

Grant Application Proposal: Culbokie Community Café Feasibility Study & Business Planning

Applicant: Culbokie Community Trust (CCT)

Project Title: Culbokie Community Café: Feasibility Study, Options Appraisal, Community Consultation & Business Plan

Funding Requested: £16,500 (inclusive of VAT)

Target Completion Date: Spring 2027

1. Executive Summary

Culbokie Community Trust (CCT) is seeking a grant of **£16,500 (inclusive of VAT)** to commission an updated Feasibility Study, Options Appraisal, Community Consultation, and Business Plan for a proposed Community Café.

The café represents the final missing piece of the ambitious Culbokie Community Hub development—a transformative project situated on a 0.5-hectare site in the heart of the village. Having already delivered a vibrant community greenspace, six affordable homes, a rapid EV charging point, and public toilets with a volunteer base, the Trust is currently progressing the construction of 'The Space' (a mixed-use community and business building scheduled for completion in mid-2027).

While community support for a café has remained consistently strong, previous feasibility studies and business plans dating back to 2015 are now significantly out of date. To secure capital build funding and ensure long-term operational sustainability, CCT requires updated, professional appraisals that reflect post-pandemic economic realities, local demographic shifts, and current operational models.

2. Project Background & Local Context

Historically a thriving agricultural settlement, Culbokie's population doubled between 1981 and 2011 to approximately 1,250 residents. Continuous residential expansion without matching commercial or civic investment transformed the village into a car-dependent dormitory settlement.

Today, Culbokie suffers from a severe lack of basic services, retaining only a single village shop and one public house. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) ranks Culbokie in **Decile 1 for geographic access to services**, with NHS Highland data noting that residents must travel over 30 minutes to reach primary healthcare and retail provision—well above the Highland regional average.

Furthermore, Census data highlights an ageing population (21% aged 60–75 compared to the Scottish national average of 15%), alongside 15% of residents living with limiting long-term health conditions or disabilities. With a recent 'call for sites' under the Local Development Plan identifying potential for a further 212 homes in Culbokie, the risk of social isolation and infrastructure strain will only intensify without proactive community-led intervention.

Project History & Progress to Date

In 2015, following an 82% vote in favour via a full community ballot, CCT acquired the centrally located 0.5ha site using the Community Right to Buy. Since then, CCT has systematically transformed an abandoned field into a thriving focal point:

- **2022:** Completed **Culbokie Green** and the *Am Fasgadh* shelter—a biodiverse greenspace shortlisted for the 2025 Nature of Scotland Awards.
- **2023:** Delivered **6 affordable homes** in partnership with Cairn Housing Association.
- **2024:** Installed a **rapid EV charge point** in partnership with SWARCO/Pogo.
- **May 2025:** Completed and opened the **Public Toilets** and the **Potting Shed** (volunteer base for the site's 'Green Team').
- **In Progress (Target June 2027):** Construction of '**The Space**', providing co-working desks, private offices, treatment rooms, and a digital meeting room (fully funded).

COMPLETED	IN PROGRESS	PROPOSED PHASE
• Culbokie Green & Shelter • 6 Affordable Homes • Rapid EV Charge Point • Public Toilets & Shed	• 'The Space' Hub (Funding secured; completion June 2027)	• Community Café (23 covers, courtyard integration)

The proposed Community Café is designed as a 23-cover facility integrated around an attractive shared courtyard alongside 'The Space' and the public toilets. It will complete the physical and social regeneration of the Culbokie village centre.

3. Project Aims & Objectives

The primary objective of this funded stage is to produce a market-tested, bankable roadmap for the café. The ultimate aims of the resulting Community Café are to:

1. **Complete the Physical Hub:** Realise the final structural element of the central village development, converting the site into a fully integrated, accessible asset.
2. **Provide Essential Social Provision:** Deliver a warm, inclusive, day-to-day gathering space offering morning coffee, light lunches, and afternoon teas, complementing (rather than competing with) existing local services such as the local church's once-weekly afternoon café and the Culbokie Inn.

