

Community Land Scotland 2023 Annual Conference



Summary Report

Friday 2 June – Saturday 3 June 2023
Sabhal Mòr Ostaig



Community Ownership and Land Reform:

Marking the centenary, shaping the future

There was a buzz in the air as delegates arrived at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig for this year's conference. The event started with a lunch that spilled out of the SMO café onto the back terrace, where delegates enjoyed sunny skies and good conversation.

Opening Plenary

In the first plenary, **Ailsa Raeburn**, Chair of Community Land Scotland, welcomed delegates to the conference, and thanked the sponsors of the event: Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Government, William Grant Foundation and The Tudor Trust.

Julia Campbell shared the story of Coigach Community Development Company's path to community ownership. The Company was founded in 2010 to tackle challenges of depopulation, falling school roll, and lack of access to housing and land. In particular, she shared the progress the Company is making on the purchase of the Hydroponicum (to be completed in June), which will be converted into housing.

Mairi Gougeon MSP, the newly appointed Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, sent a pre-recorded message. In her message, the Minister confirmed that the Scottish Government has committed to doubling the Scottish Land Fund to 20 million pounds by 2026. She also announced the full analysis of the Land Reform Bill consultation had been published.

Following this message, **Andrew Proudfoot**, Land Reform Bill Team Leader at the Scottish Government, gave a short presentation on the consultation process for the upcoming Land Reform Bill, and answered questions from delegates.

Attendees also listened to Three Bold Ideas for Change as **Kate Wimpres** of North Edinburgh Arts talked about putting communities in the driving seat in relation to development; **Mercedes Villalba MSP** pitched the idea that there should be a cap on the total amount of land an individual or corporation can own; and **Megan MacInnes** from the Scottish Land Commission asked whether Scotland's land should be used to build community wealth.



Resources:

- [Watch opening plenary](#)
- [Land reform in a Net Zero nation: consultation analysis](#)
- [Coigach Community Development Company community story slides](#)
- [Mentimeter results: 3 Bold Ideas for Changes](#)



Afternoon Plenary



Pat Mavor shared the story of WAT IF?'s path to community ownership. The group was established in 2011 to negotiate the community benefit income from the local windfarm to come directly to the trust, rather than to the local authority. The group's projects thus far include a local transport scheme, community broadband, community halls and a community show, a local paths network in greenspace, local grants, affordable rental housing. Most recently, the trust has been working to complete the purchase of Loanhead, a farmhouse, outbuildings and 20 acres in the middle of the community. The purchase will hopefully be completed in June 2023, and will provide space for income generating projects including shops, café and tourist accommodations.

Linsay Chalmers provided delegates with an update about Community Land Scotland upcoming year-long project, A Hundred Years of Community Ownership. This project will gather the stories of community ownership, include oral histories from community owners, and share this developing archive via events, a travelling exhibition and an online website that can continue to grow. The project will involve lots of opportunities for Members to be involved, from participating in oral history workshops, to hosting events. Delegates were able to share their interest in the project using Mentimeter.



For the final session of the day, Ailsa welcomed **John Todd, Kate Wimpress** and **Bridie Ashrowan** – Community Land Scotland's newest Directors – to the stage and conducted a conversation. Following this session, delegates moved outside for a group photo, and then dispersed to relax until dinner.



Resources:

- [Watch afternoon plenary](#)
- [WAT IF? community story slides](#)
- [Mentimeter results: A Hundred Years of Community Ownership](#)
- [Community Land Scotland Directors](#)



Panel Discussion: Community-led Biodiversity:

Local and Global Stories

The second day of the conference began with a panel discussion chaired by **Agnes Rennie** that explored community-led biodiversity in a local and global context. **Donald Mackinnon** provided an overview of the work done by Urras Oighreachd Chàrlabhaigh in peatland restoration, and discussed the benefits to biodiversity resulting from that work. Donald also discussed the ways in which the trust works in collaboration with the crofters on the estate, and how crofting policy impacts that collaboration. **Maria Latumahina**, from Papua, Indonesia, spoke about her work with the SeventyThree Foundation and the work done by the foundation with indigenous communities. In this work, the communities are given support and technical expertise to revitalise their local ecosystems, but she noted that the work starts with community empowerment work to allow indigenous populations to relearn their own relationship to the land.



