

FINZEAN BUCKET MILL CIC STRATEGIC PLAN

OUR PLAN TO RESTORE A HISTORIC WATER POWERED SAWMILL

Adopting the not-for-profit social enterprise structure to repair, operate and maintain an A-listed historic building, using the process of repair to teach endangered heritage building craft skills, and in the process create a sustainable and repeatable model for rural craft businesses.

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE

Finzean Bucket Mill CIC Board of Directors
v2 May 2026

FUNDERS AND SUPPORTERS

Indebted thanks are due to all of our funders and supporters (in alphabetical order):

Aberdeenshire Council • Architectural Heritage Fund • Community Enterprise
Future Foresters Fund • Heritage Crafts • Historic Environment Scotland
Just Transition Participatory Budget Fund (Aberdeenshire) • Marr Area Partnership
Local Energy Scotland Community and Renewable Energy Scotland Fund
Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings Mill Repair Fund • Shannel Trust
Trades Widows' Fund

ORGANISATIONAL DETAILS

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Company Number:	SC830053
Company Type:	Community Interest Company Limited by Guarantee
VAT Registration No.:	518415201
Incorporated:	November 2024
Asset Lock:	Birse Community Trust
Lead Architect:	Arc Architects



THE FINZEAN BUCKET MILL

ABBREVIATIONS

AHF	Architectural Heritage Fund
ANP	Adams Napier Partnership
BCT	Birse Community Trust
CIC	Finzean Bucket Mill Community Interest Company
DDSB	Dee District Salmon Fisheries Board
HES	Historic Environment Scotland
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
HTN	Heritage Trust Network
ICH	Intangible Cultural Heritage
NMA	National Museum of Antiquities
NMS	National Museum of Scotland
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SCIO	Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation
SEPA	Scottish Environmental Protection Agency
SPAB	Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings
QS	Quinquennial Survey (every five years)

DOCUMENT LOG

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VISION: *For the Bucket Mill to be a sustainable rural craft business. In doing so, we want to create an inspirational model which can be used to revitalize historic buildings and enthuse and encourage other traditional and heritage craft businesses to flourish, support the next generation of craft makers and demonstrate a practical, competent and meaningful way to continue to operate our historic mill.*

MISSION: *To repair, maintain and operate the Finzean Bucket Mill and protect, preserve, promote and disseminate the rich Intangible Cultural Heritage associated with the historic Finzean Mills and use the site as a hub for teaching the endangered craft of Millwrighting.*



BUCKET TURNING LATHES IN THE MILL

FORWARD

The Finzean Mills are unique in the United Kingdom as the only intact complex of water-powered woodworking machinery. However, the buildings are only half of the story. The true heritage resides in the knowledge, skill and practices relating to the endangered crafts of millwrighting and, in the case of the Bucket Mill, in the manufacture of traditional wooden buckets. Without the structured transmission of this knowledge, these techniques risk vanishing within a single lifetime.

At Heritage Crafts we are acutely aware that the survival of our most vulnerable traditional skills depends on proactive, community-led initiatives that bridge the gap between historic preservation and modern economic viability. By establishing the Bucket Mill as a hub for training and apprenticeships, a sustainable pathway is created for the next generation of craftspeople. Ensuring those who operate the machinery also possess the skills to repair it, is a profound model for heritage resilience. It fosters internal competence that supports the wider local economy.

Furthermore, the emphasis on 'heritage livelihoods' encourages the kind of resilience that these skills need to survive. By integrating sawmilling and building contractor services, more than a museum memory is preserved: a low-carbon, genuinely sustainable commercial engine is created, underpinned with local materials. The manufacture of traditional buckets, roofing shingles and other woodcraft products demonstrates that heritage crafts offer a sustainable, authentic counterbalance to contemporary throwaway culture.

The collaborative nature of this project, involving the Birse Community Trust and various local stakeholders, underscores the importance of community ownership in safeguarding at-risk assets. A long-term lease and the 'Asset Lock' mechanism lays a firm structural foundation to ensure that every success can be achieved – whether in revenue generation, volunteer engagement or skills training – with profit reinvested into further developing the project.

This plan is an inspirational model for the heritage sector. It proves that with a coherent guiding philosophy and a practical works schedule, we can restore not only physical structures but also the living traditions, the intangible cultural heritage, that defines our identity. Heritage Crafts is proud to support this work as it secures a positive, working future for the Finzean Bucket Mill and the endangered skills it protects.



Daniel Carpenter
Executive Director, Heritage Crafts

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

To whom it may concern,

We are writing to express Finzean Community's support to the Finzean Bucket Mill Community Interest Company's work at the Finzean Water Mills.

The water powered Finzean Mills, aside from being of national importance, hold a very special place in our community, but are showing significant signs of wear and tear. We wholeheartedly support the plan to repair and return them to be properly restored, while at the same time creating local employment.

Signed.

Guy Haslam,
Chair, Finzean Community Council
Association

Roy Cowie,
Chair, Finzean Community

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To whom it may concern,

I am writing on behalf of the Birse and Ballogie Community Council to express our support for the Finzean Water Mills by Finzean Bucket Mill Community Interest Company.

We are very supportive of the plan to repair and restore these water mills. This work preserves something of community and also national importance whilst also providing local employment.

Signed.

David Williamson,
Chair, Birse and Ballogie Community Council

To whom it may concern,

The Birse Community Trust has wholeheartedly supported the incorporation and development of the Finzean Bucket Mill CIC so that it can succeed as an independent organisation and deliver huge benefits to our local community. The Finzean Mills are an exceptional collection of A-Listed historic buildings, which are in the care of our Trust. These mills have an incredible, unbroken heritage of operation, which at the Bucket Mill, dates back to before the current mill was built in 1853.

As the next custodians of the Bucket Mill, this social enterprise will keep alive cultural heritage which is so dear to our community. Via the 'Asset Lock' mechanism, and in our granting of a 25-year lease of the Bucket Mill to the Community Interest Company, our organisations are linked in defined, yet independent ways, which enables and empowers us to all look towards an exciting future for the Finzean Mills.

All of the mills in our care require a unique set of skills and knowledge to both maintain and operate them. Safeguarding the skills associated with these mills is of the highest importance, so we support all efforts to record, cultivate, nurture and share the knowledge embodied in them so that it can be passed onto the next generation.

The protection and dissemination of these skills, and the continued maintenance of the mills is a highly technical and complex challenge, which incorporates significant civil and mechanical engineering challenges, the navigation of ecological and historical designations and significant administration to fundraise and manage future repairs and we look forward to the Finzean Bucket Mill CIC continuing to grow and develop.

Signed.

The board of Trustees,
Birse Community Trust

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 OUR COMPANY

The **Finzean Bucket Mill Community Interest Company (CIC)** was founded in 2024 to conserve the historic A-Grade listed water-powered Bucket Mill, in the Forest of Birse, in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. The Bucket Mill is in a remote rural area in the eastern fringes of the Grampian Mountains with the Cairngorms National Park boundary a few miles to the west.

After extensive research via support from the Churchill Fellowship, which explored best practices in the field of shingle making (*Supporting Rural Craft Businesses: A Study of European Shingle Makers – Bushell, 2025*), we settled upon the social enterprise model to turn around the fortunes of the Finzean Mills which sit a critical juncture, with skills and buildings at risk of loss.

These mills are owned by the Birse Community Trust, who has four A-Listed historic buildings in their care, three of them are historic water-powered wood and sawmills. In October 2025, we signed a 25-year lease on the Bucket Mill with them, marking the beginning of our journey as custodians of the mill and the start of our adventure to reimagine what a rural craft business operating from a near 175-year old building can look like in the 21st Century.

1.2 THE BUCKET MILL

The Bucket Mill was built in 1853 on the site of an earlier water-powered sawmill and sits at the gateway to the Forest of Birse. It is this forest to which the Bucket Mill owes much of its existence, and represents a long and unbroken connection between people, land, landscape and livelihood which is rooted in the harnessing of water power and sustainable use of highly local timber stocks.

The Bucket Mill's namesake and unique product is the Finzean Bucket. These buckets, unlike a coopered whisky barrel, are turned inside and out and have triangular tongue and grooves joining together the tapered staves of each bucket. They are made from a variety of tree species: most common is Scots Pine, but historic examples have been made from Oak and Alder, depending on the end purpose and market.

