

# Community Benefit

## CASE STUDIES

Delivering community benefit from natural capital development and investment is at an early stage in Scotland. Although interest from the private sector has grown in recent years, many projects have not yet reached the point of delivering community benefit, and a variety of different approaches are being taken.

The organisations featured here demonstrate deliberate approaches to community benefit, particularly where carbon unit sales and private investment play a key role. The selected case studies illustrate a range of community benefits, in addition to the inherent environmental and public benefits, and their efforts highlight the importance of the third sector in delivering high-quality results.

These projects all deliver improved access for the community and visitors to the area. Community benefit projects also have a focus on supporting local economic development, with the development of new enterprises, local employment, and local service procurement.

Collaborations and partnerships between organisations enable a wider range of funds to be utilised for project delivery. In these examples, all projects are in receipt of public and/or charitable funding that enables them to make ecological improvements as well as deliver a wide range of local community benefits.

At such an early stage in the development of community benefit as a field, the case studies highlighted here are illustrative of current practice on the ground, and the results can be used to shape what will be considered good practice as the concept continues to develop.



SCOTTISH LAND COMMISSION  
COIMISEAN FEARAINN NA H-ALBA



*CASE STUDY 1*  
Ardura Community  
Forest



*CASE STUDY 2*  
Natural Course



*CASE STUDY 3*  
Sleat Community  
Trust



*CASE STUDY 4*  
Threave Nature  
Reserve



*CASE STUDY 5*  
Thorlux



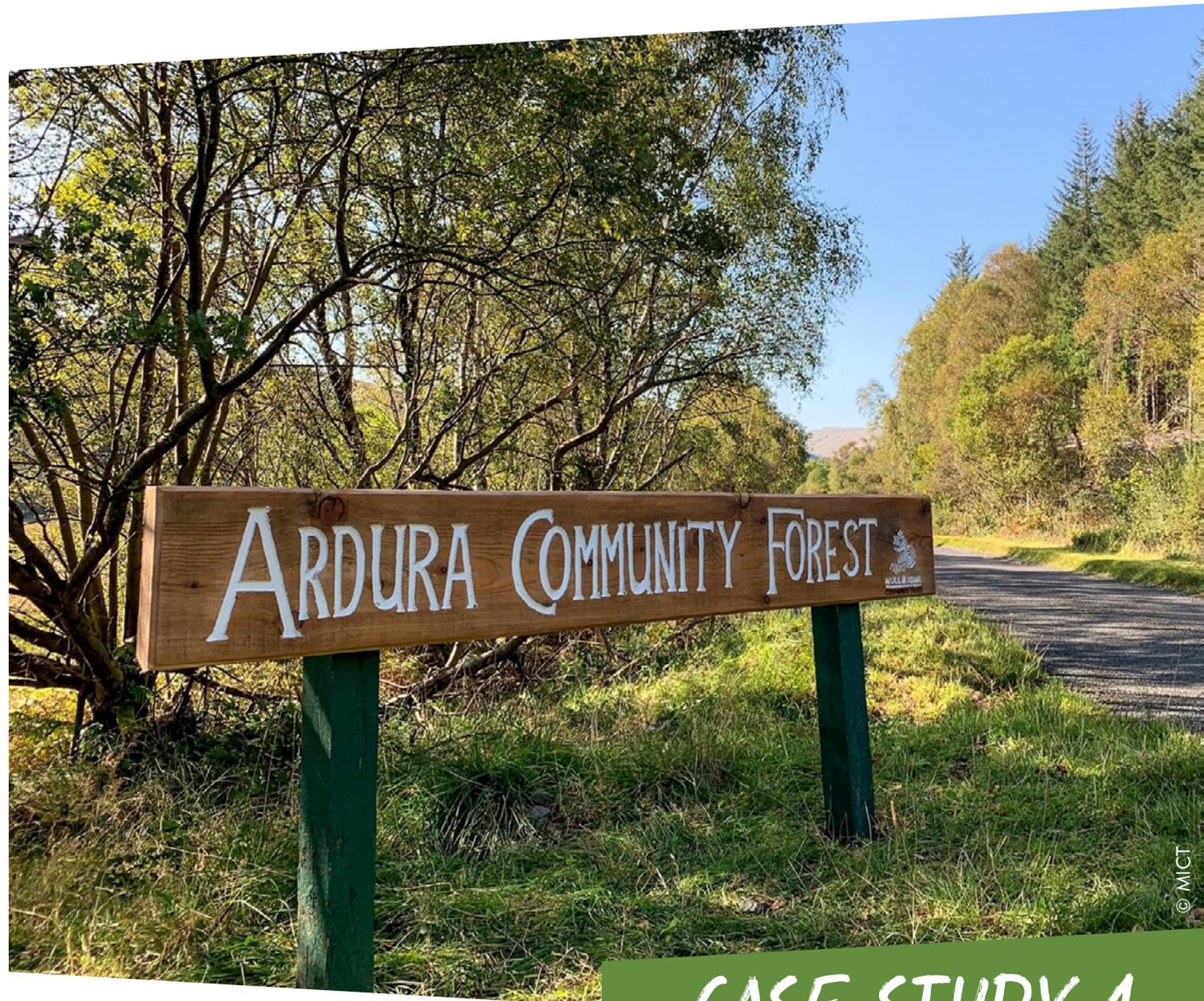
*CASE STUDY 6*  
Trees for Life

# Ardura Community Forest

Mull & Iona Community Trust (MICT) undertook a community asset transfer to acquire a publicly owned timber plantation with funds from the Scottish Land Fund.

They have a three-year management agreement with Tree Story, a private consultancy, to manage the forest and employ local people. The community has been heavily involved and engaged in the project, particularly in agreeing future land use.

Income from harvested timber is being reinvested in planting native woodlands, developing community facilities in the forest and in wider community development including job creation and business development.



CASE STUDY 1



