

## Q & A with Sarah Jackson

Associate Director, Rural with Savills

December 2017

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

**Sarah Jackson:** Predominately valuation, strategic purchase advice and planning. The wider Savills business is able to provide all aspects of land and property management services and advice.

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

**Sarah Jackson:** More detail surrounding the success stories – together with honest and realistic commentary as to the highs and lows of community ownership.

**Question 3:** Can you tell me about the major community land buyouts you are involved in at the moment and how you aim to progress them successfully?

**Sarah Jackson:** I have provided valuation advice to both Stirling Council and the Bannockburn House Trust, working together with building surveying colleagues to assist in the purchase of Bannockburn House. I have provided strategic purchase advice to the NWMCCW in relation to their bid to purchase Ulva which is currently in progress. I was also involved with the East Lochaber and Laggan Community Trust in their joint venture negotiations on the sale of Rio Tinto.

Our role is usually to provide independent advice to support communities and give them the tools and information they need to assist them in making their decisions.

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

**Sarah Jackson:** Private owners often have a more detailed understanding of the legislative framework surrounding the management of property, have more experience and are more aware of the obstacles difficulties and likely costs of land ownership. Community landowners often initially need a higher level of support but generally are aware of their knowledge gaps and learn fast.

**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?

**Sarah Jackson:** Some thought should, I believe, be given to allowing communities access to professional advice early in the process, i.e. before a right to buy is registered or before negotiations commence with a landowner. Frequently we are brought into the process very late, by which time some of the strategic decisions have already been made, and perhaps mistakes made that could have been avoided had early advice been obtained. In order to obtain quality advice there is a cost, but the overall benefit would be better thought out, and more comprehensive, applications or approaches to landowners.

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

**Sarah Jackson:** Ultimately land professionals are there to act in the best interest of their clients, whether that be Land owner or Community, but this does come at a cost. There needs to be a

greater understanding of the value of professionals' work and an acceptance that it has to be paid for at market rates if the community landowning sector is to receive the best advice.

**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?

**Sarah Jackson:** The formal process is still uncommon and uncertainty as to how land owners and communities should proceed may deter full engagement in the process. It will take time for a comprehensive understanding by land agents of the procedures and practices, but case studies based on success stories may assist dispel some myths.

**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?

**Sarah Jackson:** The limited funding sources are likely to be the biggest hurdle, but the lack of support for professional fees may also prevent early engagement with landowners' agents and be a barrier stopping communities from approaching professionals for advice.

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

**Sarah Jackson:** Savills Rural has specialists who act as the main point of contact for communities, and we then source the required professionals within our wider business to assist. This is predominately done through the Rural Professional and Rural Planning teams, and where other professionals are used (ie building or commercial surveyors), the rural specialists act in a supporting role, helping with communication and client management.

**Question 10:** Do you think more successful community land buyout case studies and information sharing can assist in more land professionals getting involved?

**Sarah Jackson:** Yes - it may also help communities in discovering the breadth of experience and knowledge available to them