1.3 SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

We are a not-for-profit social enterprise, a Community Interest Company (CIC) limited by guarantee. We have a small and focused board of Directors, and work with a broad range of stakeholders both in the local community, and at a national and governmental level.

Within the CIC framework, we have nominated the Birse Community Trust as the recipient in the 'Asset Lock' mechanism. If our company were to be wound up, all assets would return to

them, which keeps the materials, tools, equipment and archive material in our ownership with the mill in all eventualities. We aim to use the social enterprise model to create employment and provide a vehicle to promote and support other rural craft businesses. We aim to develop a repeatable model in which heritage and traditional building crafts can be used as a catalyst to regenerate and bring to life forlorn and static historic buildings whilst consistently championing the creation and sustaining of local and resilient supply chains that have their roots in, and add value to, local natural materials.

1.4 CRAFT TRADES AS A FORCE FOR GOOD

We believe that traditional craft trades, be that in stonemasonry, joinery, thatching, leather tanning, lime burning, weaving, blacksmithing and all the other multitude of skilled trades are of immense value to the rural economy. The practicing of such craft brings inherent social good.

These trades keep alive cultural heritage which can be traced to medieval times. They process and add value to local natural materials. Each craft practice is often inter-dependent or complimentary to the other. That is why we seek to make the Finzean Mills and particularly the Bucket Mill, a hub for traditional craft trades, with especial focus on the endangered craft of millwrighting, creating and nurturing a network and community of makers and producers.

Millwrighting is now a 'red-list' endangered craft (*Heritage Crafts, 2026*). It is a broad trade which covers civil and mechanical engineering, joinery, stonemasonry and lime-work, metalwork and fabrication, metal and wood turning and historic machine operation.

1.5 THE MILLER IS THE MILLWRIGHT

The Finzean Mills represent a huge wealth of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Historic millers were also millwrights, having the skills and expertise to conduct repairs on their mills. We wish to keep these traditions alive and recognise that our work to rejuvenate the Bucket Mill will have huge and positive impact upon the fortunes of the lower Turning and Sawmills in the care of the Birse Community Trust.

Aberdeenshire has more historic watermills per capita than any other county in the UK. Many of these are listed buildings, but sit empty, idle and are deteriorating fast with no scope nor hope for funding to protect them. Each represents that same link between people, place, landscape and livelihood, only unlike the mills of the Forest of Birse, the link has been broken. Finding a way to reforge this link and imagine a working future for these historic buildings is a huge task.

The Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Finzean Mills extends beyond skills and buildings. Beekeeping is a long-standing tradition of the Finzean millers and we seek to continue this alongside our other work.



THE BUCKET MILL WATERWHEEL

2 OUR PHILOSOPHY

2.1 FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH

In 2024, Managing Director Owen Bushell travelled extensively across central Europe to explore the conditions which sustain, make or break rural craft businesses, using his own craft of shingle making to act as a constant in which to delve into the complex and nuanced topics which impact the creation, sustaining, passing on and education of craft practices. This report highlighted many learning points and the key areas which impact craft businesses:

- Security of tenure
- Autonomy in operation
- Access to local natural materials
- Support for capital costs, such as tools, machines and equipment
- Support to navigate regulatory stipulations, such as health and safety or taxation.

Many of the observations and learning from this intense period of study have been fed directly into this project and led to the adoption of the social enterprise CIC structure to take forward a lease of the Bucket Mill.

2.2 RURAL OPTIMISM

One core value developed from this research is the principle of rural optimism which underpins our work:

A resilient network of cottage industries creates and sustains a supply chain which keeps and brings money in local circulation. It would be in our cultural memory to think of cottage industries as archaic, the industrialists will be quick to say they are inefficient. Yet as a model it can be immensely productive. Our monolithic modern industrial systems strip away the human touch, and with it, connection and meaning. A cottage industry model can be very reactive to local needs and in conversation with a local community, in a way in which a large corporation cannot.

The importance of sustaining the skills which come from traditional crafts is immensely important. This is not a glorified, whimsical or romantic lifestyle. In such skill lies a whole technology system which is highly sustainable, is local in nature, has a low or even negative carbon footprint and is very harmonious if not beneficial to nature. Traditional craft businesses related to architecture and the building trades underpin the maintenance and repair of all the historic buildings we have in the UK. Without them, there would be no castles, stately homes, cathedrals, windmills or Tudor timber frames.

Supporting Rural Craft Businesses: A Study of European Shingle Makers – Bushell, 2025

2.3 CORE VALUES

- Sharing - To freely share skills and knowledge
- Supporting - Support and encourage cooperative working practices
- Inclusive culture - Create an inclusive and welcoming educational culture
- Heritage livelihoods – Create, support and sustain livelihoods in heritage craft trades.



A FINZEAN BUCKET, FROM SCOTS PINE

3 LOCATION

3.1 BUILDING LOCATIONS

Finzean Bucket Mill

Easting 357761, Northing 791208

Owner: Birse Community Trust

Tenant: Finzean Bucket Mill CIC

Postcode: AB31 6NE

Listing Category: A

Listed Building Reference: LB3100

Finzean Sawmill & Turning Mill

Easting 359131, Northing 791423

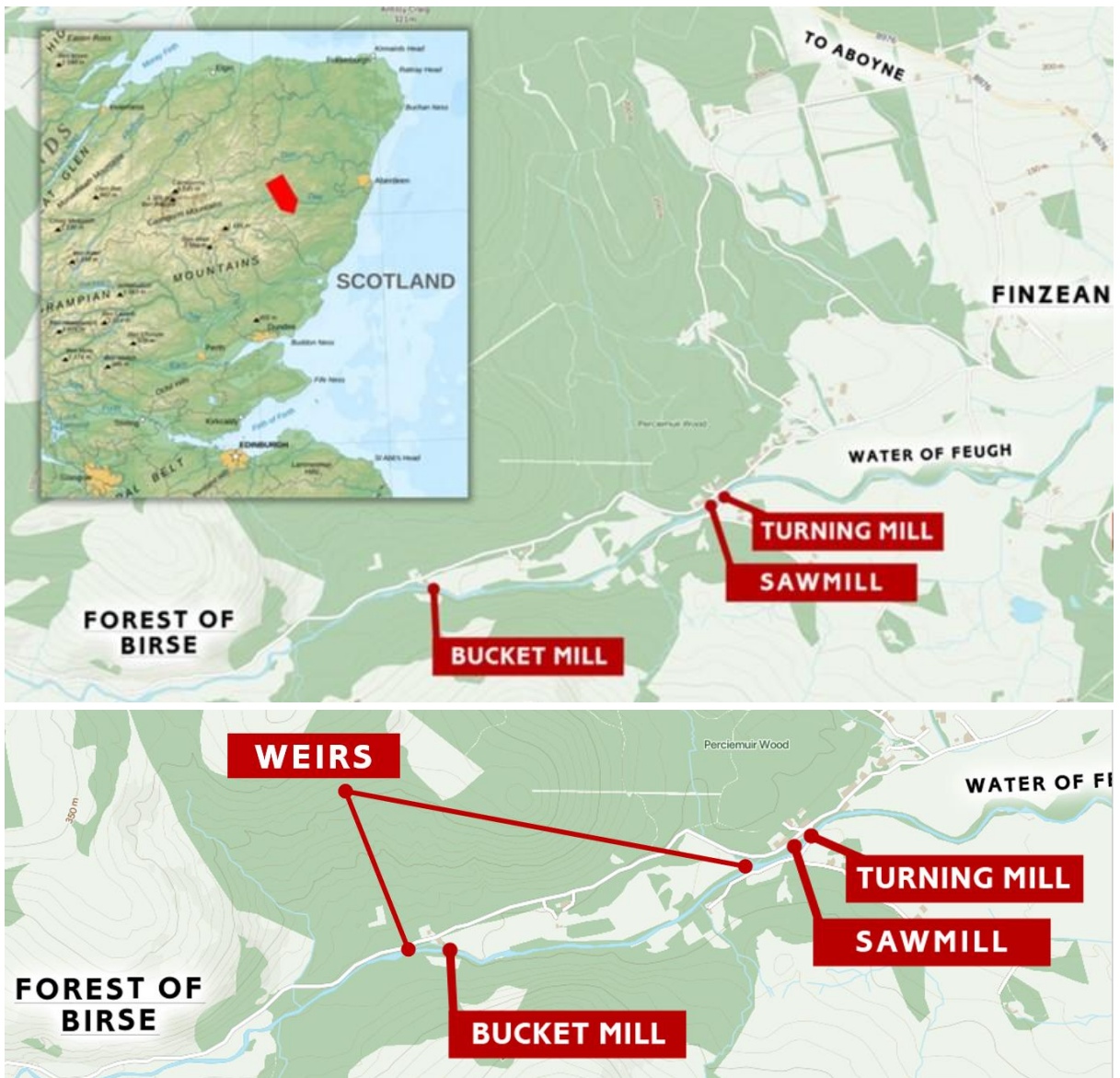
Owner: Birse Community Trust

Leaseholder: Vacant

Postcode: AB31 6PP

Listing Category: A

Listed Building Reference: LB3046



4 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

We have eight key objectives and eight areas of focus which we use to steer our strategic direction. We make this plan public and freely available so that our objectives are clearly known.