Closing Plenary

Donald Boyd told the story of Huntly Development Trust in Aberdeenshire. The Trust was founded in 2009 with the goal of revitalising their market town. From the beginning, they had a goal of long-term sustainability, rather than relying on grant funding, so they began pursuing renewable energy projects. In 2013 the Trust was able to purchase a local farm, which allowed them to build a turbine, which in turn has allowed them to invest in revitalising the town centre, setting up a transport scheme, and developing their greenspace.



Linsay Chalmers and Josh Doble, Community Land Scotland's Development Manager and Policy Manager respectively, gave a presentation on the work of Community Land Scotland. Linsay provided an update about the support and promotion work of the organisation, and highlighted the Community Ownership Hub's work in Glasgow and Clyde Valley. Josh gave an update of the policy priorities of the organisation, with a focus on the upcoming Land Reform Bill, Community Wealth Building, and a just transition to Net Zero and a just response to the twinned crises of climate change and biodiversity.

Resources:

- [Watch closing plenary](#)
- [Huntly Development Trust community story slides](#)
- [Mentimeter results: Priority setting for Community Land Scotland](#)



Conference Workshops

How can we make renewable energy projects work for communities in 2023?

This workshop featured three presentations, followed by a Q&A and discussion moderated by **Community Land Scotland chair Ailsa Raeburn.**

Carola Bell, Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn

When the Trust purchased the estate, which includes 21 crofting townships on 56,000 acres, they recognised that they would need to generate much more income than it currently had in order to make their work sustainable. The Trust built three 900KW turbines, with a £5 million development cost. The funding package was comprised of a bank loan, community shares and other loans.

Using the income from the turbines, the Trust was able to create a community investment fund, which can feed the income back into the community.

Donald Boyd, Huntly Development Trust

The Huntly Development Trust was formed in 2009 as part of Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership in response to the need of the market town to adapt for sustainability. The Trust owns a single 500KW turbine on a piece of land that they purchased, and an additional two turbine projects in which the Trust has a share. The total net value for these projects is projected to be £7 million over the next 20 years.

Income from the turbines allows the Trust to invest in a travel scheme, a greenspace, town centre regeneration, and a host of other projects.

Artemis Pana and Rosie Macinnes, Raasay Community Renewables

Raasay Community Renewables has constructed two micro hydro schemes, 138kW total (50kW export constraint till 2026). It took the company 9 years from feasibility study to commissioning, and the journey was supported by expertise from Highland & Islands Enterprise, Local Energy Scotland (CARES), Community Shares Scotland (DTAS) and Forestry & Land Scotland.

Artemis highlighted the need for communities to consider their interdependence on other communities, and on local micro-enterprises to make the project successful. She also flagged up the need for strong governance structures and emphasised that for RCR, the ability to write their own governance structure allowed them the opportunity to consider how their governance could reflect their values.

Rosie spoke about the possible benefits to communities when they own their own renewables, rather than rely on community benefit funds. While currently RCR must sell their electricity to the grid and local residents buy it back at a higher rate, they are interested in investigating ways to sell directly to communities (obstacles in both policy and infrastructure).

Discussion

Much of the discussion in this workshop centred on the need for communities approaching renewable projects to consult with and learn from other communities.

Resources:

- [Watch workshop](#)
- [Presentation slides](#)



Community-led biodiversity

This workshop featured three presentations, followed by a Q&A and discussion moderated by Community Land Scotland Director **Kate Wimpres**.

Mark Perry, Viewpark Conservation Group / Historic Douglas Support

Viewpark Conservation Group completed purchase in 2018 of the Historic Douglas Support estate, which is a 172-acre greenspace in North Lanarkshire, completely surrounded by a concrete jungle. The group has three main objectives: to improve access and connectivity, to maintain and create habitat, and to regenerate historic features. The estate focuses both on creating opportunities for biodiversity to thrive, through creating biodiversity corridors, and also on suppressing invasive species, such as rhododendron and Japanese knotweed.