## Detailed Study

Mull & Iona Community Trust (MICT) undertook a community asset transfer to acquire a publicly owned timber plantation. They have a three-year management agreement with Tree Story, a private consultancy, to manage the forest. Tree Story was able to offer technical knowledge in the development of the project, including income and expenditure estimates for the business case required to undertake the asset transfer. Income from harvested timber is being reinvested in planting native woodlands, developing community facilities in the forest, and supporting the running costs of MICT.

MICT consulted widely in the development of the project and were open to the land being used to attain other objectives, such as housing or employment, rather than nature and biodiversity. This openness led to widespread community support for the project and local people felt empowered in the decision-making process. Their views were listened to and action taken: for example, no neonicotinoid chemicals were used in the project, despite them being the industry standard for timber planting, and the project was adapted to accommodate this concern from the community.

Community engagement also identified opportunities for community benefit. Facilities were developed which allow the public to access the space more easily, such as a new carpark and an improved track network. Events and regular activities in the forest are organised by MICT and other community, faith and education groups. The project brought local employment, with local contractors being hired, and MICT established a local tree nursery using seeds from the forest.

The income from the timber sales has enabled these activities and other community projects to take place; for example, MICT used £150,000 from the sale to fund the expansion of their industrial business park. MICT are not able to access Woodland Carbon Code credits as they have not created new woodland but they are considering peatland restoration through the Peatland ACTION Fund and Peatland Code. Although there is currently no detailed process for measuring community benefit or access to the forest, MICT now feel more confident in land ownership, and they are now thinking about further community right to buy applications for both land and buildings.

 **Ardura Community Forest**

**CASE STUDY 1**

# Natural Course

Natural Course is a nine-year EU LIFE Integrated Project that commenced in 2015 with 60% EU grant and 40% match funding. The project is a collaboration between public, private and third sector organisations who are working together to overcome some of the biggest barriers preventing the achievement of 'good ecological status' for rivers and water environments in the North West River Basin in England. Natural Course aims to find ways of reaching ecological targets sooner by building capacity, trialling new ways of working together, establishing more joined-up thinking, and exploring innovative sources of funding. Some of the achievements to date include large-scale ecological and environmental improvements, increased and improved access for communities, as well as the reduction of flood risks.