4.1 KEY OBJECTIVES

- 1. Restore the Finzean Bucket Mill**
to working condition and maintain it in good order. This involves navigating necessary health and safety legislation and interventions and implementing safe systems of work to ensure compliant and safe operation.
- 2. Protect the historic buildings**
beyond conservation-standard repairs and maintenance, develop fire detection and suppression measures, site-wide security enhancements and remote monitoring for river and lade levels.
- 3. Manufacture wooden buckets and pails**
and other woodcraft products, especially those connected to previous products made in the Finzean mills, such as block paving, roofing shingles and a large variety of turned products – all manufactured from locally sourced materials.
- 4. Develop the local supply chain and revenue generating activities**
through the milling and sale of local timbers, and by capitalizing on our skills and experience by offering specialist building contractor services to support the renovation and repair of other historic mills, especially the lower Finzean Sawmill and Turning Mill.
- 5. Teach and disseminate skills relating to the endangered craft of Millwrighting**
through effective means, such as apprenticeships, building craft training placements, craft courses and educative engagement activities in the community.
- 6. Champion the Finzean Mills**
and give a voice to this remarkable and intact collection of historic buildings and the Intangible Cultural Heritage embodied within them.
- 7. Support other rural craft businesses**
by building a resilient network in our locality and working to create and sustain an inter-dependent craft economy in the North-East of Scotland, using our platforms to nurture and support allied rural craft trades and procure services from such trades wherever possible.
- 8. Build a resilient and sustainable organisation**
with a good brand, fair working conditions for employees, directors and volunteers, always striving to get the best out of everyone with engaged staff, volunteers, stakeholders and partners, adhering to the Scottish Government 'Fair Work First' guidance.

4.2 AREAS OF FOCUS

Each of these areas represents a significant number of sub-projects: each area of focus can be developed independently of the other and demonstrates the complexity and diversity of our project. This broad focus helps us achieve our key objectives and take advantage of a wide variety of funding to further our project aims.

4.2.1 FOCUS 1: EDUCATION

Our educative activities will focus mainly upon using the process of repair to teach millwrighting skills. Our primary focus is on structured skills training, mainly via apprentices and skills training placements, supplemented by commercial courses teaching various millwright related crafts.

- Apprentices
- Skills training placements
- Courses
- Addressing skills shortages in North-East Scotland
- Protecting the endangered craft of Millwrighting

4.2.2 FOCUS 2: SAWMILLING & WOOD PRODUCTS

Our sawmilling enterprise has two primary aims:

- 1) Create a training pathway to operating historic machinery that begins with the operation of modern, controllable machinery where experience can be built up, and,
- 2) Using this sawmilling business to generate revenue to support our core costs and our educative and building preservation aims.

As a social enterprise, any profits we generate will be reinvested into our buildings and facilities, keeping them in good order and contributing to a healthy and sustainable business.

- Manufacturing sawn products for retail sale
- Operating a modern milling business to support revenue generation
- Manufacturing materials for repair in-house, offering substantial cost savings for the wider Finzean Mills project
- Cultivating skills and experience to support the wider Finzean Mills
- Continuing the manufacture of wooden buckets
- Manufacturing other wood products, such as roofing shingles and turned items
- Adding value and finding markets or social uses for waste products: e.g. sawdust and slabs

See our case study on this focus area for further information.



FOCUS 2: SAWMILLING WITH A MODERN MILL

4.2.3 FOCUS 3: VOLUNTEERING

In order to focus our limited resources efficiently, we have made a conscious decision to *not* initially develop a general volunteering programme which would utilise volunteers to make repairs to A-Listed historic buildings as this requires specific skill sets and understanding of conservation principles, and using unskilled labour requires careful supervision, such supervision risks spending our limited resources away from areas of focus which would further our project.

The Bucket Mill and wider Finzean Mills have substantial maintenance burdens, with low-skill tasks such as vegetation clearance, upkeeping footpaths and fencing a constant requirement. These sorts of tasks lend themselves to positive mental health-orientated volunteering groups, where the primary goal is focused upon wellbeing rather than material achievement.

We have identified some funding streams which could help bring in a dedicated member of staff to administer and deliver such activities and perceive that operating this kind of activity as a compartmentalised project will enable the most positive outcomes.

Separate to this, we still wish to develop a lightweight volunteering programme, with focus on welcoming volunteers to specific roles:

- Developing a team of tour guides to open the mill to the public more regularly, including for school and educational group visits.
- Developing a ‘road show’ to engage with local communities at events
- Welcoming specialist volunteers for specific projects: e.g. where professional expertise can be volunteered to the benefit of our work.

4.2.4 FOCUS 4: SUSTAINABILITY

The nature of our business puts our work at the heart of many of the immediate and pressing political and environmental challenges of our time:

- Climate Change & Net Zero – reducing and eliminating fossil fuel use.
- Renewable resource use and power generation, particularly hydro power.
- Using our work to develop a local and circular economy.
- Building efficient resource use into our model.
- Developing a low-carbon local supply chain, reducing transport miles.
- Connecting communities to the materials they consume.
- Reducing waste and finding social uses for waste products: e.g. making charcoal.
- Creating jobs to contribute towards a just transition in a post-oil economy.

In 2026 we worked with the Birse Community Trust to produce a hydro power feasibility study which recommended a 3-kv ultra-micro ‘PICO’ hydro-power system would be feasible at the Bucket Mill site, such technology can provide steady and reliable ‘trickle charging’ for battery powered plant and equipment, such as a battery powered forklift to move logs, an electric vehicle

to make timber deliveries and battery powered tools such as chainsaws and power tools.

4.2.5 FOCUS 5: SUPPORTING RURAL CRAFT BUSINESSES

Our project will naturally cultivate and collect specialist skills and experience, in the specialist knowledge of crafts such as millwrighting, but also in our specific application of the social enterprise model in the historic craft and building field, and in our navigation of complex challenges with multiple stakeholders, such as when repairing our weir, sluice gates and lade.

As our project builds traction and attention, we will naturally develop a platform and digital footfall to our online content which can be used to benefit and support other craft trades in our locality. For instance, we can make available our infrastructure – such as our online booking system and webshop – to promote courses run by other makers.

There are a number of key areas in which we can contribute to the development of the interconnected craft economy in North-East Scotland:

- Create and promote an informal network of makers and encourage social connection.
- Make available our platforms to support promotion.
- Directly employ or contract local makers and producers for our own specialist requirements (e.g., the manufacture of leather drive belting or for specialist cast iron repairs).
- Part-time direct employment can provide stability to other makers, enabling their own businesses to grow and prosper.

4.2.6 FOCUS 6: DEVELOPING CONTRACTOR CAPACITY

As an incorporated company desiring to employ staff and teach apprentices and those on skills training placements, we are mandated to ensure appropriate levels of compliance with the law when undertaking building repairs. This requires our organisation to hold appropriate training and certification for activities such as:

- Running a safe building site and holding risk assessments for all work tasks
- Holding appropriate vehicle and machinery competencies
- Having necessary First Aid and Fire Safety training
- Using and issuing correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Such structure represents a substantial investment in training, equipment, structure and process. With this in place to undertake work at the Bucket Mill, we are well placed to support organisation like our primary stakeholder, the Birse Community Trust, to offer building contractor services and/or consultancy services to aid repairs at other historic buildings and earn

revenue to support our work in turn.