Mike Daniels, John Muir Trust

The John Muir Trust is currently in its 40th year. The genesis of the Trust can be traced back to 1982, when the Knoydart Estate was put up for sale and there was concern in the local community, and among conservationists, about the future of the peninsula. JMT has since been involved with a number of community buyouts, including Knoydart Foundation, Assynt Foundation, Carrifan Wildwood, North Harris Trust and Langholm Estate.

Mike spoke about the three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social and economic, and his belief that while all are important, the environmental must underpin these others. He challenged delegates to consider, with the myriad of projects that community landowners undertake, how biodiversity and the environment can be a part of their work.

Michael Hunter, North Harris Trust

The North Harris Trust was founded 20 years ago to purchase a 26,000 hectare estate, which contains both crofting land and deer forest. To date, the Trust has initiated a range of projects that have greatly increased the amount of native woodland in North Harris. By working with the crofters, the Trust has encouraged regeneration around fragmented areas of remnant woodland, supplemented with planting in suitable areas, the intention is to create a network of native woodland habitat across the estate.

Discussion

The discussion centred around the question of balancing community benefit and environmental benefit when prioritising biodiversity projects. The speakers considered different approaches, from restricting projects works to specific areas until the benefits can be understood by a wider audience, to working with local stakeholders (crofters in particular) to settle on projects that can be mutually beneficial.

Resources:

- [Watch workshop](#)
- [Presentation slides](#)



Passing the Baton: engaging young people in community ownership

This workshop featured three presentations, followed by a Q&A and discussion moderated by Community Land Scotland Directors **Bridie Ashrowan and Lincoln Richford**.

Jemma MacVicar, Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn | Galson Estate Trust

Galson Estate Trust has an ambitious 20-year strategic plan that is focused on the well-being of the community, creating an exceptional place to live. The Board have always had a long-term view of preserving the estate for future generations. To address the challenges of an ageing population and the drift of younger community members away, the Trust invests heavily in the young people of the island. These programmes include activities for primary aged children and holiday activities. Additionally, activities are tailored to be inclusive for young children with special needs. Galson also offers employment opportunities – graduate opportunities, placements and apprenticeships.

Priya Logan, Largo Communities Together

Largo Communities Together was formed by a group of concerned citizens who were anxious to address challenge of abandoned and neglected land. The group went through the process of creating a Local Place Plan, which has led to the increased work with schools and students.

The students have been engaged in both consultation and engagement work. There are plans to offer co-designing opportunities integrating young people. Thus far, the work has been mainly with primary schools, although LCT hopes to engage with young adults as well.

Gavin Cowan, Community Land Scotland

Gavin serves as the Policy Intern with Community Land Scotland. He spoke about his perspective that youth engagement, for both consultation and programming, is the most important activity that communities can undertake.

Learning point:

- Involve children and young people directly in the running of the project, activities etc.

Resources:

- [Watch workshop](#)
- [Presentation slides](#)



Repopulation in action: new settlements and housing

This workshop featured three presentations, followed by a Q&A and discussion moderated by Community Land Scotland Director **Mike Staples**.

Steven Robertson, Isle of Rum Community Trust

Between 2010 and 2018 there was a decline in island population, partly due to the condition of old estate houses. The Community Trust built new homes (pre-fabricated panel constructed on site) plus a bunkhouse for visitors and contractors. The Trust had to overcome financial challenges – building costs were 50% higher than on the nearest part of the mainland.

The affordable homes were all allocated to new island residents and include six children. The population of Rum is now 38.

New projects include the sale of three older properties rather than refurbishment and, potentially, the sale of plots for self-build homes.

Brendan O’Hanrahan, Lochbroom & Ullapool Community Trust

The community trust carried out a stock survey in the village which included information on use type e.g. short term lets. There is an issue with flats over shops being empty long term. The local authority has plans for 90 new homes on land outside the village, so the Trust’s focus is on provision for single people and couples, particularly young people. They want to provide affordable accommodation to retain young people in Ullapool.

