



Planning and Access Committee

Meeting: 23 February 2026

Agenda item 5

SUBMITTED BY:	STUART MEARNS Director of Place
APPLICATION NUMBER:	2017/0254/MIN
APPLICANT:	SGZ Cononish Limited
LOCATION:	Cononish Gold Mine
NATIONAL PARK WARD:	Ward 2 - Breadalbane and the Trossachs
COMMUNITY COUNCIL AREA	Strathfillan
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1. Summary and reason for presentation

1.1. This is an annual report to provide an update to members on the development of the Cononish Gold and Silver Mine near Tyndrum.

2. Recommendation

2.1. That Members:

NOTE the updates on the development.

3. Background

Development Background

3.1. A planning application for the development of an underground mine to extract gold and silver with associated service and production building, plant, storage areas, Tailings Storage Facility (TSF), settlement pond and gauging station, bridge and car parking (Further revision of permission 2014/0285/DET) was received in August 2017. On 27 February 2018 the National Park Authority Board was minded to approve the application subject to conditions and a section 75 legal agreement. Following the conclusion of the section 75 legal agreement, planning permission was granted - with the issuing of the decision notice on 19 October 2018. All suspensive conditions were discharged between March and December 2018 and works started on site on 3 January 2019. To view the files above, please go to our e-planning system, select 'Applications' and enter the reference '2017/0254/MIN' (also ref to earlier application 2014/0285/DET). See Appendix 1 for a location plan and site plan.

Reporting to Planning Committee

3.2. Given the significance of the development within the National Park, annual progress update reports are presented to Planning and Access Committee. The last report was presented to committee in February 2025. This report updates Members on site status between February 2025 and February 2026.

3.3. Since the last formal update report to Planning Committee, updates have been provided to the National Park Board including in the CEO Update to the Board in March and September 2025.

4. Update on Progress

	Current Status
4.1	Members will be aware, from last year's update, that at the end of September 2023 mining and production ceased and the majority of staff at the mine were put on unpaid leave whilst discussions were held with potential funders to secure new investment. After a period of care and maintenance (with limited works being carried out on site and continued environmental monitoring); Acrux Gold invested in SGZ Cononish Ltd in February 2025. Acrux Gold are now the parent company of SGZ Cononish Ltd. SGZ Cononish Ltd remains the operator of the mine, in accordance with the planning permission.
4.2	The National Park Authority has been in regular correspondence with Acrux as they progressed their investment in SGZ Cononish Ltd and since they acquired the mine.
4.3	The National Park Authority has undertaken numerous site visits during this period, including continuing with the regular monitoring visits with the Planning Monitoring Officer. Fortnightly operational meetings were held with SGZ Cononish Ltd during the transition period and this only recently reduced back to monthly meetings.
4.4	Mining re-commenced on site in July 2025 and the processing plant was re-commissioned and processing started in December 2025. There will be a period of testing in the processing plant, with new equipment having been installed. It is envisaged that the plant will work up to full production in summer 2026. Staff numbers have gradually increased as works on site have re-commenced and around 62 people are now employed.
4.5	Acrux Gold specialise in sensor-based ore-sorting technology, which in simple terms measures the gold content of the ore and "rejects" mine rock which does not have a suitable gold content. This means that less ore is processed and the ore that is processed is guaranteed to have a high gold grade. Less tailings will be produced and the "rejected" ore is used on surface and/or placed back underground.
4.6	The use of this new technology means that some changes are required on site. The Planning Authority has been advising SGZ Cononish Ltd on the planning requirements of some of these changes and future proposals as outlined below. So far, these changes have not been significant and are adjustments to reflect a change in some of the methods of processing the mined ore.
4.7	A new ore-sorter will be installed within the existing processing plant building and a new conveyor structure is required leading from the ore-sorter (within the plant building) to the "Run of Mine" platform outside the

Current Status	
	building, to return the rejected ore to a stockpile, before it is placed back underground or used on the surface. A replacement laboratory building is also required to house specialist equipment which will analyse samples from the processing plant and the ore sorter to allow continual monitoring of the accuracy of the technology and to reduce the time that rejected material is stockpiled on the surface.
4.8	Planning applications were submitted for the conveyor structure (2025/0261/DET) and a small lab building (2025/0262/DET) in September 2025 and were approved as delegated decisions in November 2025.
4.9	Internal site electricity supply upgrades have been undertaken, within the mine and above surface as well as refurbishment and replacement of some of the processing plant equipment.
4.10	Any further changes affecting the planning conditions will be discussed with the operator and advice provided on planning requirements.