4.2.7 FOCUS 7: DEVELOPING SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE

This focus looks to how we can make a lasting impact to secure a stable future for the Bucket Mill and support the Birse Community Trust to keep the Sawmill & Turning Mill in good order.

This is interconnected with our ability to be a financially sustainable and independent business, working towards a point where we will no longer be reliant on grants to operate our enterprise and maintain the historic buildings in our care. To do this we need investment in machinery and equipment which can support our development. This includes:

- A mobile sawmill.
- Transport trailers.
- A vehicle to make deliveries and move our mobile sawmill.
- Machinery such as a telehandler or forklift to move logs.
- A mobile welfare unit which may include versatile exhibition space.
- A modern workshop to make efficient repairs and teach courses.
- Timber drying sheds.
- Hydro-power generating equipment.
- Supporting the renovation of outbuildings and bothies to provide interpretation and affordable workshop spaces.

4.2.8 FOCUS 8: BIODIVERSITY, ECOLOGY & LANDSCAPE

The Bucket Mill and the leasehold in our care is host to a variety of flora and fauna including rare and endangered species. This importance is enshrined by the ecological designations and considerations which cover our site:

- The River Dee Special Area of Conservation (SAC) includes the Water of Feugh. This includes Atlantic Salmon and Fresh Water Pearl Mussels (FWPM).
- Bats roost in the Bucket Mill, four species are identified.
- The Glen Ferrick Pinewood– a native historic Caledonian pinewood, covers part of the leasehold.
- Seasonal birds nest in and around the mill – such as dippers under the wooden lade.

Historically Finzean millers have been great beekeepers. We have in our care a large quantity of beekeeping equipment and desire to support a community initiative to keep this tradition alive.

Much of our work requires careful consideration of a variety of ecological considerations and it is our aim to always protect and improve biodiversity whenever possible.



ASSESSING THE CONDITION OF THE WATERWHEEL

5 IMPACT STRATEGY

5.1 RETURNING THE BUCKET MILL TO WORKING ORDER

Our clearest goal from the outset is to return the Bucket Mill to working order and restart production of its unique namesake product. This is simple to say, but complex to deliver.

As an incorporated organisation, the commencement of our lease marks a shift change in the way these mills have been operated and governed in the past.

Historically, the Bucket Mill has been operated by private individuals – three generations of the Brown family to 1974, then by Stan Moyes from 1982 to around 2020. All of these operators operated the mill in different regulatory environments. A combination of sole-trader operation and a geographical off-the-beaten-track location means that there has been no impetus to meet the modern regulatory environment until now.

5.2 ADDRESSING HEALTH & SAFETY CHALLENGES

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) visited the Finzean Mills in 2022, and stated in their report:

If either mill was to be operated in this condition this would involve contraventions of health and safety law due to the risk of serious injury from entanglement or cutting/ severing from contact with these dangerous parts.

Health & Safety Executive report, 2022.

The HSE's visit combined with devastating damage from Storm Frank in 2016 marked a turning point in the demise of the Finzean Mills, they have remained mostly inactive since.

As an incorporated organisation, under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, and subsequent legislation, we have a duty of care to all employees - the definition of employee extending to also include volunteers and directors – and we have a duty of care to others accessing our site, such as the public visiting the mill during a tour.

Addressing these challenges requires multiple tasks to be completed and the development of an entirely new Health & Safety management culture. This includes:

- Safe System of Work: to safely access, maintain and operate the mill.
- Risk Assessment: for site and task specific activities.
- Fire Safety: risk assessment, measures to reduce fire risk and hazards, and the introduction of fire suppressing equipment.
- Electrical Safety: wholesale rewiring to building codes, improved lighting and routine inspection including PAT testing of appliances.

- Asbestos: control, management and removal, and of other harmful substances which may be present.
- Machinery Interventions: a methodical process of introducing physical guards on drive belts and machines.
- Lockout Devices: to prevent machinery being operated when it is not in use and the introduction of a failsafe stopping system.
- Confined Spaces: reduction in access, via measures such as changes to machinery lubrication.
- Competency Management: the development of a training pathway and competency management regime for the safe operation of machinery.
- Dust Extraction: installation of a dust extraction system to reduce health impacts from operation.

COMPLEX HEALTH & SAFETY COMPLIANCE ISSUES MUST BE ADDRESSED TO RETURN ALL THE FINZEAN MILLS TO WORKING ORDER.

5.3 FUNDRAISING FOR REPAIRS

In 2025 we supported the Birse Community Trust to undertake full quinquennial historic building surveys across all three mill sites, which were completed by the Adams Napier Partnership in the winter of 2025-26. This involved reappraising the Bucket Mill (first surveyed 2022) and provided a new appraisal for the lower Sawmill and Turning Mill site. This put repair figures at:

- £175,000 for the Bucket Mill – representing a 61% increase in cost since the 2022 report.
- £1,305,00 for the Sawmill & Turning Mill – representing a 21% increase since a 2023 report by Arc Architects.

These figures are repair costings only. They do not take into account the cost of enabling machinery interventions for health and safety compliance. Nor do they take into account capital tasks required such as rewiring the Bucket Mill, or making a new electrical connection at the Sawmill & Turning Mill. There is no drinking water, or untreated, water supply at either site.

The sharp increase in estimated costs highlights the accelerating decline in condition of all of the Finzean Mills. These are buildings which are designed to be regularly repaired: they are not much more than clad timber frames. When that process of regular repair ceases and the maintenance threshold reduces, they can quickly reach a critical point of degradation. The total cost of repairs required at the Bucket Mill highlights that as a set of buildings, they are smaller, less complex and in better condition than the lower Sawmill & Turning Mill site.

We estimate that a **figure of £500,000 is a reasonable estimate to return the Bucket Mill to working order**, accounting for machinery interventions and capital investment in tools, machinery and equipment as outlined in this strategic plan.

5.4 ENGAGING WITH THE WIDER COMMUNITY

There comes a time when historic buildings cease belonging to any one person. As custodians of the mill, we recognise that we are just caretakers, responsible stewards aiming to pass on the Bucket Mill in a better condition than we found it in.

Because heritage belongs to us all, we wish to put community engagement at the heart of our enterprise, but with health and safety responsibilities noted, this must be done in a considered way. We therefore seek to engage with the wider community through structured means, such as:

- Public open days and tours of the mill
- Engagement at community events – e.g Highland Games, Agricultural Shows etc
- By giving talks and presentations to interested groups, locally and online.

5.5 MONITORING AND EVALUATING IMPACT

We have a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan, which aims to gather regular, updated and useful information on our projects and activities, which we use to assess and report on their overall performance.

We use quantifiable results to show how our activities produce outcomes (i.e. number of skills training placements) and the impact that brings.

Focus Area	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
1. Education	# Apprentices # Skills placements # Course participants # Talks and presentations	# Jobs created # Qualifications achieved # Hours of learning # Stakeholders engaged - Course feedback - Educative awareness	• Sharing of endangered craft skill knowledge • New entrants create businesses and practices of their own • Endangered skills protected.
2. Sawmilling and Wood Products	# Tons local materials # £ Revenue	# Jobs created # Repairs enabled # Historic buildings supported # Tons waste material used for social projects	• Creation of a resilient local economy • Historic buildings protected using local materials
3. Volunteering	# Volunteers	# Jobs created # from vol. feedback	• Wider connection with built heritage and associated ICH

Focus Area	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
	# Specialist roles (e.g. tour guides)	- improvement in mental health # events attended # £ Revenue from tours	• Mental health benefits to participants • Further goals achieved from revenue.
4. Sustainability	# Tons Material produced locally # vice imported # road miles reduced # tons CO2 sequestered in materials	# Low carbon employment created # KW Hydro power generated # Tons waste material used for social projects	• Contribution towards a low-carbon economy • Market sales reduce carbon-intensive imports • Self-generated hydro power reduces grid demand • Waste products benefit others
5. Supporting Rural Craft Businesses	# Mentored businesses # Network participants # New businesses created	# Jobs or self-employed businesses created - feedback of network participants on impact of support	• Contributes to reducing skills shortage in NE Scotland • Reduces rural isolation • Connections create symbiotic outcomes
6. Developing Contractor Capacity	# External contracts # £ Revenue	# Jobs created # Sub-contractors employed # Repairs made to historic buildings	• Our skills and expertise can be used to protect and benefit other historic buildings • This process contributes to the stability and sustainability of our own organisation
7. Developing Supporting Infrastructure	£ of capital investment # Target goals achieved	#Jobs or self-employed businesses created # Tons material produced # Tons waste material used # KW Hydro power generated	• Supports our long term sustainability • Reduces grant dependence • Creates jobs and opportunities
8 Biodiversity, Ecology and Landscape	Data from surveys	Better understanding of ecology on our site Education opportunities	• Biodiversity improved • More Education • Species protected