Carey Doyle, Community Ownership Hub: Glasgow and the Clyde Valley

Carey spoke about the shared challenges faced by urban and rural communities in developing housing projects: the Rural Housing Fund grant is currently only available for settlements of fewer than 3,000 people, and there is currently no urban community housing fund. She brought up the example of the town centre of Dumfries being depopulated in the 1950s by change in housing patterns and the work that Midsteeple Quarter is doing in redeveloping the town centre as a model for town centre repopulation.

Discussion

The discussion centred on the challenge to build homes where the community recognises, and to tailor the allocation process accordingly. For the Isle of Rum, the important criteria for new residents is about what they can bring – jobs, skills, business, children. For Ullapool, the need is for housing for young, working-aged people – there are jobs available, but no housing available for the workforce.

Resource:

- [Presentation slides](#)



What difference does community ownership make for Scotland? A creative discussion

This workshop was discussion based, where delegates considered creative approaches to telling the story of community ownership.

Lindsay Chalmers, Development Manager of Community Land Scotland, gave a presentation about two approaches that communities have used to share the emotion and power that comes with community buyouts: Commissioned pieces and Creative engagement. **Lucy Conway**, Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust, spoke about involving creatives in community projects, and list her top tips:

1. Knowing what you want to do with a creative approach
2. Be very clear about the process
3. What is the legacy of the project?
It does not need to have longevity, but if there is a legacy, where will it live?

Discussion:

Delegates discussed a variety of projects that their organisations had done. The communities represented had engaged in commissioned work with artists (Galson Estate Trust, Thornhill Old School) and with creative engagement work (The Pyramid and Coigach Community Development Company).

Key takeaways:

- Artists are people too! They bring their own experience to the party.
- Processes for community engagement are very important. Multiple groups reported a learning curve as they determined how to bring the community along with them.
- Don't forget about the details – think about contracts and payments etc.

Resource:

- [The Stove podcast](#)



Public Interest Test & staying engaged with 2023 Land Reform Bill

This workshop gave delegates a chance to hear from **Andrew Proudfoot**, Land Reform Bill Team Leader at Scottish Government, and to provide feedback. Andrew introduced the Bill and spoke about the process of influencing the legislation through MSP lobbying and amendments.

Details from discussion

Andrew noted that pre-notification of sale will be in the Bill. This is designed to complement Community Right to Buy and give communities a chance to put in an application. In response, delegates raised concerns about Community Right to Buy:

- Process for registering interest is too convoluted
- Requirement to have business plan is onerous and inappropriate for early-stage registration of interest
- The formality of the process is off-putting for many groups

Andrew noted that the Public Interest Test legislation needs to be robust enough to capture as many land transfers as possible. Scottish Government wants a system in which there cannot be avoidance of the PIT, and in which any sale which contravenes a PIT would be void.

There was a discussion of the relationship between the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement being on a statutory footing and the Public Interest Test. Delegates expressed a need for clarity over when the PIT is applied – at the point of sale only or also when the LRRS has not been met.

There was a discussion over how public interest is defined – local public interest vs national public interest – which would have primacy? Delegates raised the prospect that the LRRS could be modified later by SLC and could provide flexibility to the PIT mechanism which would be enshrined in the Bill.

Gaelic Development in Community Ownership

In this workshop, delegates heard from two communities (Portree and Braes Community Trust and North Harris Trust) who participated in the Gaelic Communities Fund, a pilot programme run by Community Land Scotland, with funding from Bòrd na Gàidhlig which provided support for community organisations to deliver projects that boost Gaelic, a key community asset, in a way that is appropriate for their area.

Agnes Rennie, Chair of Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn and Director of Community Land Scotland, then chaired a discussion that considered the relationship between community ownership groups and land trusts and Gaelic development. This discussion highlighted the cultural and economic role that Gaelic can play in communities.

Key points that emerged from the discussion:

- Recruitment of Gaelic officers for projects is an on-going challenge. New research has demonstrated that while the demand for Gaelic medium teachers is growing, only a handful/year are in the pipeline to meet that demand.
- Development and survival of the language requires political leadership, and it inseparable from discussions of crofting and land reform.
- For groups in urban centres, it can be challenging to start work with Gaelic development. For these groups, it would be useful to have learning from the groups in the pilot programme shared.

Community Land Scotland will be publishing a report about the outcomes and impact of the Gaelic Communities Fund in the coming months.



