



Historic Assynt

Old Kirk Community Heritage & Access Project

Initial Concept Note



Historic Assynt | Inchnadamph Old Kirk, Assynt

The Opportunity

Historic Assynt manages the Old Kirk at Inchnadamph as a community archive and heritage resource. The building houses an important collection relating to the people, places, archaeology and history of Assynt and is opened to residents and visitors through a volunteer-led summer programme.

The Old Kirk has considerable potential to become a more active community heritage venue: a place where people can access the archive, take part in talks and workshops, explore family and local history, attend exhibitions and events, and use the building as a starting point for engagement with the wider historic landscape.

Recent activity has reinforced that potential. Historic Assynt's community heritage programme, funded through the North Highland Initiative, has taken archive material out into communities across Assynt, increasing the visibility of both the collection and the organisation. Analysis of summer opening records indicates that, while the Kirk was opened more frequently in some earlier years, 2026 has recorded a notably higher number of visitors per opening. This suggests growing interest in accessing the archive when it is available.

The Current Barrier

The Old Kirk has no toilet or kitchen facilities.

This significantly restricts the length and type of activities that can be held there and creates an important accessibility barrier for volunteers, participants and visitors.

Providing permanent facilities within or immediately beside the building presents challenges. The Old Kirk is a historic listed building and the amount of land surrounding it is very limited. Any solution therefore needs to respect the building, its setting and the surrounding historic landscape.

Rather than seeking a permanent alteration to the site, Historic Assynt proposes to explore whether a low-impact and mobile solution could meet this need.

A Shared Community Solution

One option to be investigated is an accessible, towable community welfare and event-support unit.

Depending on the outcome of feasibility work, this could potentially provide:

- an accessible toilet;
- handwashing facilities;
- a small kitchenette/refreshment point;
- independent water and waste storage;
- low-energy lighting and power;
- solar generation and battery storage where practical;
- limited storage for community event equipment; and
- a robust design suitable for use at different locations.

A mobile approach could reduce the need for intrusive alteration at the Old Kirk while also creating an opportunity for something much wider.

Historic Assynt would like to explore whether the facility could become a shared community asset, supporting other organisations delivering cultural, environmental, educational, recreational and community activities at outdoor and remote locations across Assynt.

Rather than each organisation repeatedly hiring or developing its own temporary facilities, a shared unit could provide reusable community infrastructure for a geographically dispersed rural area.

Initial informal conversations with a number of local groups has been positive.

Potential Benefits

The project could:

- remove an important barrier to greater use of the Old Kirk;
- improve accessibility and inclusion;
- enable longer and more varied archive openings and activities;
- support talks, workshops, exhibitions, heritage learning and community events;
- enable greater participation by volunteers and visitors;
- support community archaeology and outdoor heritage activity;
- provide useful infrastructure for partner organisations and community events;
- encourage collaboration and sharing of community resources;
- incorporate environmentally sustainable technologies and approaches;
- avoid unnecessary permanent intervention beside a historic building;
- support the visitor experience at heritage and community activities; and
- create opportunities for greater use and earned income to contribute towards the long-term sustainability of the Old Kirk.

Evidence and Development

This proposal is currently at an early feasibility and partnership-development stage.

Historic Assynt has begun analysing its historic visitor, donation and sales records to establish a baseline for use of the Old Kirk. The organisation's wider community engagement work is also providing evidence of interest in Assynt's archive and heritage.

The next stage will establish whether there is sufficient wider demand to justify developing a shared facility and identify the most practical, sustainable and affordable solution.

This will include:

1. consultation with community organisations and potential users;
2. investigation of suitable storage and servicing arrangements;
3. accessibility requirements and appropriate specifications;
4. environmentally sustainable power, water and waste options;
5. planning, heritage and other regulatory considerations;
6. comparison of new, second-hand, adapted and bespoke mobile units;
7. capital and ongoing operating costs;
8. ownership, insurance, towing, booking and management arrangements;
9. opportunities for earned income and community use; and
10. potential grant, partnership, sponsorship and in-kind funding.

No particular technical solution has yet been selected. The purpose of this development stage is to ensure that any investment responds to demonstrated need and provides the greatest possible community benefit.

Wider Strategic Fit

The project has the potential to contribute to priorities around:

Community capacity and resilience — enabling community organisations to share infrastructure and deliver more activity.

Accessibility and inclusion — improving welfare provision at heritage and community activities where facilities are currently limited.

Heritage and culture — enabling greater community access to the Old Kirk archive and Historic Assynt's collections.

Environment and climate — prioritising a reusable, low-impact solution incorporating sustainable technologies where practical.

Visitor infrastructure — improving facilities supporting engagement with Assynt's heritage and landscape.

Community wealth and sustainability — increasing opportunities to use an existing community heritage asset and potentially generate income to support its long-term operation.

Next Steps

Historic Assynt is seeking discussions with community organisations, potential partners, funders and suppliers during **autumn and winter 2026/27**.

The initial objective is to establish demand, identify the preferred option and develop a realistic business and management case.

Subject to the findings of that work, Historic Assynt would aim to secure funding and progress implementation during **2027**.

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