3. **Generate Local Employment & Training:** Create direct local jobs and offer structured work experience, volunteering, and skill-building opportunities for young people.
4. **Support Local Enterprise:** Function as a showcase and sales outlet for local micro-businesses, crafters, artists, and regional food producers across the Black Isle.
5. **Enhance Hub Viability:** Cross-subsidise site running costs (including daily toilet maintenance) and serve the hot-desking, professional, and wellbeing clients utilising 'The Space'.
6. **Offer Flexible Multi-Use Space:** Utilise the building in the evenings for community bookings, youth groups, open-mic nights, pop-up dining, and educational workshops.

4. Strategic Alignment & Policy Fit

The proposed development directly supports key statutory plans and strategic frameworks across national and regional tiers:

- **Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan (Adopted June 2024):** The site lies within allocation **CU3**, which explicitly mandates a mixed-use development combining housing, business, and community facilities under existing planning consents (21/01930/FUL, 18/05806/PIP, and 21/00660/MS).
- **Black Isle Place Plan (2024):** Strongly aligns with the vision for a net-zero, resilient community. The café advances the **20-Minute Neighbourhood** principle, allowing residents to access vital social infrastructure within a short walk, wheel, or cycle from home.
- **The Place Principle & Scottish Government Priorities:** Exemplifies collaborative, place-based working between CCT, Highland Council, HIE, Sustrans, Cairn Housing, and private partners. It addresses core national priorities: **growing the local economy**, **tackling the climate emergency** (EPC A target, timber cladding, zero-carbon active travel links), and **reimagining sustainable public services**.
- **Active Travel Integration:** Connected to the wider village via the Culbokie Active Travel Route, designed by CCT and Sustrans and delivered by Highland Council in 2026, ensuring safe, non-car access for all mobility levels.

5. Scope of Work & Grant Requirement

To progress from planning consent to capital fundraising and construction, CCT requires **£16,500 (inclusive of VAT)** to contract external specialist consultants. While CCT possesses a highly skilled volunteer board, independent expertise is essential to ensure commercial rigour and satisfy capital grant bodies.

The commissioned work will deliver four distinct, interconnected outputs:

Key Workstreams & Deliverables

1. **Refreshed Feasibility Study:** Re-evaluating local demographics, footfall estimates, supply chain costs, catering equipment specifications, and

potential operational models (e.g., direct CCT operation, social enterprise lease, or commercial tenancy).

2. **Comprehensive Community Consultation:** Executing structured public engagement to determine community priorities for opening hours, menu pricing, youth evening use, and volunteer engagement.
3. **Options Appraisal:** Rigorously evaluating legal, governance, and financial structures for running the café, balancing community benefit against financial risk and VAT implications.
4. **Updated 5-Year Business Plan:** Formulating detailed capital budget estimates, 5-year profit-and-loss projections, cash-flow models, staffing structures, and key performance indicators to ensure long-term self-sufficiency.

6. Budget Breakdown

The total cost estimate of **£16,500** is based on CCT's proven procurement experience for previous technical consultancy phases on the site:

Activity / Workstream	Scope & Focus	Estimated Cost (inc. VAT)
Feasibility Study & Technical Review	Market analysis, catering layouts, operational model review, and capital cost updating.	
Community & Stakeholder Engagement	Public workshops, online surveys, targeted focus groups (e.g., youth/elderly), and reporting.	
Options Appraisal	Evaluation of management models, legal structures, risk management, and governance.	
5-Year Business Plan & Financial Modelling	Detailed cash flow, 5-year projections, staffing models, and funding strategy.	
Total Project Funding Requested		£16,500

7. Conclusion & Expected Outcomes

Grant support for this preliminary stage will unlock the final chapter of a decade-long community investment strategy. By funding this feasibility and business planning package, supporters will enable Culbokie Community Trust to present a thoroughly vetted, commercially sound, and community-backed capital application in 2027.

Once built, the Culbokie Community Café will eliminate a major gap in local service provision, reduce rural isolation, foster intergenerational connection, support local supply chains, and secure the long-term vibrant heart of Culbokie village. We welcome your support in turning this long-held community ambition into a lasting reality.