S.P.A.B. SKILLS TRAINING EVENT, 2023

6 COMMUNICATION & MARKETING STRATEGY

This strategy keeps everyone with an interest in our project updated on our activities and helps us to build a reputable brand for the sale of our products. It will also support our fundraising activities.:

6.1 WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

Website: bucketmill.co.uk
Instagram: [instagram.com/bucketmillcic](https://www.instagram.com/bucketmillcic)
Facebook: [facebook.com/bucketmillcic](https://www.facebook.com/bucketmillcic)
Substack: substack.com/@bucketmillcic

6.2 WEB SHOP

A web shop is the most useful self-generating marketplace in which to sell and market goods to a wide audience. We will use this platform to sell wood products, tickets to events and make it available to support other craft businesses in our network.

6.3 COMMUNITY OUTREACH

We wish to develop our presence at public events, particularly community events such as agricultural shows and highland games which are popular in the summer months. To do this we will develop engaging traditional craft activities which can be demonstrated and/or suitable for drop-in participants, develop models which can demonstrate water power and double as useful resources for school visits.

6.4 SCHEDULED TOURS

We are building a team of volunteer tour guides to deliver more regular open days to better engage with the public, fulfil funding obligations and capitalise on donations and sales to earn revenue to cover our core costs.

6.5 NEWSLETTERS & MAGAZINE ARTICLES

We have been steadily growing our newsletter mailing list. We use feeds from Instagram and Substack to automatically update our website, shortform pieces falling to Instagram and long form to Substack, which provides a platform to republish articles written for other journals and magazines so they can reach a larger audience.

6.6 PRESS & MEDIA

Our general policy is to engage with the press and conventional media at times when it is advantageous to our organisation: e.g., to publish news which will generate positive engagement to support our work. We have had front page coverage in the Press & Journal and been featured on BBC Radio Scotland. We must carefully manage and communicate to the public that the Bucket Mill is not normally open to the public as the site is at varying times a working sawmill yard and/or construction site depending on activities planned.

7 FINANCIAL STRATEGY

We desire to administer our company in a professional, competent and transparent way.

7.1 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND SYSTEMS

We have our own bank account with the necessary financial systems and controls required for efficient operation. Our company is now able to trade and take on employees as funding permits.

We publish an annual report alongside our annual accounts and utilise digital accounting software to accurately track and log incoming and outgoing payments related to our business.

Our digital systems are suitably compartmentalised so that they can be handed over if job roles or personnel within our company were to change.

7.2 REVENUE GENERATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainable finances rely upon revenue generation. Earning revenue reduces our dependence upon grant funding and builds resilience and organisational competence. Whilst we are dependent upon grants and funding to support our establishment, we are working towards attaining a sustainable level of financial sustainability so that all our activities may be supported by the revenue we generate, enabling funders to support other organisations.

The initial task of repairing the Bucket Mill and establishing this company will be reliant on grant funding to meet the large capital expenditure required, especially to develop the facilities and procure the specialist tools and equipment which will enable our repair works and long term success.

The Bucket Mill sits below a maintenance threshold, which once the building condition is improved, only routine maintenance will be required for several decades.

Our revenue generating activities align with our areas of focus, highlighted below:

7.2.1 EDUCATION

We anticipate strong financial support from multiple funders to take on our first 'Millwrighting' apprentice. The craft-trade apprentice funding landscape is currently more generous than many other sectors.

To get there, we seek to employ a resident blacksmith to complement our skill set. With two members of staff on a part time basis, we lay the foundation for hosting an apprentice for five days a week.

7.2.2 SAWMILLING & WOOD PRODUCTS

We forecast that this area of our business will be our main source of revenue outside of grants. A pilot study in April 2026 brought in a mobile sawmill operator on hire for a week, milling 30 tons of European larch for costs of £7,500 – producing an estimated £15,000 in sawn material.

As unrestricted income, such revenue can help us cover core costs and other budget lines which are harder to seek funding for.

7.2.3 VOLUNTEERING

We will target grants which can support a full time ‘Education & Outreach Officer’ with a brief to develop, administer and run a regular volunteering programme. Engaging and building a team of volunteer tour guides helps us open the mill on more open days, which can attract further donations and sales, all contributing towards a steady revenue stream.

7.2.4 SUSTAINABILITY

The recent hydro-power feasibility study has highlighted the availability of low-impact technology which can be used to reduce our carbon footprint and consumption of energy from the national grid.

Allied to battery-electric vehicle charging, we have scope to utilise machinery such as an electric forklift, a battery bank to operate a higher-rated modern sawmill (negating the use of a fossil-fuel powered variant) and the use of an electric vehicle capable of towing a trailer to make timber and wood product deliveries.

We are working with the Birse Community Trust and their appointed forest agent to procure timber from their forests for further sawmilling, ensuring that wholesale timber stocks are procured within the locality – in this instance, within a five mile radius of the Bucket Mill.

7.2.5 SUPPORTING RURAL CRAFT BUSINESSES

In making our platforms available to other users in the allied craft trades, such as for their promotion of their own craft courses, we can attract either a small premium for accessing our platform, or a booking fee for administering the connection. Alternatively, we can seek grant funding to subsidise such costs to reduce front-end costs.

By offering part-time work as projects dictate to skilled trades, we can bring financial stability to local craftsfolk whilst obtaining structure which can help us plan and undertake technical repair tasks efficiently.

7.2.6 DEVELOPING CONTRACTOR CAPACITY

We anticipate that our second largest revenue stream will be in offering our in-house expertise to other local organisations, especially the Birse Community Trust who are responsible for the repair

and development of their Sawmill and Turning Mill site a mile and a half downstream of the Bucket Mill.

By creating a pro-active ‘doing’ organisation, we are able to cultivate and attract expertise which we can capitalise on through the provision of labour and sawn materials for other historic building repair projects.

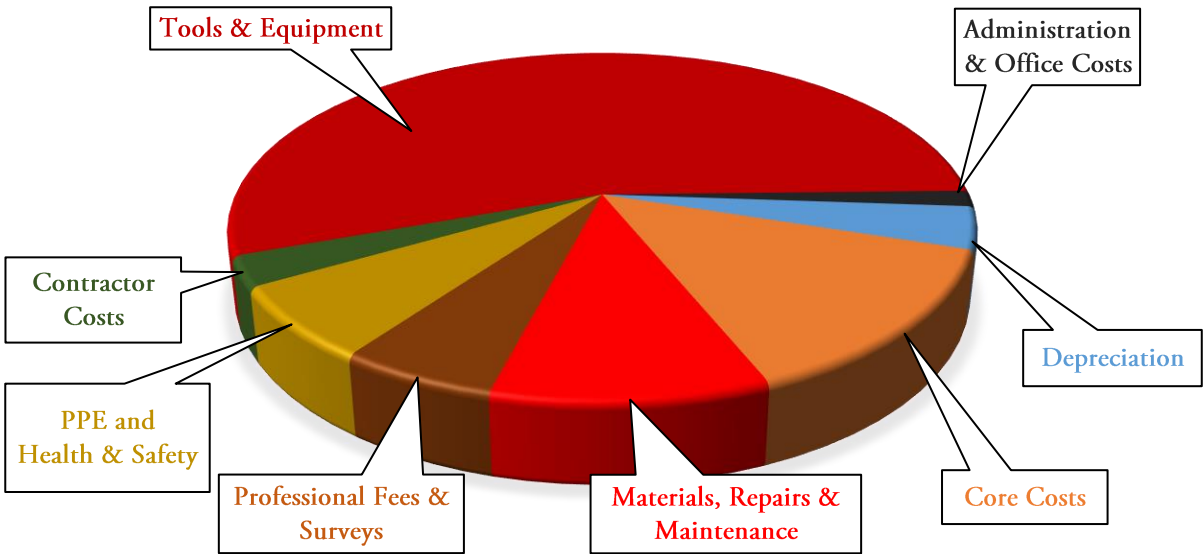
As our expertise deepens and we find a pathway through complex regulatory challenges such as attaining health and safety compliance for the machinery and navigating stakeholders such as SEPA in our works involving the Water of Feugh, we will also have the option to offer advice and consultancy to other groups facing the same challenges.

