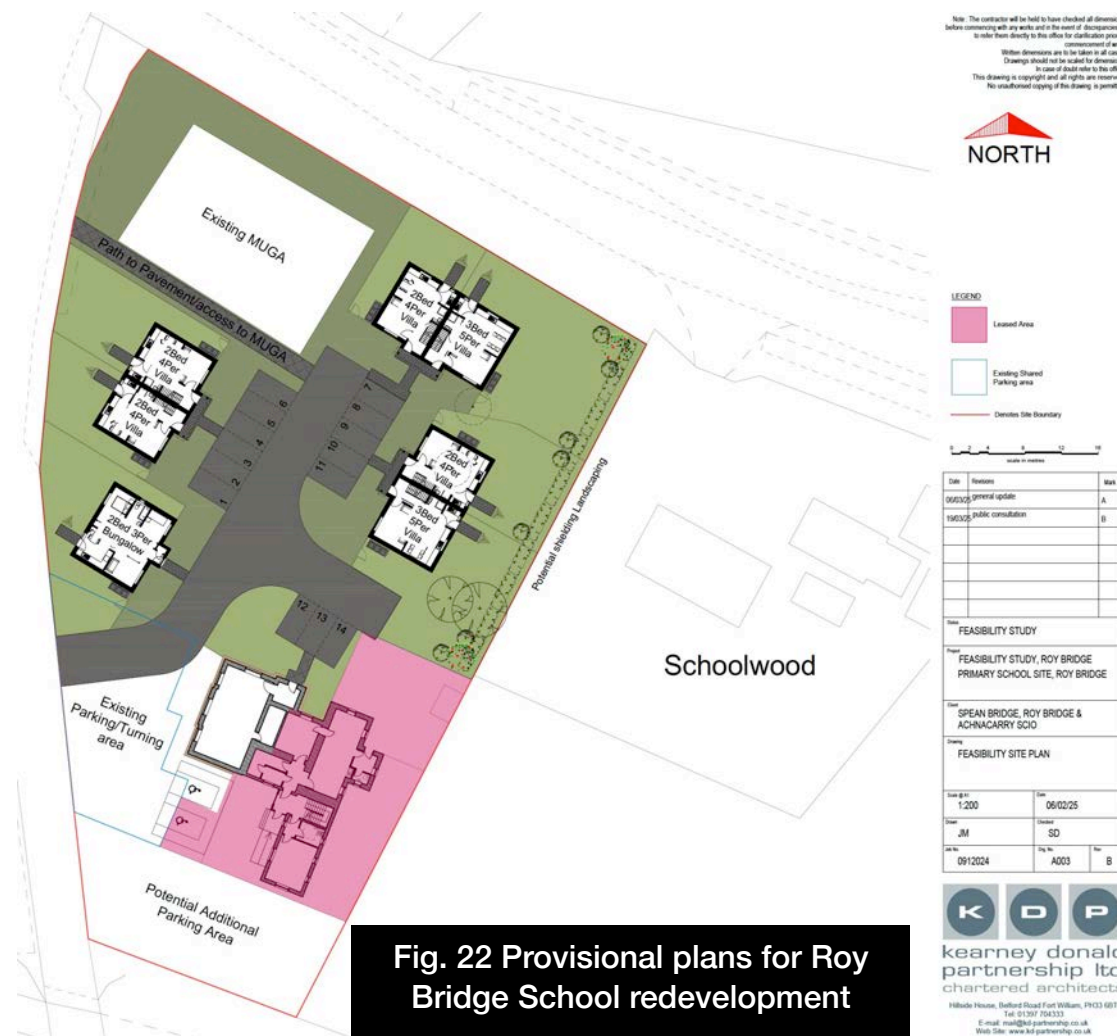


Fig. 22 Provisional plans for Roy Bridge School redevelopment

Spean Bridge Community Garden

The community garden, which fits in with the well being theme, began as a discussion between the Community Council and Highland Council on the

replacement of the equipment in an old play park adjacent to the Spean Bridge Community Hall. Progress was as shown below:

- 3 acres acquired via Community Asset Transfer *gratis* from Highland Council in August 2025 (Fig. 23a).
- Includes open ground, woodland and riverbank
- Satisfies key Action Plan priority: improving the environment and creating a community garden (92% in favour)
- New playpark at £17,000 funded by SSE Renewables, Highland Council, our own Community Council and Killiechonate Woodlands
- Additional 2 acres of woodland gifted in December 2025 (Fig. 23b).
- Start-up funds from SSE Renewables Hydro Community Fund and Great Glen Tourism Group
- Community Picnic with 60+ participants took place in September 2025
- Project run by community-led Garden Group with 6 meetings since September 2024

The plan for the community garden is to create both a garden, allotments and a river side walk, The garden is managed by the Garden Group on behalf of the SCIO. The Garden Group first met soon after the replacement play park opened in September 2024, and is deliberately Spean Bridge community-led, with only one SCIO trustee member. It has now held six meetings. A Community Picnic in September celebrated the acquisition from Highland Council the previous month.

