

Strontian

Strontian, Lochaber, Highland

May 2023



- > **Facilitated a community-driven Place Plan**
- > **Scotland's first community-owned primary school project-managed by CHT**
- > **8 Social Rent homes project-managed for Lochaber Housing Association**
- > **3 Rent to Buy homes provided by CHT**
- > **Infrastructure for future development**
- > **Great value for money: school project cost under £1 million**
- > **An excellent example of stakeholders and landowners working together**
- > **Future affordable homes are provided for in the place plan and agreement on the principal of development**
- > **Opportunities for other remote rural communities to learn from Strontian**
- > **Wide social, environmental and economic benefits to the area**

Strontian is a remote rural village on the Ardnamurchan peninsula, over an hour away from Fort William by car and ferry. The Communities Housing Trust (CHT) has worked with the community over a number of years facilitating a community place planning exercise, to include the delivery of affordable housing and providing project and development agency services on **Scotland's first community-owned primary school**.

CHT undertook a Local Housing Need survey in 2015. This helped decide upon the tenure mix for housing development. CHT then negotiated the purchase of land. A joint development with Lochaber Housing Association (LHA) resulted in the completion of 8 Social Rent homes for LHA, and CHT completed 3 Rent To Buy homes, which was **shortlisted in the World Habitat Awards and Scottish Rural Parliament awards**. The school has since **won two national awards: 'Innovation in Delivering Value' at the Education Buildings Scotland Awards 2019, and the Scottish Civic Trust My Place Awards**.

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Strontian Community School Building Ltd

Community members in Strontian formed a Community Benefit Society to develop Scotland's first community-owned primary school, which was designed to be easily convertible to another use in the future. CHT provided project development and management services from its inception to realisation, and kept costs under £1 million, providing great value for this community asset. This ground-breaking school was opened to pupils in October 2018, and officially opened by Deputy First Minister John Swinney MSP in August 2019.



Successes

There were conflicting interests in the village over development priorities, but the place planning exercise allowed the whole community to have their say. A consensus was reached and reviewed before the final document was published and subsumed into the local development plan by the Highland Council.

There is a strong track record in the area of community-driven projects, for example the Sunart Community Hydro scheme, and the local residents feel empowered to realise their goals.



Challenges

The place planning exercise was challenging for the community, as it hadn't been done before. However, careful planning and collaboration with SEPA ensured the risk was offset in the final plan, which ensured it was adopted by the Highland Council for the benefit of the local community.

The community's ambition to provide the new primary school meant that they were moving in to unchartered water as it would be the first of its kind. There was some opposition within the community as some believed education provision to be the sole responsibility of the local authority. This was overcome through ensuring support from the community at large and the Highland Council by demonstrating short and long-term value for the project.

Future

One of the major benefits of the community-owned primary school is that it's designed on an adaptable footprint which will allow future conversion to a use defined by the community e.g. affordable housing, elderly units, medical facilities or offices.

CHT and LHA are in the process of developing further affordable homes for rent in the community.