Operational Development to date	
4.11	<u>Background</u> The development can be divided into three phases: construction, operation and restoration.
4.12	After an extended construction period due to unexpected volumes of peat, weather conditions and coronavirus pandemic related delays the processing plant was completed in November 2020 and the first gold was produced on 30 November 2020. The development then entered the operational phase.
4.13	The preparation of the footprint of the first tailings stack commenced with stripping of vegetation in October 2020 to allow the completion of the landscaping of the screening bund. The stacks are the approved method of storing inert waste material (tailings) arising from the mine processing operation – forming a sequence of mounded landforms – up to 10 in total over the lifetime of the permission – each being sequentially restored using turves cut from the formation of the subsequent stack. Stack 1 is located immediately to the east of the plant platform and screening bund.
4.14	Stack 1 was prepared for tailings placement with a series of layers including a basal drainage layer and shear key – in effect the retaining wall element of the stack structure - formed from mine rock. Placement of tailings in stack 1 commenced in January 2021 and was completed in February 2023.

Operational Development to date

4.15	Quarterly geotechnical inspections have been agreed with SGZ Cononish Ltd and the National Park's geotechnical advisers from Ironside Farrar have carried out regular inspections of stacks 1 and 2.
4.16	Stack footprints require to be incrementally prepared for deposition of the tailings and once the tailings are deposited then soils will be added, followed by turves, mulch and divots taken from the footprint of the next stack in the sequence. The stack restoration phase continues on a phased basis throughout the life of the mine in tandem with mine operation.
4.17	The documentation required under planning conditions, relating to the construction and restoration of stack 2 was approved in October 2022. The stripping of stack 2 commenced in late October 2022, with the turf stripped being used in the progressive restoration of stack 1.
4.18	The placement of tailings in stack 2 commenced in February 2023 and continued until September 2023. Tailings began being placed on stack 2 again in December 2025, following the re-commissioning of the processing plant.

5. Monitoring of the Development

Planning Monitoring Officer

5.1	<u>Background</u> The Planning Monitoring Officer (PMO) continues to visit the site regularly and continues to produce a report following each site visit which includes a summary of the site visit, a clear audit trail of any issues arising and classification of these issues base on traffic-light reporting.
5.2	The PMO Planning Audit Reports are published online on the public access planning website 6 months after the site visit, to allow the operator a reasonable timeline to address any arising issues, and to not prejudice any formal enforcement action should that be required.
5.3	<u>Update</u> Since works have recommenced at the site, the focus of the PMO monitoring has been on the management of water on site, the maintenance and upgrade of site infrastructure and proposed changes on site. Ongoing compliance with planning conditions has continued to be monitored.

Monitoring Reports from the Developer

5.4	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>The operator (SGZ Cononish Limited) is required to submit (as a minimum) quarterly construction and operation monitoring reports to the Planning Authority setting out how the requirements of the Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP) and all other conditions of the permission are being adhered to on site. Each report is specified to contain an update on construction or restoration progress, up-to-date photographs and an update from the Ecological and Landscape Clerks of Work (ECoW and LCoW) including evidence of, and from, their site visits and including their photographic record. The report is also required to contain a list of issues identified and the subsequent report should explain how the issue has been addressed and evidence the remedial works undertaken.</p>
5.5	<p><u>Update</u></p> <p>The ECoW and LCoW visit the site quarterly with the reports from their site visits being submitted to the Planning Authority. The latest report from the operator covering October-December 2025 was submitted to the planning case officer on 9 February 2026.</p>

6. Obligations

Greater Cononish Glen Management Plan (GCGMP)