If supportive land owners can be found it may be possible to repeat the garden model in Roy Bridge and at Clunes.

Active Travel

Active travel options for cycle/footpaths between Spean Bridge and Roy Bridge, and connecting to the path from Fort William are being pursued by the Community Council and the Active Travel SCIO. So far discussions with Bear Scotland and HTRANS have failed to deliver anything tangible.

Defibrillators

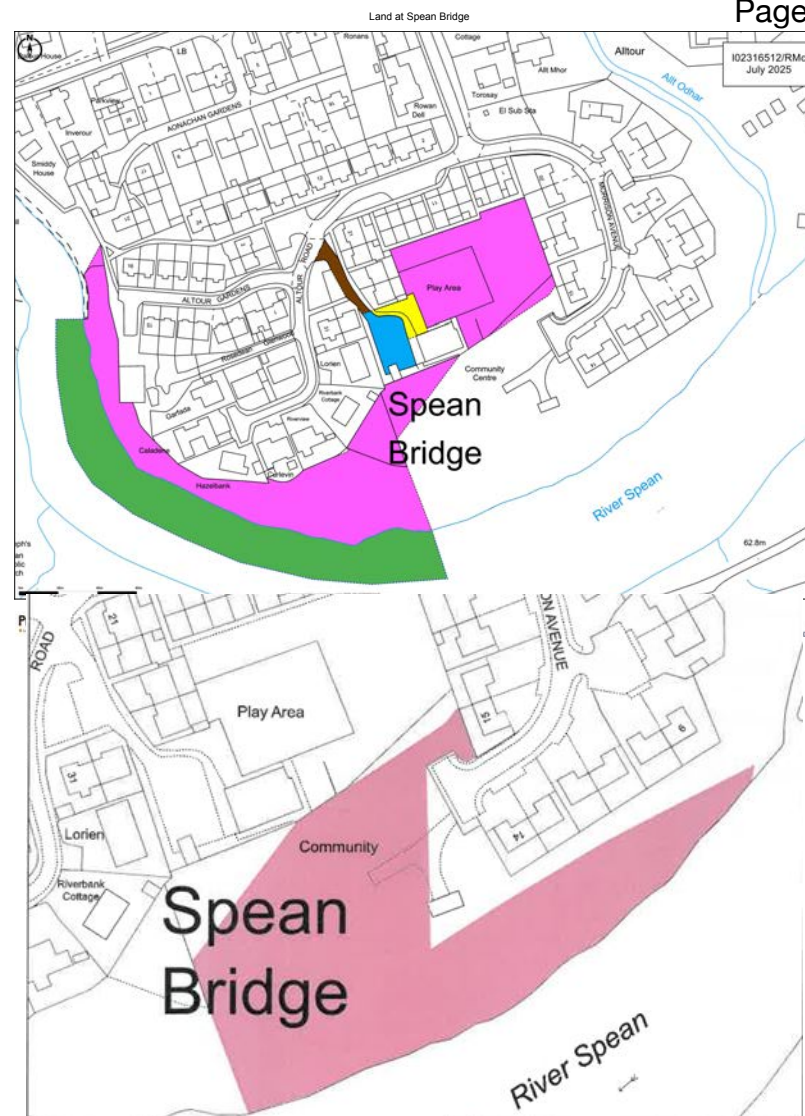


Fig. 23 Community Garden
Fig. 23a -Community buyout of Highland Council land
Fig. 23 b Land donated by an anonymous donor

Again on the well being theme, the SCIO is sourcing and installing additional defibrillators on the Caledonian Canal at Gairloch close to the red phone box and notice board and at the new pharmacy in Spean Bridge. This is progressing well with funding arranged.

Wrap around care at Spean Bridge School

The need to help working families by supplying wrap around care at the Spean Bridge primary school has been recognised as an area of concern. A survey of the needs was undertaken in March 2025 that further strengthened the need. Discussions between the SCIO and the school on how to provide this resulted in the School agreeing to take this on and no further action was required by the SCIO. To date nothing further has occurred, and the situation is under review.

Resilience Planning

The Community Council has prepared an outline Resilience Plan that recognises the intensely rural nature of the area and is focusing at present on identifying key people across the area that can act as focal points for identifying needs, organising local help and passing on information to the appropriate authorities.