CLAN: Research and community ownership

In this workshop, **Dr Bobby Macaulay** shared a presentation on his on-going research project which explores the ways in which community landowners are interacting with researchers amid a growing number of research requests. The goal of the research project is to develop a new framework for a sustainable and mutually beneficial approach to community landownership research.

Following the presentation, delegates participated in round table discussions to answer further research prompts. In the discussions, key points that emerged were:

- Communities can benefit from research that promotes what the community has achieved (as well as identifying potential areas for improvement), that provides data for funding applications, and that helps tell the story of community ownership;
- More guidance for early-stage (often graduate-level) researchers is needed to ensure that they have reviewed the existing research and that they are considering the needs of the community before embarking on a new research project;
- Community-led research, whether facilitated by CLAN (Community Landownership Academic Network) or not, should be included in an accessible archive of community ownership research.

Bobby's research project will continue with stakeholder interviews in the coming months, and should be available by early autumn.

How can HIE help you deliver natural capital aspirations?

In this workshop, **Sandra Holmes** led a discussion about how Highlands & Islands Enterprise is supporting community landowners participate in the growing and evolving natural capital sector.





Feedback from the day

What has been the most useful?

- A real buzz. Radical & Positive. Lots of young people.
- The diverse range of people and opportunities to mix. Bringing together lots of people with a shared interest in Scotland's land.
- Networking and awareness raising.
- Having the event and accommodation on same location allowed conversations to continue over mealtimes.
- Excellent balance of experiences from community landowners and government engagement
- The online live engagement was excellent and to see direct in time feedback.
- Combination of place, delegates, programme and organisation
- Networking with peers and potential collaborators
- The chance to network with other community groups, get useful experience with them, find solutions and be inspired
- Informal/unstructured time for connections and networking
- I found the format of the event really useful in terms of providing a good quantity of shorter presentations - it was a dynamic approach that kept people engaged.
- The stories about other community landowners and how they have become self-sustaining
- Meeting different groups, hearing their stories and building connections. The breadth of topics covered was also very impressive. I particularly enjoyed the speaker from the international stage and almost wished she'd had a session all to herself!
- Exchanges with others active in community land ownership and land reform
- Meeting some amazing and inspiring people

What should we change for future conferences?

- It would have been useful to get a perspective from an urban context.
- Slightly longer event, to allow more time for the discussions after presentations
- More emphasis needed on post-acquisition issues and challenges.
- The workshops could have been more facilitated and allow for collaborative input rather than presentation focused. Perhaps there was room for some bigger bolder thinking?
- The area for stalls was too crowded. Delegates were not provided with enough time to visit the exhibitor stalls.
- Would have liked to hear more details about the challenges of community land ownership and how folk overcame them, as well as the successes.
- Need a bit more space for discussion (ie sitting in a circle) as well as just presentations with Q&A. We always run out of time for discussions.
- I'd be interested to hear more of how land reform can be made to feel accessible in marginalised communities.
- Speaker timing was limited, sometimes due to the number of speakers within a single session. There were a couple of examples where I felt that just as we were getting into the real meat of the topic a speaker or session had to end. This was particularly true of several of the Q&As where I felt there was a lot more to had.
- Some workshop topics were very central and serious issues in land ownership - more time for these subjects in open session would be good.

Final thoughts from the day

- I found the conference motivational for the thematic objectives in my work streams.
- Thoroughly enjoyed the event, very well organised, excellent opportunity to spend quality time with like minded people, left inspired and looking forward to hearing how everyone has come along at the 2024 conference.
- It was one of the most well organised and engaged conferences I've ever been to (I've been to quite a few) - thank you to the team at CLS!
- Wish it had lasted longer! Thank you to the CLS team.
- An excellent conference.
- There were so many amazing people and brilliant stories to learn from however the breaks were so short and the schedule so packed it was difficult to make those links in the time allowed; we gained so much from attending, thank you!
- Urban and rural finding synergies was really inspiring.
- It was as stimulating as ever. So much to chew over and report back.



Delegate responses to the question 'What is one word you would use to describe community ownership?'

Save the Date: 2024 Annual Conference 10 & 11 May 2024

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