7.3 BUDGET

We set a three yearly budget annually. This is specifically written from a perspective of *hope*, not *optimism*. It outlines where we *hope* to be in the following financial years, making assumptions that certain grants and funding identified will come true.

To create this budget we also ask ourselves the question: “what do we hope to achieve in the next year(s)?” – identifying the outline costs of, for example, paid roles and tools and equipment which will help us achieve our goals. With these figures included in the forecast for following financial years, we then set our fundraising and revenue generating strategies accordingly to meet these targets.

Above: Breakdown of expenditure from incorporation to 31st March 2026



7.3.1 THREE YEAR BUDGET

THREE YEAR BUDGET	2024/2026 (REPORTED)	2026/2027 (FORECAST)	2027/2028 (FORECAST)
Income			
Milling services			
Building and restoration services			
Product sales			
Grants for overheads and projects			
Donations			
Project Management Fees			
Craft Course Fees			
Other income			
Expenses			
Accounting & Professional Fees			
Administration & Office Costs			
Bank & Finance charges			
Computer expenses			
Cost of Sales - Other			
Cost of Sales - Raw Materials			
Energy costs			
Equipment - Repairs & Maintenance			
Finance charges			
Insurance			
Health and Safety & PPE			
Insurances			
Marketing			
Motor Expenses			
National Insurance			
Property Repairs and Maintenance			
Rates			
Rent			
Security			
Staff costs - Internal			
Staff costs - Subcontractors			
Travel			
Tools			
Net surplus/loss			
Capital Asset Balance Sheet			
Less Depreciation			
Loan repayment			
Less Costs			
Cash at beginning of period			
Cash at end of period			

FINANCIAL FIGURES ARE OMITTED FROM
THIS ONLINE-ONLY COPY OF OUR
STRATEGIC PLAN. PLEASE EMAIL
ENQUIRIES@BUCKETMILL.CO.UK FOR
FURTHER DETAILS

8 FUNDRAISING STRATEGY

8.1 WORKING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Initially, we have enjoyed substantial support from the Birse Community Trust to establish our CIC, with the BCT firstly being awarded grants and administering to benefit the establishment of our company and latterly appointing us as a contracted project manager to administer other grants to benefit the Finzean Mills on their behalf. BCT is our primary stakeholder, but it will be important to maintain clear separation between our two organisations going forward.

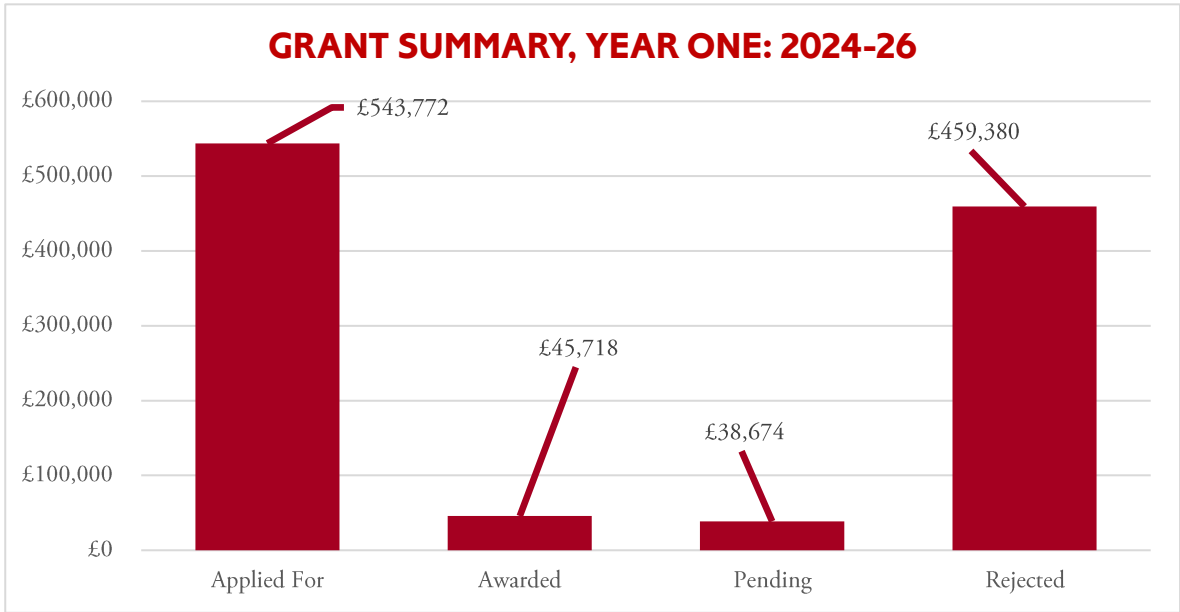
We explored a formal partnership with them but opted by mutual agreement not to develop this further at the time, as some degree of organisational independence and clear legal separation was perceived to be to mutual advantage. The BCT is still a stoic backer of our organisation, as outlined in their letter of support published in the opening pages of this strategy and from the 25-year lease they have signed to us on a peppercorn rent of £1 per annum.

We continually build relationships and connections with other stakeholders, be they other local charities, community groups and councils, landowners, those with historic connections to the Finzean Mills or governmental and regulatory agencies.

Additionally we have explored converting our organisation to a SCIO structure, but have concluded that the CIC model offers the most optimal structure for our intended activities going forward.

8.2 AWARDED GRANTS SUMMARY

Below is a breakdown of all the grants that have been applied for, and awarded, to date from incorporation to 31st March 2026. We experience a high rejection rate on applications.



Funder	Amount	Description
Aberdeenshire Council – Business Startup Fund		Supported the cost of fire safety equipment, PPE, padlocks and office stationery.
Heritage Crafts – Endangered Crafts Fund		Supported the purchase of tools and materials belonging to the retired miller Stan Moyes and a contractor to prune trees rubbing against the mill, the brash from which was used for a craft besom broom course.
Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings – Mill Repair Fund		A contribution from the SPAB towards repairing the Bucket Mill's canopy and roof.
Marr Area Partnership – Initiative Grant Scheme		Supported the cost of an ecological audit survey ahead of a Planning Permission application to obtain permission to work in the weir.
Shannel Trust		Wide remit grant to enable a number of difficult-to-fund activities. This included building a new website with maintenance for 5 years, hiring a mobile sawmill to process timber, enabling historic building and asbestos surveys to facilitate future grants and repairs, the purchase of safety equipment and signage and some specialist and rare millwright tools.
'Just Transition' Participatory Budget Fund		By public vote we were awarded a sizeable grant which has enabled us to purchase a delivery of logs, a transport trailer and a library of battery powered joinery and vegetation clearance tools.

FINANCIAL FIGURES ARE OMITTED FROM THIS ONLINE-ONLY COPY OF OUR STRATEGIC PLAN. PLEASE EMAIL ENQUIRIES@BUCKETMILL.CO.UK FOR FURTHER DETAILS

8.3 FUNDERS IDENTIFIED

We regularly search grant funding portals and subscribe to funding newsletters to catch wind of grants and financial support which can help us achieve our stated aims. We keep a directory of these funds and their deadlines which is regularly updated.

8.4 FUNDRAISING MECHANISM – THE BUCKET LIST

With the launch of our web shop, we have developed a single fundraising mechanism to bring in additional revenue for our company, which is in essence a donation to reserve a spot on an order list, on a first-come-first served basis. This avoids complicated obligations and crowdfunder style debt, whilst enabling us to capitalise on interest and support for our project.

We have the option to expand our fundraising activities in the future and hope to work with the Birse Community Trust on this point in the future.

