Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge, and Achnacarry SCIO SC0 44101

Minutes – Trustees' Meeting 3rd July 2025

Present: Sharon Donald (Chair), Valerie Steele (Treasurer), Ian Langley (Secretary), Brian Smith, Melvyn Giles, Margaret Horner, Charlotte Hatto and Tony Perriam

1. **Apologies:** Jo Kotula, Eilidh Maitland, Keith Hoole.
   Sharon highlighted that the meeting was taking place for the first time at Roy Bridge School, by kind permission of the Board of *Taigh na Sgoile.*

2. **Approval of Minutes of Meeting on 7th May 2025:**

   Proposed: Ian Langley
   Seconded: Margaret Horner

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

- **Defibrillator**: now installed at Mhor Health
- **Litter Pickin**g: It was agreed not to carry out an Autumn litter pick, although there may be a future tidy-up at the new Spean Bridge Community Garden if need be
- **Community Payback Teams**: in light of management issues with the scheme, no further action to be taken.

4. **Community Development Officer Update:**

   Spean Bridge Community Garden and Woodland:

   Timescales: The agreed entry date is now Friday 1 August. Ownership of the access area from the car park lies with the Community Centre SCIO.

   Costs: An additional £397 in legal costs not covered by the £2,000 HIE grant was now anticipated for deed plans. A quote of £150 for top-up insurance to cover public liability for the ground being transferred was unlikely to be payable, as the renewal date for our principal policy is 2 August and our new premium will reflect the acquisition.

   Funding: Our application to SSE's Hydro Community Fund for £18,125 will now be determined in September. Meanwhile, Val has identified funding of at least £10,000 through the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund and will liaise with Tony over a possible application.

   Tree Felling: Our insurers require three young trees identified as diseased in the Tree Survey of February 2025 to be felled within 3 months of acquisition. A quote of £200 has been received. Brian offered to check contact details for John MacPhee so that another estimate could be obtained.

Steering Group: The next meetings have been scheduled for late July and mid-September, with the six-member Group now including Catherine Mitchell, a permaculturist.

Celebratory Picnic: Val proposed a family picnic on Saturday 16 August just before the end of the school holidays, with an Autumn Apple Festival to follow and a cycle of four events annually. It was agreed that the SCIO would underwrite any costs for the picnic, if grant funding could not be secured in time.

Roy Bridge Primary School Site:

Highland Council: our Community Asset Transfer Request has been validated and is live on the Council's website. A decision is expected at the 13 August meeting of the Property Committee of elected councillors. We have proposed a consideration of £100,000 with vacant possession, or £75,000 if the lease to *Taigh na Sgoile* remains in place, and we become their landlords. *Taigh na Sgoile* had not progressed their earlier discussions with the Council over ending their lease.

Scottish Land Fund (SLF): our Stage Two (acquisition) grant application was submitted timeously on 9 June, although the accompanying Business Plan due to be completed by the Communities Housing Trust (CHT) did not follow until 25 June and most of the content was ultimately compiled by us. An assessment interview is due to take place in mid-July, and a decision is anticipated at the start of September. We have requested up to £145,000, depending on the consideration required by Highland Council.

Early Expressions of Interest: Conscious of the importance of evidencing demand, an *ad hoc* survey carried out by us in June had produced 37 named notes of interest in the final scheme, in marked contrast to CHT's Housing Needs Survey of February, which had elicited only one interested party.

Communities Housing Trust (CHT): A lively and frank discussion followed on the merits of retaining CHT as principal consultants, and of swapping our contact point within their team. It was agreed to invite their Interim CEO Morven Taylor to meet with the trustees separately before the end of July. Margaret cautioned against making any changes until the outcome of our Asset Transfer Request and SLF Stage Two grant was known.

NHS Highland: The resuscitated Belford Hospital project could provide a capital partner for construction or long-term leases at market rents for the holiday flats, and Ian offered to pass on the contact details of senior management.

Gairlochy and Spean Bridge 'Phone Boxes:

A BT consultation ends on 15 July, and it seems likely that the public call boxes adjoining the canal at Gairlochy and at Spean Crescent, Spean Bridge would then be decommissioned and removed. Eligible community organisations are able to adopt redundant boxes if they register an interest during the consultation.