Experience to date, suggests that the first area that needs addressing are severe weather events resulting in electricity outages. Vulnerable people have noted that the batteries given them to recharge mobile phones etc., have failed, often because the outage has gone so long the batteries have been exhausted.

Achnacarry Village Hall

The Achnacarry, Bunarkaig and Clunes Community Group SCIO is planning to replace their village hall utilising community benefit from a hydro-electric scheme.

Commando Monument

The Commando Heritage Trust unveiled plans to develop a 7.4 million pound heritage centre in the area of the monument. The plan is to build a “discrete” centre near the monument to honour Commandoes and Special Forces. The Community Council broadly welcomes this initiative and is happy to discuss plans and help the Trust.

Summary

The growth in renewable energy developments, particularly pump storage schemes, are causing great concern over the rise in road traffic and its impact on the road network and knock on effect on the tourist business. The Community Council looks forward to a fair and equitable distribution of community benefit with which to fund its objectives. Opportunities also exist, for instance by attracting high income home workers into the area that can utilise the newly installed fibre internet network.

6. Challenges and Opportunities

Community Challenges

There exists a number of wider challenges to the community that cannot easily be addressed.

Pumped Hydro and other renewable energy schemes

The wider area has three proposed pumped storage hydro schemes:

Coire Glas

Loch Erba

Fearna

Each of these is a massive project, involving the setting up of work camps, movement of heavy equipment and disposal of spoil each of which will take more than 10 years to reach fruition. Much of this work utilises the main roads in the area - A82, A86 and A87, as equipment will come in via the ports in Kyle, Inverness or Caol. Even if not all go forward, this will put tremendous pressure on the main arteries through the Highland Council area.

At the same time proposals for new wind farms will undoubtedly also appear.

Questions by the Community Council have revealed that there is no integrated transport plan (i.e. taking into account all the plans) that has assessed the increased road traffic on safety, or the local economy (tourism etc.,). Instead each plan has been treated in isolation. At the same time,

hauliers working for companies setting up camps unconnected with the projects mention here, have warned the Community Council of the significant disruption their convoy movements will cause. The Community Council is extremely worried that these renewable energy construction projects will have a negative effect on the local economy and our road network. An integrated approach by Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government to assess the increase in road traffic and upgrade the roads is required.

It has also become apparent that Planning conditions agreed in planning consents by SSE and Highland Council have been arbitrarily overturned by Highland Council without consultation with local residents. Some these conditions such as working hours have had a direct impact on those living in the area. Furthermore, attempts by the Community Council to discover how these decisions have been made have been obfuscated.

Finally, the Community Council is concerned about ensuring that fair levels of Community Benefit are allocated to all projects. The discussions around Loch Erba with Gilkes Energy are a good example. Gilkes are trying to get the communities affected by this development to agree on a significantly lower level of benefit than is the norm. At the same time operators are arguing that lower levels of Community Benefit should be applied to pumped storage systems than other renewable projects because they are not renewable projects! How, its possible to argue that any hydro scheme that uses a renewable source to store and the release energy is not renewable is mind blowing.

Given the position of Spean Bridge, it would expect to be a major beneficiary of Community Benefit which could then be used to forward plans for creating a sustainable community.

Youth Unemployment

Building a sustainable community requires local jobs particularly for young people, in order to retain them. Currently like many areas of the Highlands we are losing our youngsters to cities with better opportunities. This is not impossible to reverse as there are also shortages of skilled workman in the area so the opportunities exist, it is the training that is missing. So schemes like that eluded to in the section on a different form of community benefit are worth serious consideration.to exercise facilities.

Alongside youth unemployment there is a lack of facilities for children, youths and residents , from childcare to physical activity.

A86

The A86, is a main route for many existing wind farms and the Loch Fearn project if not more. It should be a major east-west connection through the Highlands. Transport Scotland have confirmed that it is not really an “A” road standard. The road not only provides a major coach route, but also connects the Community Council area with direct trains to Edinburgh and London. Recall, however, the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation shows that Roy Bridge is the poorest area of the Community Council area. Arguably, if the A86 was actually a major artery through the Highlands then Roy Bridge should be a major tourist centre for those coming from the east. In reality, the A86 does not have the confidence of tourists and this impacts businesses.

Along with the transport of equipment to the renewable energy projects this provides yet another reason why the A86 needs upgrading.

The Community Council has been pursuing a pedestrian crossing for children at the Spean Bridge Primary School but the request has been rejected by Transport Scotland. At the same time a crossing has been installed for 16 pupils of Glen Gary School on the A87 that has many times fewer pupils. We are yet to receive a believable explanation from Transport Scotland as to why a pedestrian crossing for many times more pupils is not necessary at Spean Bridge.

