

COMMUNITY LANDOWNERS AND THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Community Ownership for Green Travel

Huntly Development Trust

COMMUNITY*
LAND SCOTLAND

CASE STUDY



Introduction

Scotland has declared a climate emergency and committed to becoming carbon-neutral by 2045. The community landowning sector is contributing towards this goal.

Community Land Scotland has commissioned research to document action that the sector is taking to address climate change. Alongside a report which looks at climate initiatives across the sector, six case studies have been produced.

Each of the case studies looks in depth at one asset-owning community organisation and how it is contributing to a particular climate action theme. The themes are: renewable energy generation; managing 'carbon sinks' like woodlands and peatlands; helping people to adapt to the effects of climate change, and; reducing emissions related to food, transport and domestic energy use.

Each case study also looks at the wider work of the community owner in relation to the climate emergency, and the diverse benefits that they are providing.

This case study features Huntly Development Trust (HDT), a community organisation which owns a range of assets in and around the town of Huntly in Aberdeenshire.

The case study focuses on HDT's work to reduce transport-related emissions.

It also touches on other climate initiatives that the Trust is engaged in, such as generating renewable energy, planting trees and reducing emissions from the buildings it owns.

Finally, the case study looks at how these various initiatives are benefitting the community.

KEY MESSAGES

Community landowners:

- ✓ carry out holistic programmes of active and low-carbon travel. HDT is supporting people to stay local for work and leisure, providing ebikes and developing the path network, amongst other things.
- ✓ deliver community-led climate action in ways that are not possible without control over land and other assets.
- ✓ are trusted by local people and well-placed to communicate the importance of behaviour change and how this might be done.
- ✓ can regenerate small towns - like Huntly - through asset ownership, reducing the need for people to leave.



Huntly Development Trust (HDT) was established in 2009. It serves a population of around 10,000 and is bound to act in the interests of local people. HDT owns a 63-acre farm, a wind turbine, an 'eco-booth', retail spaces in the town square, a range of ebikes, low-carbon cars and a minibus.
<https://huntlydevelopmenttrust.org>



Community wind turbine (right) at Greenmyres Farm: Photo: HDT.



Cycling event starting from Huntly, 2020. Photo: Stuart Masson.

Reducing transport emissions

Over time, Huntly has gradually been losing much of its 'life'. The town square has become increasingly quiet, with empty shops and little investment. HDT has stepped in to reverse this trend. It aims to make Huntly and district a better place to live, work and visit.

The Trust has bought three empty buildings in Huntly's town square, with funding from the Scottish Land Fund, Aberdeenshire Council and others. £2.4m has been secured from the Scottish Government's Regeneration Capital Grant Fund for renovation of the buildings. The plan is to install low-carbon heating systems and modern insulation to reduce emissions. These spaces will provide services and facilities which reduce the need for local people to travel further afield.

One of the concerns has been the departure of banks from the town. HDT has taken ownership of one of the vacated bank properties. It will also provide space for one of the banks with part-time use of a room, ensuring that banking services remain available. The Trust also plans to install its own ATM cash machine.

The retention of these buildings and facilities, and improvements to the look of the town square, has helped to rebuild civic pride and confidence.

Another of HDT's buildings will host a café, a community cinema and pop-up shops, and provide a venue for other activities. This will encourage people to consider what the town has to offer - something which has been brought to the front of people's minds as the COVID-19 pandemic has constrained travel. There are plans to develop a co-working hub which will reduce the need for people to commute to Inverurie or Aberdeen. The space will provide communal working and good broadband facilities. It will enable remote workers to stay local while still separating their home and working lives. It will help to develop business and other connections within the community.

Finally, one of the buildings will serve as a physical base for Huntly's Green Travel Hub. This initiative, with its own dedicated staff member, offers people a range of options for low-emission commuting or recreational travel. The project has been



Community-owned building, Huntly town square. Photo: HDT.

underway for some time and the new space will provide storage for the Trust's electric bikes.

HDT has 14 e-bikes and it has secured funding to purchase a further 10. Over the course of the pandemic, demand for renting the bikes has increased and the Trust has had to adopt a waiting list for their use. HDT is working with surrounding communities to develop further 'hubs' which will create opportunities for active travel across the region and help to meet the growing demand.

Much of this demand is thought to have been driven by the recent expansion of the local paths network, creating safe and exciting opportunities for cycling. Support from the EU-funded LEADER and SRDP schemes has enabled the creation of paths connecting Huntly with the Trust's farmland at Greenmyres, five miles away. With the support of a consultant funded by Forestry and Land Scotland, HDT is engaging local people to map the new paths and add them to a website. This will provide users with information and classify the routes according to their accessibility and their potential for commuting and recreation. The

new paths were completed in March 2020. This was shortly before the first 'lockdown' of the pandemic and, as a result, the paths have yet to be publicised. Nonetheless, they are already enjoying substantial use.

