Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge, and Achnacarry SCIO SC 044101
Minutes – Trustees' Meeting 23rd February 2026

Held at *Taigh na Sgoile*, Roy Bridge starting at 7pm

Present: Sharon Donald (Chair), Valerie Steele (Treasurer), Ian Langley (Secretary), Brian Smith, Melvyn Giles, Margaret Horner, Keith Hoole, Eilidh Maitland and Tony Perriam

1. **Apologies:** Charlotte Hatto

2. **Approval of Minutes of Meeting on 30th October 2025:**

   Proposed: Ian Langley
   Seconded: Brian Smith

3. **Matters Arising (not covered elsewhere on agenda):**

   Spean Bridge Christmas Lights: despite Tony's suggestion to the co-ordinators, the Community Council had not received a microgrant application.
   Apple Press: Val intended to repeat the Community Apple Day in the Autumn
   Hector the Haggis: would not re-appear at Easter, and has retired

4. **Community Development Officer Update:**

   Tony now circulates activity updates to all trustees at the start of each month, with the aim that board meetings could focus on strategy and debate.

   Roy Bridge Primary School Site:

   Taigh na Sgoile: the board of *Taigh na Sgoile* had unexpectedly approached Sharon in early December and indicated that they would be willing to surrender the remaining 29 years of their lease to the SCIO on 29 December 2025 for no consideration. On that day Sharon and Tony met with Taigh na Sgoile's Chair and Secretary, and a formal Renunciation was signed giving us vacant possession of the whole Roy Bridge School site. In light of the significant benefit to the SCIO, there had been no enforcement of the tenant's maintenance and repair obligations in the lease.

   Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) – a visit by their Chair, Chief Executive and senior staff was scheduled for mid-March. HIE have financially supported Tony's post and were likely to be one of the two funders for the forthcoming planning phase of the project.

   Demountable Classroom and Offices – the Shinty Club had decided not to pursue their earlier interest, and an approach had been made to Arkaig Community Forest, who are seeking to replace their ageing Forest School building at Clunes. Three of their committee members and their architect inspected the unit on 6 February.

   Appointment of Architect for Planning Phase – three quotations had been received and previously circulated to the Steering Group. The Steering Group's recommendation to the SCIO Board was that Kearney Donald be retained to secure planning consent for the project, co-ordinating structural engineer and quantity surveyor input as well as other specialist

consultants, in the same way as for the Feasibility Study. Sharon and Eilidh declared an interest and recused themselves from the discussion and vote. After a brief debate, there was unanimous agreement to re-appoint Kearney Donald.

Open Day: a drop-in event in the Victorian school room was proposed, to allow updated plans to be available for the community to view and potentially adjust, in good time before final planning documents were assembled in May/June. Saturday 11 April, during the Easter school holidays, emerged as the preferred date.

Project Funding: the planning phase budget is £64,000. HIE have indicated support of around £20,000 in principle, allowing Tony to submit an application for gap funding of £45,000 to SSE's biennial Sustainable Development Fund in late January. The outcome is expected during April.

Post Funding: HIE had confirmed on the afternoon of the meeting that the Scottish Government's Strengthening Communities Programme (SCP) had agreed to fund half of Tony's 0.5 FTE role for one year from 1 April 2026.

Spean Bridge Community Garden and Woodland:

As the required Trustee member on the Garden Group, Eilidh outlined recent progress:

After a Winter break, the community-led **Garden Group** met on 12 February. The priorities for the months ahead were to agree a maintenance contract (to include the grounds at Roy Bridge School), deal with nuisance or hazardous tree work, remove rotten picket fencing and clear the bracken in the area chosen to create allotments.

Volunteer Morning: volunteers would be sought via our Facebook posts and word of mouth among neighbours for a Spring tidy-up of the open ground and windfall in the woodland on the morning of Saturday 28 March.

Acquisition: on Christmas Eve a gift of two acres of woodland from an immediately adjoining landowner had formally completed, expanding the Community Garden and Woodland to 5 acres. With the donor's consent, the area will be named "Campbell Wood".

Design: an overall master plan would be drawn up for community feedback to incorporate the existing playpark with room for additional inclusive equipment, a polycrub, allotments for rent, an upgraded riverside footpath, a pavilion/shelter, a wildflower meadow, a seating area and sensory garden with raised beds for older residents, a bike rack and a more inviting entrance from the Community Centre car park. A suitable site would be identified and prepared for the picnic benches from Roy Bridge School.

Signage: Tony will liaise with Highland Council over statutory requirements for new signage on the A86 and on Altour Road.

Community Composting Area: an approach had been received from the Community Council to see if an area could be set aside for garden composting by the wider community. However, access, funding and positioning of a composing facility for the allotment holders have still to be finalised. After some debate, it was agreed that the Group did not feel able to support a residents' composting facility at this early stage due to concerns over monitoring and the dangers of contamination by unsuitable material. However, once the allotment

composting area has been up and running for a while it may well be possible to open up the scheme.

Vehicular Access: Tony has approached Lochaber Housing Association (LHA) to secure vehicular access from Morrison Avenue via the existing gate used by the Scottish Water. This would allow a car park to be created for the allotment holders.

Funding: £22,140 of designated funds secured for the garden and woodland project remains in the SCIO's bank account.

Gairlochy Noticeboard: The board has arrived. Permission for the replacement has been obtained from Scottish Canals West Area Supervisor and the tenant of the lock keeper's cottage, and a risk assessment template has been requested from Scottish Canals Third Party Works department. The contractor is standing by.