Planning Timelines

The planning process is a two edged sword, it can both protect the environment but sometimes the time taken to reach a decision can result in opportunities being lost. In our area, we have seen an examples of a developer (Campbell) coming forward with plans for both affordable housing and a new Co-Op on one site but eventually pulling out as no decision was reached in a reasonable time frame. We believe, that where planning proposals meet the guidance set out in this document decisions should be expedited whenever possible.

Education

The School currently has no wrap around care, and although agreed is yet to materialise. This provides a barrier to employment. Such care would take a burden off parents and potentially allow more people into employment.

There is also no early learning centre with sensory space and special educational needs learning facilities. Similarly there’s no youth centre.

The small plot crisis

As previously discussed, unauthorised (ie. without any form of planning permission), creation of small plots, with hard standings in areas of protected land, and their sale either via land investment companies, auction houses or social media, originated in Achnabobane. It is now spreading across the Highlands and on to Orkney and Ayrshire. Its success has relied on the lack of any action by the authorities.

The Internationally renown Parallel Roads of Lochaber SSSI has already been seriously damaged in one area, unless this is tackled in our area, firmly and quickly, it is likely that serious reputational damage will be done to Lochaber.

Community Opportunities

The disappearing digital divide

In the last two years much of the area has become linked to a high speed fibre based internet network, and this offers an opportunity to run businesses from remoter areas as a result of Scotlands R100. Furthermore, since the pandemic many people have wanted move to the countryside for a better quality of life as home working becomes a real possibility for them. Those moving here quote a love of the natural environment, less pollution and mountains; remote enough but with access to all amenities, schools and nurseries; cheaper housing and larger plots of land; small community feel giving a feeling of slower living. The Spean Bridge area is ideally placed to meet many of what the digital nomads are looking for. Many of these jobs are very well paid. These people also bring in new skills, create jobs and boost education. A strategy is needed to draw such individuals/families into our area as this will increase the economically active population which in turn will help grow local services.

Making more of what we have

There are opportunities to increase the range of services offered tourists based on our heritage. Currently nothing is made of:

Parallel Roads of Lochaber

Jacobite Heritage

Spean Bridge to Fort Augustus railway

Commando history

The above topics offer tour and visitor centre possibilities that could employ local people.

A different form of Community Benefit?

The renewable companies creating wind farms, and pumped hydro systems largely bring in their own employees or those of their contractors to carry out the work. In return, disrupted communities are offered cash. Unfortunately, such construction work rarely uses local labour. One new form of community benefit that should be considered is the funding of apprentices to develop skills needed desperately in the community such as electricians, plumbers, painters etc. In that way the number economically active individuals in the community will rise.

Summary

We are asking the Highland Councils support to help build a sustainable community by prioritising affordable housing, facilities for residents over tourists, limits on second homes and improvements in connectivity. It is also critically important to stop the destruction of the landscape and internationally important scientific sites that is occurring by unauthorised development.

7. Conclusion and Action Plan

The Community Council will focus on supporting the building a sustainable community by:

Promoting the growth of affordable housing and services in Spean Bridge and Roy Bridge corridor.

Lobby for Active travel and improvements of connectivity, especially along the A86.

Continue to build a community resilience plan

Look carefully at any rural development proposals, especially those on protected land.

Lobby Highland Council and other agencies to stop the clearance and sale of small plots on protected land.

Identify and support opportunities for building affordable housing and the necessary support services (child care, jobs, etc.,) to reverse loss of the younger generation from the area.

Create a plan to attract digital nomads to live in the area.

In the short term this means:

Planning

- Support planning applications that meet our criteria for building a sustainable community
 - o Look for opportunities to build develop local services e.g. second supermarket, doctors surgery etc.
- Look carefully at any rural planning applications
- Support SCIO in Roy Bridge Housing development
- Provide ABC Group support for the redevelopment of the Achnacarry Hall

Resilience and well being

- Continue to build and resource plan, and identify gaps and needs.
- Increase number of defibrillators
- Continue to develop and publicise the community garden

Transport

- Continue discussions with Transport Scotland and HTRANS on active travel between Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge and on to Fort William.
- Continue to lobby the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland to upgrade the A86
- Pressurise Transport Scotland to put in a crossing close to Spean Bridge School

Medium Term

Planning

- Works with partners to ensure development of affordable housing
- Utilize community buyout with a partner where appropriate

- Partner of choice is Spean Bridge, Roy Briudge, Achnacarry SCIO where it has the capacity.

Long Term assuming significant community benefit from pumped hydro schemes.

- Create options to use benefit for creation of local apprenticeships in return for set guaranteed period of residence in the area.

Build

- Works with partners to ensure development of affordable housing