

Q & A with Faye MacLeod

Partner with Campbell, Stewart, MacLennan and Co in Portree

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Question 1: What type of advice do you typically provide to community landowners?

Faye MacLeod: *All sort sorts of accountancy and business advisory advice including:*

- *Feasibility studies & financial projections for:*
 - *community land buy-outs*
 - *asset transfers from local authority*
 - *New build projects on community land purchased*
- *Due diligence financial analysis on existing estate data to be purchased by community*
- *Financial projections pre-buyout*
- *Advice on suitable business structures*
- *VAT advice*
- *Advice and assistance in establishing accounting systems*
- *Establishing monthly management reporting systems*
- *Preparing annual accounts*
- *Financial projections for major projects*
- *Annual budgeting*
- *Financial advice provided to Board of Directors*
- *Providing support to Chief Executive dealing with funders*

Question 2: What do you think can help in creating a real understanding of the scale and ambition of community landownership in Scotland?

Faye MacLeod: *The best way to aid understanding is to provide real examples of community landownership in Scotland. The most interesting part of any of the CLS event is the case studies showing what can be achieved as this brings to life the legislation and is really engaging.*

Question 3: Are you been involved with many community landownership projects? Are there instances of good practice that are helpful for others?

Faye MacLeod: *Every buyout is different and each one involves very different assets, existing opportunities and new development opportunities, so the most important thing to bear in mind is that what works in one community buyout might not be suitable in the next. It's important that each one is considered in its own right, but that examples of what other communities have done with similar aspects of their estate/assets are learned from and used to inform newer community buyouts.*

I am involved in two separate teams working on the following feasibility studies and business plans:

- *Isle of Ulva – Community Right to Buy proposed purchase of the island and the most unusual meeting venue to date*
- *Crossbost, Isle of Lewis – Potential asset transfer of local authority owned pier*

- *Isle of Scalpay former school – Potential asset transfer from local authority to the North Harris Trust*
- *Storas Uibhist – Feasibility study into Foodhub*

I feel that working as part of a team with other consultants results in a much better feasibility study at the end of the day as you can bring together a mix of different skills and can spread to workload to be able to deliver the reports within a relatively tight timescale.

Question 4: What to your mind, are the nuances, in relation to working with private owners and community landowners?

Faye MacLeod: *Community landowners are driven by broader aspirations than private landlords usually are and are answerable to their membership to not only safeguard the assets they hold, but also to ensure that they are at least operating at a break even position or better, and deliver social and community benefit. There is far greater transparency and openness with community landlords who are happy to share data with other community landowners, and their membership, whereas it can be very difficult to obtain financial data in relation to private landowners, even where there is an amicable negotiated sale position.*

Question 5: When advising community landowners what in essence are the areas/topics that need to be focussed on more to increase the likelihood of good progress? *Thinking along the lines of democratic approach, balancing economic and social benefits.*

Faye MacLeod *Having clear aims and objective that are shared with and supported by the community being represented on a number of levels such as being financially responsible and ensuring that the estate/assets are going to be financially sustainable in the medium to long term. This also as to be balanced against meeting the community's collective aspirations which may be economic, demographic or social. Each community is different and the community land lord has to have clear aims that are supported by the community with clear communication being vital.*

Question 6: In the journey towards more community land ownership across Scotland - what encouragement do you think land professionals need, to become more engaged?

Faye MacLeod: *Professionals need to be convinced that there are opportunities for their particular professions by getting involved in community land and that they are not going to get sucked into undertaking work at a low rate that is not worth the effort. Few professionals are aware that there is much work to be obtained in the community land sector, so more information needs to be distributed.*

Question 7: Are there any “fear” factors for land-professionals you have noticed creep in and how best would you help to dispel those ideas?

Faye MacLeod: *Some professionals are concerned that they will upset private clients by becoming involved with community landlords, but if community landownership can be seen as a viable*

alternative land disposal route for private landowners, then the 2 sectors can co-habit the same professional space.

Question 8: What are the potential hurdles you foresee on both sides - stopping more of community land buyouts going ahead – what are the things to look out for?

Faye MacLeod: *There are many new challenges that will arise as community land buyouts begin to emerge in urban areas in terms of the high value of land, related professional costs etc. There will be increased tension between private landowners and potential community landowners who may be viewed as thwarting a much higher private sale price.*

Question 9: What steps have you taken in your organisation to help build expertise in the community land ownership arena?

Faye MacLeod: *I have recently taken on a new member of staff to get involved in the community land ownership sector, and I take advantage of CLS events to keep up to date with developments and network with others in the sector. I engage with other professionals in the community land sector as this increases the opportunity to generate further work in the future.*

Question 10: Are there any examples of good practice you have experienced? That can be promoted more?

Faye MacLeod: *Working in a syndicate of professionals is very effective and gives communities a good collaborative product at the end of the day. Communities are all very different and some need to be supported beyond just delivering the services required to build up their confidence that they are not taking on a major responsibility and liability that is beyond their capability. There is a mentoring role as well for professionals when working with community landowners. When working with a community it is very rewarding to work through a feasibility study and see that the steering group/Community Company/Trust's aspirations and confidence grows throughout the process and by the time the process is complete that they are ready to make the next step towards community ownership.*

Question 11: Do you think more successful community land buyout case studies and information sharing can assist in more land professionals getting involved?

Faye MacLeod: *Yes – this is probably the best way to engage with professionals – it brings it all to life in a very powerful way*