Outdoor Heritage Events: There was widespread approval for a pilot scheme, which would result in modest expenditure of under £500 but does chime with one of the SCIO's stated aims. Suggested themes included the Commando Memorial, Highbridge and the Jacobites, the Invergarry & Fort Augustus Railway, the Battle of Mulroy, the Parallel Roads and the Puggy Line. Tony will check our public liability insurance cover.

The *Dualchas Bràigh Loch Abair* history group had recently obtained a quote of £870 to replace the interpretation board for poet Iain Lorn at Roughburn and were seeking financial assistance. It was felt that our resources should concentrate on launching the outdoor heritage talks this year.

SCVO's *The Gathering* Conference: Tony attended this excellent free two-day event at Edinburgh in mid-February on behalf of the SCIO and took notes at governance, compliance and financial sessions. Weblinks to the content may be available from mid-March.

Membership: unchanged from October at 122 (116 Full, 6 Associate) whilst Facebook followers risen to 676 (610 in October)

5. Taigh na Sgoile

Sharon reminded the meeting that an oven-ready, flexible community resource was now owned and managed by the SCIO.

The ground floor meeting room and the first-floor former youth club recreation area offered obvious potential for income generation from hourly hire to community groups, beyond the three existing users. Tony will ensure electrical and fire compliance before promoting online booking via hallbookingonline.com as used successfully at Kilmallie. Regular cleaning of the hire and circulation areas would be required.

The Garden Group are investigating a contract for the lawned area beyond the playground, and a more radical tidy-up of the unkempt approach to *Taigh na Sgoile*. The utilities (broadband and electricity) have been successfully transferred, and Tony will apply for non-domestic rates relief.

Effect on Development Options: The requirement to avoid the leased grounds and the area designated for shared parking with the school had constrained the potential site layout at Feasibility Study stage. Now that these limitations were removed, our architect would look at potentially giving more garden space to each dwelling and reducing the length of the internal vehicular access, an expensive element in the scheme's overall costs. A significant cost saving could also be achieved by converting surplus space on the ground floor of *Taigh na Sgoile* to create a 1- or 2-bed apartment with its own entrance and garden, to form one of the seven new affordable dwellings for rent approved in principle at Pre-Application Enquiry stage. Indicative plans would be circulated to the Steering Group and at April's Open Day.

Right of Access Beside Railway: Eilidh declared an interest and left the meeting for this topic. Her family member Calum Macdonald has approached the SCIO and requested a right of vehicular access over the strip of rough ground alongside the West Highland Line at the Southern edge of the school site. Previously this area formed part of the lease to *Taigh na Sgoile*. Subject to planning approval, he intends to build a family house on ground owned by his family immediately to the East.

After due debate, it was agreed that we woud indicate our approval in principle, subject to legal and practical safeguards. Tony will write to Twin Deer Law with a list of our suggested stipulations. Following their advice, these would then be passed on to Calum Macdonald to incorporate in a draft Deed of Servitude for Twin Deer Law's further scrutiny before being brought back to the Board.

6. **Trustee Recruitment**:

Sharon suggested that this subject could be deferred until our next meeting. In the interim, all trustees were encouraged to actively consider suitable candidates to approach to maintain a healthy balance of age, geography and expertise across the Board.

7. **Financial Protocols:**

Melvyn indicated that he was keen to initiate a debate on tighter financial control as the SCIO's activity level grew and increasingly larger sums of public money were being sought and spent by our charity.

Val opened the discussion by outlining her current system for tracking expenditure and ensuring restricted funding was suitably accounted for. She was also ever mindful of recommendations from Voluntary Action Lochaber (VAL) who carry out the annual independent inspection and limited scope audit. She advocated a robust framework, and possibly the use of Google software to share financial information amongst trustees.

Keith endorsed this view and suggested that we might consider hiring a bookkeeper.

Tony advocated retaining the existing separation between the operational (his role) and the fiscal, with only the Treasurer and Chair as signatories to our account. He proposed that the current limit of £25,000 per single transaction remain for now, but that both signatories should be required to authorise any transaction in excess of £5,000 to reduce the exposure

for our office bearers. Once the Roy Bridge School build is underway, it would be prudent to create a separate account for the project. Finally, he suggested he could create and circulate a draft Risk Register prior to the next trustees' meeting.

It was agreed that in the first instance Sharon, Val and Tony would hold a working meeting in mid-March, with the aim of producing proposals on financial control for the Board's approval in April.

8. **Treasurer's Report**:

   £72,916 was available in our account on the meeting date of 23 February.

9. **Any Other Business:**

   Shinty Club: the new children's strips and the pitch side advertising board had further improved the relationship between our development trust and our community's largest sports club. Val indicated that the Shinty Club were actively seeking a new training ground and were keen to know if the SCIO could identify, acquire and purchase land on their behalf, as well as seeking any necessary funding through our Development Officer.

   Tony reminded the meeting that we had assisted the Shinty Club's successful application for £10,000 towards a club house extension from SSE's Stronelairg Community Fund in November 2022. Subsequently, the Consultation and Action Plan of April 2023 had not identified the Shinty Club as a community priority. The SCIO's two principal projects at Roy Bridge School and Spean Bridge Garden allowed very little additional capacity within his part-time role and he therefore urged caution at the risk of becoming the Shinty Club's land buyer and fundraiser. Instead, Tony suggested that he could readily forward funding opportunities of which he became aware to the Club.

   It was generally agreed that this was a sensible approach, and Val or Sharon would advise Bruno at the Club accordingly.

Meeting closed at: 10.00pm

Date of next scheduled meeting: Thursday 9 April at *Taigh na Sgoile*, at 6pm to allow for an earlier finish.

Ian Langley, Secretary