The Trust is working with SusTrans on a 'Mini-Holland' project, investigating safe routes for children to cycle to school. This project will engage with parents and children to investigate and publicise safe cycling routes. It will produce an interactive digital map and reduce the need for children to be driven to school by car.

HDT organises a car club. In situations where car travel is felt to be unavoidable, this club helps to reduce dependency on individual car ownership. A community minibus also helps to reduce individual car travel, with plans to replace the current petrol model with an electric alternative. A lack of EV-charging infrastructure has constrained the use of HDT's electric car, but a feasibility study is being carried out on the expansion of community charging points, potentially making this option more viable for users. In the meantime, two hybrid cars are receiving more regular use from local organisations and people.

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“People have been and continue to be very despondent about town centres. Obviously, like every other Northeast town, shops have been closing. But I think HDT's work now gives people cause to have some optimism for the future of Huntly.”

Pat Scott, local journalist

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“We still haven't had a grand opening event [for the new paths network] because of lockdown and everything. But it's always busy! You know, these people out all the time and it's just amazing. And a lot of these are people on the electric bikes, so this has been fantastic.”

Mary Scott, Board Member, Huntly Development Trust



Cycling on the path at Greenmyres Farm. Photo: Debbie Haefner.

In addition to its work on active travel, HDT has been delivering a range of other climate initiatives, with diverse benefits for local people.

Asset ownership has enabled the Trust to pursue larger and more ambitious projects.

To secure its financial sustainability, HDT sought to develop a **community-owned wind turbine**. It was unable to convince local landowners to provide access to land for this purpose. As a result, the Trust bought Greenmyres Farm in 2014, comprising 63 acres of unimproved upland.

In 2016, HDT erected a 500kW wind turbine at Greenmyres. As well as generating renewable energy, this turbine provides an income which covers the core costs of the organisation and helps to lever in other funding for projects.

HDT is now investigating alternatives to selling electricity to the grid, such as using microgrids, batteries and hydrogen to store energy for when it is needed.

The Trust is talking with Community Energy Scotland and Aberdeenshire Council about the feasibility of producing hydrogen to help power the Council's bus services. It is also hoping to install EV-charging points at Greenmyres Farm. Plans for additional renewable energy might include a solar farm. In addition, HDT has in the past received and distributed community benefit payments from commercial renewable energy companies.

While buying Greenmyres Farm was a means to an end – providing a site for the turbine – it has also provided opportunities for other community uses and benefits. Following community consultation, HDT has gradually developed the farm.

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“One of the challenges ... is the availability of land unless you own the land, it's not really doable by renting. It's not just the long-term security ... it's that the big developers ... got in first and nabbed access to all the best sites.”

Mary Scott, Board Member, Huntly Development Trust

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“The wind turbine ... was a means to an end in that it supplies a long-term income source. But it's also an end in itself in that it produces green power.”

Les Allan, Former Chair, Huntly District Development Trust; Former Area Manager, Aberdeenshire Council

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“If I want to get a message across, I don't use a public body to do it I think the message is much better delivered by one of your own, as it were. One of the things that development trusts are fairly good at is getting information out there.”

Les Allan, Former Chair, Huntly Development Trust; Former Area Manager, Aberdeenshire Council

6,000 native trees have been planted, with hundreds more regenerated, providing a natural 'carbon sink'.

Ponds have been dug, with benefits for the biodiversity of the area.

Future plans may include further development of the path network, building 'huts' for rental and harvesting timber to provide an income.

HDT has recently built an '**eco-bothy**' on the site. This provides indoor accommodation and outdoor camping, a classroom space, kitchen and bike shed. It will be used by local groups and clubs, schools and nurseries, families, outdoor enthusiasts and 'adventure tourists'.

There are plans for Forest School type activities, with both Scouts and Guides groups having expressed an interest.

A **ground-source heat pump** warms the space and water and **state-of-the-art insulation** retains the heat. Solar PV is planned for the roof of the bike shed.

Providing greater access to the natural environment has driven behaviour change. People are engaging more with nature and opting to stay local for leisure and recreation. The fact that action on behaviour change has come from a community organisation has helped to get the message across to people.

Looking to the future, increased funding support for climate initiatives will place HDT in a strong position to continue its work within the community.

It is a source of pride that Huntly is ahead of the curve with regard to community climate action.



HDT's wind turbine (foreground) at Greenmyres Farm. Photo: HDT.

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Project supported by:



Front cover photo: Debbie Haefner

Base map on p. 2 designed by Exclusive-Free, Image #7740610