At **Gairlochy** the residents have set up a standalone SCIO, the Gairlochy Red Telephone Box Preservation Company Ltd, with the aim of installing a defibrillator in the vintage kiosk there. It was agreed that the SCIO would keep in touch and offer to step in only if the adoption

faltered. Brian offered to add any defibrillator there to his watchlist for battery and pad replacement.

A debate ensued over whether to adopt the modern 'phone box at **Spean Bridge**, and for what purpose, and it was agreed not to pursue an interest. Tony will advise the Community Council accordingly.

Gairlochy Noticeboard: Visuals and quotations were circulated for oak and man-made timber effect noticeboards, and there was unanimous approval to order a 2-bay, 6 x A4 man-made timber glazed noticeboard with one lockable bay at £1,951 to include the SCIO's name across the top. The quotation includes delivery to Edinburgh and once it was with us a local joiner would be approached to put it in place.

SCIO Logo: Some early design ideas were passed around the meeting, and it was agreed to postpone a decision pending further drafts, which Sharon would circulate.

Membership: Numbers now stood at **120** (118 in April) and Facebook followers were at **565** (533 in April). 155 or so members, at around 10% of full-time residents, represented a realistic target to achieve by the year end.

5. **Commando Memorial**:

Sharon updated the meeting on the International Commando Heritage Trust (ICHT), a Marine-based charity hoping to endow a new heritage and interpretive centre adjacent to the Commando Memorial. Given the constraints of the site, a semi-subterranean design was proposed at an indicative cost of £7.5m. A community briefing and a public launch had both taken place in late June.

The focus of the project was on education and veterans rather than a public visitor centre, although there would be obvious economic spin-offs locally including job opportunities. There was some urgency to fundraising, as there are very few surviving WW2 cadets who had passed through their training at Achnacarry. It now looked unlikely that the Spean Bridge Hotel, at one point hosting a Commando Room of memorabilia, would feature in the ICHT's plans.

In absentia Keith had supported Melvyn's suggestion that any new centre should embrace other tourist attractions locally including General Wade's High Bridge, the disused railway and the Parallel Roads. However, Brian questioned whether this was appropriate given the Marine focus to the project. It was agreed to offer support to the ICHT's principals in pursuit of their highly commendable aims, and to provide introductions to local professionals and potential funders.

6. **Shinty Team Sponsorship:**

Val proposed two strands to sponsorship of Lochaber Camanachd Club, totalling £1.075:

- a pitch side board at £175 *pa* and one-off fabrication costs of £250
- junior team shirts at £650, likely to last for some years

The suggestion met with warm approval, and was passed unanimously

7. **Hector the Haggis Revival:**

   Val proposed that the SCIO provide seed finance for the revival of Hector the Haggis, a mascot to the colourful planters placed around Spean Bridge by a now defunct local tourism group wih residual funds of around £5,000 looking to be transferred to a live charity with aligned aims. The scheme had fallen by the wayside during the Pandemic. The suggestion was seconded by Charlotte and the Trustees agreed unanimously to provide the first year's support.

8. **Potential Future Income Streams:**

   An update on possible community benefit income streams from consented major renewable schemes at **Coire Glas** (SSE) and **Loch na Earba** (Gilkes) was postponed until Sharon and Tony had attended SSE's next Community Liaison Group on 30 September. It was considered important that the SCIO's status as the only community development trust representing the whole of our area was emphasized going forward.

9. **Treasurer's Report**:

   £60,000.53 was available in our account on the meeting date of 3 July, with all the Roy Bridge School Feasibility Study costs incurred and refunded in full by our year end of 30 June.

   Val will liaise with Voluntary Action Lochaber over the independent examination of our 2024-25 accounts.

10. **Any Other Business:**

    Rik Eppens: Rik has decided to step down as a co-opted trustee and Brian led the Board's wholehearted appreciation of all that Rik has contributed to the success of our charity over many years. He had been exceptionally generous with his time, wisdom and resources.

    Apple Press and Apple Festival: Val will seek quotes for apple presses (funding agreed in principle at September 2024 meeting) and for holding an Autumn Festival.

Meeting closed at: 9.00pm

Date of next scheduled meeting: 13 October, but may be re-scheduled to later in October, possibly to be combined with the AGM. Tony will circulate possible dates.

Ian Langley
Secretary