9 PARTNERSHIP & STAKEHOLDER STRATEGY

Our project is a complex one and this is reflected by the many and varied stakeholders we engage with. We aim to work constructively and courteously with all our stakeholders; we firmly believe that success of our project and the wider stated goals will work best by playing to the strengths of everyone involved. We recognise that, particularly in the local community there are complex and historical relationships with differing and conflicting points of view. As a new organisation we make a point to have no allegiances nor hold favour to any one particular group and endeavour to cut a non-partisan position, based around this statement:

“We are here to represent the interests of the Finzean Mills”

9.1 STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholder (Alphabetical Order)	Nature of Relationship
Aberdeenshire Council (AC)	• Manages some grant funding. • Planning Department & Conservation Officers.
Arc Architects Scotland (AA) <i>Consultant</i>	• Lead Architect for the Bucket Mill. • Conservation accredited architect. • Have previously been commissioned to produce feasibility studies for BCT and understand the mill and associated challenges well.
Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action (AVA)	• Regional Social Enterprise & Charity Network. • Support and signposting for grants. • Manages some grant funding.
Birse Community Trust (BCT)	• Local development trust, established 1998. • Owners of the Bucket Mill, and our legal landlords. • Manages forestry local to the mill. • Owner of the Finzean Old School, a useful community space.
Ballogie Estate (BE)	• Local estate. • Local gamekeepers and staff afford degree of security and fire watch. • Manages forestry.
Birse Estate (DE)	• Local estate at the head of the Forest of Birse, managed by the larger Dunecht Estate. • Local gamekeepers and staff afford degree of security and fire watch • Manages forestry.
Branching Out Plus (BOP)	• Local mental health volunteering group. • BCT has previously orchestrated their involvement with simple repair tasks and vegetation clearance at the Finzean mills.
Community Associations & Councils (CC / CA)	• Finzean Community Council – Chair, Guy Haslam. • Finzean Community Association – Chair, Roy Cowie. • Birse and Ballogie Community Council – Chair, David Williamson.

Stakeholder (Alphabetical Order)	Nature of Relationship
Dee District Salmon Fisheries Board (DDSF)	• Oversee the River Dee and Water of Feugh catchment. • Consulted on weir topics and issues. • Have a public policy that weirs should not be reinstated .
Duncan Family (DF)	• Family operators of the lower Sawmill and Turning Mill since the 1870s.
Expressing Scotland CIC (ES)	• Local social enterprise, specialising in business development and fundraising support.
Finzean Estate (FE)	• Local estate, historic owners of the Finzean Mills. • Local gamekeepers and staff afford degree of security and fire watch. • Manages forestry. • Owners of the nearby Mill of Clinter, a category B-listed meal mill.
Finzean Hall (FH)	• Local village hall, a useful venue for meetings and public events.
Finzean Rabbit Newsletter (FR)	• Local community newsletter. • A useful mechanism to update the community on our project.
Green Aspirations CIC (GA)	• Stirling-based social enterprise connecting people with landscape. • Green Aspirations have delivered traditional craft course for us.
Heritage Crafts (HC)	• National charity promoting Heritage Crafts. • Past funder, huge support network.
Heritage Trust Network (HTN)	• National network connecting civic trusts and heritage organisations. • Active network in Scotland, good contacts and advice.
Keith Threadgall Sawmill Services (KT) <i>Consultant</i>	• National contract mobile sawmill. • Woodmizer agent for Scotland. • Expert advice and training for operating mobile sawmills.
Men's Shed Network (MS)	• Branches in Aboyne, Westhill, Alford, Peterculter and Inchmarlo (Banchory). • Emphasis on teaching practical skills.
Moyes Family (MF)	• Stan Moyes saved and ran the Bucket Mill for 40 years before retirement. • Neighbour of the Bucket Mill.
Sarah Kettles Fundraiser (SK) <i>Consultant</i>	• Professional fundraiser. • Previously appointed by the BCT and familiar with BCT assets and challenges.
SEPA	• Scottish Environmental Protection Agency. • License works and water abstraction from rivers.
Shannel Trust (ST)	• Local charitable trust. • Has accommodation which is available to support skills training placements at low cost.
Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB)	• National historic building preservation charity • Have previously run 'working party' events at the Finzean mills in 2022 and 2023. • SPAB Fellowship skills training programme includes Millwrighting.



SAWN TIMBER FOR REPAIRS, PRODUCED AT THE BUCKET MILL

10 CASE STUDY: MILLING LOCAL TIMBER

This case study highlights the inputs, logistics and outcomes from developing the local supply chain to procure locally harvested timber, bring it to the Bucket Mill and mill it, with the product being used either for repairs to the mill or to generate revenue for retail sale.

This case study crosses three of our key focus areas:

- Sawmilling and Wood Products
- Education
- Circular Economy & Low Carbon Futures
- Developing Supporting Infrastructure

10.1 INCOME & EXPENDITURE

Item	Cost
24 Tons European Larch – Craigellachie (55 Miles)	
6 Tons European Larch – Balfour (near 0 Miles – material donated by BCF)	
Sawmill Sawmill Operator & Telehandler Hire	
Assistant Labour for 1 week	
Expenses (Fuel)	
Total	
Retail equivalent price to same volume of timber	
Cost saving and profit margin if sold at retail prices	
Costs adjusted for 1 HGV Load (24 Tons)	

10.2 THE BUSINESS CASE

The above figures, adjusted for a single 24 ton HGV load, represent a substantial profit margin of roughly £5,000 per lorry load of timber processed. For the sale of timber to the public, further time is required to deal with customers, load and administer payments and invoices, but the principle is still solid. If this were to take place once a quarter, this activity can clearly generate useful revenue for our company, with profit to the tune of approx. £15,000 to £25,000 per annum.

Working through a HGV load of timber per month every month of the year (one week's work) would generate a profit after costs of around £60,000. The costs and profit margin outlined above are calculated from the employment of an external contractor whom commands a higher daily fee than an in-house employee. Actual margins would be expected to be higher. However, the operator we hired was highly experienced and maximally efficient in the use of their machine. An in-house operator may take time to reach the same levels of efficiency. That is why one week is budgeted for milling 24 tons, which may take the contractor three days.

Employing an all-round skilled operator also brings flexibility to the team employed to repair the Bucket Mill and would be well utilised to support other roles as required with repair tasks.

Similarly incorporating elements of milling into an apprenticeship would offer a quality, rounded and employable skill set to future apprentices. Outside of repairs, a full-time operator can fill slack time with machine maintenance, blade sharpening and arranging the retail sale of material.

Such revenue can fund core costs and salaries in the long term whilst creating and sustaining a local market for local timbers – all contributing to reduced transport emissions and an important connection with local material and how it is produced. Regular milling builds confidence and competence in machinery operation, with efficiency in processing increasing in time as logistics and handling is improved.

10.3 SOCIAL AND HERITAGE BENEFIT

Beyond the financial figures and creation of a local supply chain outlined, there are many benefits to operating a machine such as this:

- A modern mill provides a training pathway to operating historic machinery.
- The operation collects and shares essential knowledge of timber and its qualities.
- It keeps alive sawmilling traditions whilst heritage machinery is inoperable.
- All activity increases site security and presence.
- Even at a loss, the operation still offers cost savings over conventional retail purchase.
- Operating the mill builds networks and contacts useful to our heritage interests.
- The activity contributes to word-of-mouth knowledge of our enterprise.
- We are able to offer mobile sawmilling services of our own.
- This can extend to taking on less commercially viable, but societally useful tasks, such as milling single windfall trees in the locality after storms, so that the material can be used for useful purposes in the community.

10.4 SITE CONSTRAINTS

As a historic sawmill, the Bucket Mill and the mill which stood before it represent an unbroken heritage stretching as far back as the 18th Century, if not before.

However, as a historic site, we must be mindful to cut a delicate balance between industrial activity and the preservation of historic buildings.

The adjacent Bucket Mill cottage is a residential home, we must ensure that such operations do not adversely impact our neighbours which would be a breach of our lease terms.

If it were to be no longer feasible to undertake such milling activities at the Bucket Mill, or if such activity was restricted to certain hours or times of the year, we may need to explore options for creating more industrial facilities off-site, to keep on side with our stakeholders.

One such site is available to our Community Interest Company and features HGV access, a hard standing and 3-phase electricity supply. In the long term, such a premises could be developed as an off-site location through which to develop more commercial activities to sustain and fuel our Bucket Mill enterprise.