6.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>The section 75 legal agreement requires the operators to establish a Greater Cononish Glen Advisory Group to provide recommendations to the operators and the National Park Authority on all aspects of the Plan, and on the implementation thereof. It is required to meet at least once a year in the first 10 years from the date of commencement of development, and more frequently during intensive operations.</p>
6.2	<p><u>Update</u></p> <p>The GCGMP Advisory Group held its ninth meeting in August 2025. As per the requirements of the section 75 legal agreement, a report was submitted to the National Park Authority prior to the meeting. This detailed the works that have been undertaken in compliance with the Management Plan since the last meeting; and the works, which are proposed to be undertaken in compliance with the Management Plan in the following 12 months. The majority of the GCGMP projects are now complete with the final tree planting completed in December 2025.</p>

Greater Cononish Glen Management Plan (GCGMP)

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| 6.3 | Under the terms of the section 75 legal agreement, the GCGMP is to be reviewed every 5 years. This review was due in February 2025 and requires a report from the operator to instigate the review. The report from the operator was submitted to the Planning Authority in December 2025 and the review of the management plan is in progress. |
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Habitat and Land Management Advisory Group (HLMAG)

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| 6.4 | <u>Background</u>
The section 75 legal agreement also requires the operators to establish a Habitat and Land Management Advisory Group to provide recommendations to the Operators and the Park Authority on all aspects of the Decommissioning and Restoration Plan, and on the implementation thereof. The seventh meeting of the Habitat and Land Management Advisory Group was held in August 2025. |
| 6.5 | <u>Update</u>
Since the last update to committee there has been limited restoration undertaken due to the site status, however ongoing monitoring of restoration has continued to allow for review and consideration of restoration techniques. Progressive restoration of stack 2 continues as tailings are placed and the stack construction progresses. |

Financial Contributions

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| 6.6 | <u>Background</u>
In order to mitigate any adverse environmental impacts, and to ensure the wider social and economic impacts of the development are met, the section 75 legal agreement requires the operators to make payments to Loch Lomond and The Trossachs Countryside Trust. |
| 6.7 | <u>Update</u>
The most recent payment was made in January 2026. |

Financial Guarantee Bonds

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| 6.8 | <u>Background</u>
The development of the mine has two associated financial guarantee bonds, one for Restoration and Aftercare (£623,767.46) and one relating to the Greater Cononish Glen Management Plan (£268,692.95). |
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Financial Guarantee Bonds

6.9	<p><u>Update</u></p> <p>Members will recall that a review of the Restoration and Aftercare Bond was undertaken by Ironside Farrar on behalf of the National Park Authority. This review was completed in 2023 and it was agreed with SGZ Cononish Ltd and the other parties to the section 75 legal agreement, that the bond amount would be increased from £537,918.22 to £623,767.46. A payment of £40,000 was received by the National Park Authority in June 2023 and the remaining outstanding balance £45,849.24 was paid by Acrux on their acquisition of SGZ Cononish Ltd in March 2025.</p>
6.10	<p>Initial discussions have been held with SGZ Cononish Ltd and consultants from Ironside Farrar, who will review the GCGMP bond amount on behalf of the National Park Authority. The review of the GCGMP bond is not in progress at the current time, however as noted above the GCGMP is currently under review and once this review has been completed a review of the bond will follow.</p>

7. Looking Forward

7.1	<p>Works continue on the placement of tailings on stack 2. Documentation is being prepared and survey work is underway by the operator to prepare the details of the next stack. Once received, officers will review and advise. Mining is ongoing and processing is ramping up to full production, expected in summer 2026. Installation of new equipment will take place over the coming months, including the conveyor structure, lab building and ore sorter.</p>
7.2	<p>In December 2025 there were two separate fuel leaks from on-site generators and a separate incident of high suspended solids being recorded in the discharge from the settlement pond to the River Cononish. SEPA, Scottish Water and the Planning Authority were notified of these incidents and are satisfied that the operator has taken appropriate steps to enhance mitigation to reduce the risk of such incidents.</p>
7.3	<p>Monitoring of the site will continue regularly and frequent communication between SGZ Cononish Ltd, the Planning Authority and the PMO will be maintained.</p>

8. Conclusion

8.1	It is recommended that Members NOTE the contents of this report and the update that has been provided on the development.

9. Background Documents

9.1	For background information, Members should go to the website – https://eplanning.lochlomond-trossachs.org/OnlinePlanning/?agree=0 then enter the search criteria as 2017/0254/MIN.

Appendix 1: Location Plan and Stack Location Plan

