

Renewed multi-million pound land fund vital for continued community ownership success.

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Land reform campaigners and community landowners have called for a £25 million annual fund to maintain Scotland's world-beating progress towards community ownership of land and buildings.

Such is the demand for community ownership across Scotland, this year the Scottish Land Fund (SLF) – which provides funding for the scoping and purchase of community buyouts - is heavily oversubscribed with applications.

At the same time, applications to the SLF have now paused as this term of the Scottish Parliament comes to an end.

No certainty re future of SLF

There is no certainty as to what will happen with the SLF next year as it could depend on whichever government is in power after the Holyrood election in May.

The (SLF) - which was originally established in 2001 by the National Lottery's New Opportunities Fund - was created to help rural communities take ownership of land and assets that matter to them.

Between 2015 and 2024, the SLF awarded over £50 million to more than 300 community organisations

Supporters and campaigners say the astonishing success of the Fund to date should be maintained and accelerated with an increase in its current annual budget.

Such is the demand for community buyouts as the SLF enters its pre-election pause, it is estimated that there are about 150 projects waiting to request funding, with an estimated capital request value of £23million

Although the Scottish Government had promised £20 million annual budget by 2026, the Fund was actually saw a cut to around £7million this year. Community organisations are calling for a £15 million budget next year, rising to £25 million annually by 2029.

Funding is now provided by the Scottish Government and delivered in partnership through The

National Lottery Community Fund, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Community Land Scotland is the main organisation promoting and supporting community ownership of land and buildings.

Director of Communities and Operations, Linsay Chalmers, says: "The Scottish Land Fund has transformed Scotland's communities. It is fantastic value for money and has a huge beneficial impact for communities, economies and the environment all over Scotland. It has given communities the tools to tackle really challenging problems like rural depopulation and urban decline – often succeeding when other approaches to regeneration have failed."

In the last 14 years, 121,609 acres of land has been brought into community ownership with support from the Scottish Land Fund and are now delivering local opportunities and benefits.

"Hundreds of communities transformed for less than one mile of tramline"

Since 2011, over £77million has been invested into 394 rural community projects. and 71 urban community projects.

Land campaigners point out that total is the equivalent spend of less than 0.85 miles of the Edinburgh tramline.

"Many hundreds of communities have benefited with essential purchase and start-up funding and development", Linsay Chalmers adds. "These communities all over the country, have often been totally revitalised and brought to life with land projects, affordable housing, renewable energy, community facilities and biodiversity projects amongst many others– all for less than one mile of urban tramline."

Projects funded by the SLF must be community led, controlled by local residents, and benefit a clearly defined geographic area with any income reinvested locally.

Linsay Chalmers adds: "It is superb value for money. The fund should now see an annual increase. The Scottish Government had originally aimed for a £20 million annual budget by 2026, so our argument for £25 million annual target by 2029, is realistic and reasonable.

"We know that Scotland has one of the most unregulated land markets in Europe which is a major challenge. But Scotland's community ownership movement is world-beating in many ways. People come from across the world to see how our communities have tackled depopulation and developed innovative community energy projects and we need to build on that success."

Scottish Land Fund Committee Chair, Cara Gillespie, said: "The Scottish Land Fund has been a transformative force for communities across Scotland — from the Highlands to our cities — empowering local people to take ownership of land and buildings and use them to deliver lasting



social and economic benefits.

"With millions of pounds invested to date, the impact has been both wide-reaching and deeply felt. As demand continues to grow, it's clear there is an appetite for even more ambitious community ownership.

"Continued — and enhanced — investment in the Scottish Land Fund is vital to sustain this momentum and ensure more communities have the opportunity to shape their own future."

Gigha community saved

Amongst the string of highly successful projects supported by the SLF, in 2002 the Fund supported the community buyout of the Isle of Gigha with grants and loans towards part of the £4million purchase cost.

Since the buyout, the island's population has bucked the trend for many Highland Communities seeing a huge rise in population - from 92 to 170 - over the last 23 years.

Three community run wind turbines help finance various enterprises including developments in a local hotel, shop, restaurant and accommodation.

Isle of Gigha, Services Manager, Jane Macintyre, said: "The community here has been transformed and I don't think it would have been possible without the early support of the SLF. As well as the grants and loans, they helped give us advice and encouragement.

"Of course there have been challenges over the years and every community will face difficulties from time to time. But the island has been transformed and I think everyone can see that."

Orkney Benefits

In Orkney three economically vulnerable islands have benefitted hugely from SLF support. The fund helped with the purchase of 1700 acres of hill ground in the centre of Rousay, and contributed to community takeover of the old Kirk Manse which is being developed for essential affordable housing.

Rousay, Egilsay and Wyre has only one hotel and SLF support enabled the local community to buy the Taversoe Inn, which is being leased out to a local person as a year-round facility for visitors and locals.

Lloyd Gudgeon, Community Development Officer, Rousay, Egilsay and Wyre Development Trust, says: "There are significant market and statutory failures in remote rural areas, in housing, services, transport, education and health care. This means communities have to find ways to provide for themselves, and that requires ownership of or control over assets.



"The Scottish Land Fund is exemplary in terms of the support it gives communities having to acquire assets like land and buildings. The application process is simple, there is advice and support throughout and the demand for "hoop-jumping" is kept to a minimum."

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