10.5 INVESTMENT REQUIRED

A summary of the large costs and two business cases for modes using existing forecast staff and a dedicated employee are outlined below. These figures take a highly conservative 'worst-case' scenario and assume that no external grants would be available for any of the capital expenses: however, we would be confident of obtaining much of the capital costs outlined below, certainly fully funding the purchase of budget lines like the sawmill machine, skid-steer and hydro-power installation. With these lines removed investment costs sit at £25,000 vice £165,000 and in this scenario both modes are profitable with all costs paid back in ten years or less.

Item	Cost
Sawmill (example specification, Woodmizer LT40 Wide, Petrol)	
Saw blade stock, sharpening equipment	
Electric Skid-steer (micro telehandler)	
Timber Drying Shed	
Hydro-Power PICO Installation and Vehicle Charging Equipment	
Health & Safety Consultant	
Total	
Investment costs spread over 10 years	
Investment costs spread over 10 years (price per year)	
Budget for two employees (operator and labourer x12 weeks each)	
Weekly fuel cost (x4 weeks)	
Annual Insurance Premium for Operation & Equipment	
Total Annual Cost	
Less Projected Profit (£5,000 per 24 tons – x4)	
Profit/Loss	
Profit/Loss if annual investment cost is £2,500	

Capital cost spread over 10 years (price per year)
Annual Salary for a Sawmill Operator
Budget for one employee (labourer 12x weeks)
Annual fuel cost (x12 weeks)
Annual Insurance Premium for Operation & Equipment
Total Annual Cost
Less Projected Profit (£5,000 per 24 tons – x12)
Profit/Loss
Profit/Loss if annual investment cost is £2,500

10.6 CONCLUSION

We are confident that this element of our business can be developed in a phased way, making the best use of available grants to procure different items of capital equipment as opportunities arise.

We feel the potential profitability and skills training benefits from this element of the business will help us achieve financial sustainability and a means to finance the long-term maintenance of the Bucket Mill independently of grant funding.

There is always the option to continue to employ a sub-contractor to mill timber loads until we can produce a machine of our own: the figures show we can still generate around £6,000 in profit per load.

We also know that there is a captive market on our doorstep: as the Birse Community Trust gears up to face the challenge of rejuvenating the lower Finzean Sawmill and Turning Mill, in whatever form this takes, there will be a consistent demand of timber for upwards of the next decade whilst repairs and renewals are made. Outside of this forecast demand, we also know that the Finzean Sawmill was previously sustained for the best part of a decade by orders of fence posts and tree stakes, milled to support the maintenance of BCT owned lands and tree planting initiatives.



SPECIALIST MAINTENANCE TASKS EMPLOY LOCAL TRADES

11 CASE STUDY: RUNNING CRAFT COURSES

In April 2026 we ran our first traditional skills training event, with a half-day ‘Make your own besom broom’ course.

This pilot explored the appetite, finances and resources required to lay on such an event. We employed Stirling-based Green Aspirations Scotland CIC to deliver this course for us, so that we could learn more about the legislative responsibility required to suitably supervise unskilled members of the public when working with unfamiliar and sharp hand tools.

This case study crosses three of our key focus areas:

- Education
- Circular Economy & Low Carbon Futures
- Supporting Rural Craft Businesses

11.1 INCOME & EXPENDITURE

Item	Cost
Course Fee (Green Aspirations)	
Verde Events	
Total	
Ticket Sales (x13 @ £70)	
Profit/Loss	

11.2 BUSINESS CASE

This pilot was a financial cost-neutral exercise. Income covered all costs. As educative activities, we do not look to courses such as these to be highly profitable concerns, because they bring other benefits beyond the monetary:

- They connect participants with cultural heritage and natural materials
- They have empowering mental health and community building benefits
- They make people aware of our project and gives us a captive audience to promote our social enterprise
- Short courses often sow seeds
- They can lead to repeat custom and new interests

In this instance, employing Green Aspirations CIC captured the kind of mechanism we wish to make available to support other rural craft businesses. Whilst we made no profit from the endeavor, Green Aspirations did, capturing a day's wage to bring them revenue for their core costs and activities. In the future, we would be keen to support small scale sole-traders and small businesses by employing them in a similar fashion to deliver courses.

The finances of this example were very lean – we paid for no marketing and relied heavily on word-of-mouth, local newsletters and social media posts to reach our audience. At the time of publicising it we had not launched our website, online shop/booking system nor established any reputation for running craft courses.

We were aided in our audience by the Birse Community Trust having previously run several free craft courses as part of their Ballogie Soutar's Shop (Shoe Maker's) project, which included fully funded free-to-attend craft courses, which were paid for by grant funding. Several of the participants on these also came onto our course.

This course made use of waste material from tree felling conducted at the Bucket Mill site in the spring: trees were coming to rub against the mill. The brash from this felling was transported the short distance to Finzean Old School, the venue for this course.

The Bucket Mill site is unsuitable for courses so long as it does not have welfare facilities, having no running water nor toilet currently.

11.3 FUTURE FORMATS

Supporting other rural craft businesses in this way would fall into one of two categories:

- 1) We employ the craft business as a contractor, much like we did Green Aspirations CIC.
 - Our social enterprise takes the financial risk: if there are not enough bookings, we will make a loss.
 - If we make a profit, this will go to support our core costs.
 - Regardless, the contractor craft business gets paid a fair fee for their expertise.
 - This mode can be used to support new entrant craft businesses, or experienced makers looking to launch craft courses of their own who can benefit from our growing reach.
- 2) We promote and signpost to the craft business only, and/or offering to advertise and manage ticket bookings for the craft business
 - We could charge a low booking fee to cover administrative time for having bookings on our platform.
 - This would concentrate a wide variety of craft courses, by otherwise isolated makers and producers, under the Bucket Mill brand, for the mutual benefit of all.
 - Collectively all involved can build a reputation and hub for the marketing and booking of craft courses in North East Scotland.



RURAL CRAFT COURSES CONNECT PEOPLE TO LANDSCAPE



12 CONCLUSION

We are quietly confident in our plan to utilise the social enterprise model to turn around the fortunes of the Bucket Mill. We believe that with careful early funding, we can pack a powerful punch, providing a big return on the investment any funder makes with us: socially, materially and financially.

Our work comes at a critical juncture for the Finzean mills: the time for immediate and bold action is upon us. Inaction will only accelerate the loss of buildings, knowledge and the scale of the challenge to turn around their fortunes. Allied to the trade of the Millwright sitting on the 'red list' of endangered crafts, we have much to do from the starting block.

The social enterprise model outlined affords a way for us to create a proactive yet structured 'doing' organisation, harnessing and focusing the right skills, training and competence to generate self-sustaining revenue which can offer a bright future not just for these mills, but also for built and industrial heritage in Scotland, showing how craft trades can rejuvenate historic buildings and rural settings.

In choosing this model, we are opting to go against the grain for the way that large historic building repair projects are undertaken. We have made a conscious choice to build internal capacity in our organisation over employing external contractors to achieve our aims. Whilst the latter may deliver results quickly, investing in our enterprise will deliver much bigger, better and sustained work, sow seeds in new entrants and support their germination. Taking this approach ensures that we can use the process of repair as an educational catalyst. Ultimately, our project is a social project, concerned with passing on skills and inspiring others.

We also recognise that tourism plays an insubstantial part in this plan: this is also a conscious choice, as the power of these amazing buildings lies in their educative value, which can be unlocked in so many engaging ways beyond a tea room and gift shop.

We take this approach because we are afforded the luxury of long-term secure tenure thanks to our 25-year lease from the Birse Community Trust. This mentality lets us ask big questions about what the underpinning infrastructure to sustain our business can look like, for our full lease term and beyond.

Our plan will create meaningful rural employment and economic development, in the way climate change requires us: we can help play our part in rewiring our relationship to imported material consumption and localise part of our supply chain, demonstrating to others how this can be done, all whilst adding value to natural materials. In an oil-focused county like Aberdeenshire, our project becomes an essential cog in a just transition.

The fruit of all this labour will rest in continuing the production of turned wooden buckets, a trade which will become the barometer of our success. If we're making buckets, we are doing it right.

For now, it will be all about our journey to producing that first prize bucket.