CASE STUDY 2



## Detailed Study

Natural Course is an EU LIFE Integrated Project with a budget of €20 million, of which 60% is EU grant funding and 40% match funding from private bodies such as United Utilities (UU), and local authorities. The project, which will run for nine years from 2015, is a collaboration between public (The Environment Agency, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Natural England), private (UU), and third sector organisations (The Rivers Trust). These organisations are working together to overcome some of the biggest barriers preventing the achievement of 'good ecological status' under the EU Water Framework Directive for rivers and water environments in the North West River Basin in England. Natural Course aims to find ways of reaching ecological targets sooner by building capacity, trialling new ways of working together, establishing more joined-up thinking, and exploring innovative sources of funding. Some of the achievements to date include large-scale ecological and environmental improvements, increased and improved access for communities as well as the reduction of flood risks.

One of multiple Natural Course projects is the Wyre Natural Flood Management (NFM) project which initiated in 2019. The Wyre catchment suffers from significant flooding which has devastating impacts

on local communities. The NFM measures are designed to store, slow, and intercept water, reducing peak flow to flood-affected communities in the upper Wyre Catchment. The project is one of four pilot 'nature-based investment' projects across England, which aim to test whether and how private investment capital can be blended with public sector funding to finance natural landscape restoration through development of monetisable ecosystem services such as natural flood management, carbon sequestration and biodiversity gain.

The project has successfully secured £650k grant funding from the Woodland Trust and £850k from a nine-year private loan facility. The loan facility will be repaid from buyers of ecosystem services who seek to benefit from the intervention. Farmers and landowners will then be paid to host and maintain the interventions on the ground. As part of the project, the Wyre Catchment Community Interest Company (CIC) has been established as a not-for-profit Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) that will act as a local legal entity through which capital can flow. The CIC will be limited by guarantee, with an asset lock in place which confirms that any retained profits will be applied for the benefit of communities in the Wyre. The CIC is run by a board of seven voluntary directors which all represent different

stakeholders in the project including: buyers, investors, local farmers and communities. Over the next three years, up to 2025, the Wyre Rivers Trust will be contracted by the CIC to deliver a range of capital measures including pond creation, grassland conversion, river restoration and woodland creation. Collectively, these activities aim to reduce peak flow by 5-15% in a one in 50-year flood event, significantly reducing flood risk to Churchtown and downstream communities.

Another Natural Course project is the Cheshire Hub ('the Hub') which was set up to run from April 2019 to September 2021. Cheshire Hub Partners include Mersey Rivers Trust, Natural England, UU, and Weaver Gowy Catchment Partnership. The Hub was formed to bring together key organisations and other partners to work collaboratively and develop a joined-up, improved understanding of what was going on in a catchment. By sharing data on the performance of the catchment and water quality sampling, the Hub aimed to identify operational issues, decide on the likely cause and target interventions at the right locations to deliver the greatest benefit. A number of projects within the Hub have provided high quality greenspace for local communities as well as ecological and environmental benefits.

# Sleat Community Trust

Sleat Community Trust (SCT) purchased forest from Forestry Commission Scotland (now Forestry and Land Scotland and Scottish Forestry) with a mixture of income from the local community, grant and loan funding.

A wide variety of enterprises and community projects have been developed on the land. Income-generating activities, such as a tree nursery and hydro scheme, support other activities in the forest and the development of further enterprise.

Access has also been improved with new facilities, a forest school, paths, and interpretation.





## Detailed Study

Sleat Community Trust (SCT) purchased forest from Forestry Commission Scotland (now Forestry and Land Scotland and Scottish Forestry) with a mixture of income from the local community, grant and loan funding. The aim of the project was to improve biodiversity and to create a community asset that, initially, provided a sustainable wood fuel source and a tree nursery.

The income from these business operations would then create a funding stream to help establish different social enterprise activities such as vocational training programmes, access projects, trails, conservation/ outdoor education areas, cultural heritage and environmental interpretation, and green burials.

The management of the forest includes adhering to commitments and development opportunities outlined in the Long-Term Forest Plan (LTFP). This includes a clear re-stocking plan and other social enterprise opportunities. Following the implementation of the LTFP, habitat and natural capital projects were developed.

These include:

- Peatland restoration to increase biodiversity, community access, improve water quality and sequester carbon
- Wider tree planting to ensure an excellent mix of native species to improve biodiversity, health, wellbeing, and education
- Path and trail network to link different areas of the woodland and improve access
- Development of a Forest School site to promote outdoor education
- Development of a tree nursery to provide locally grown trees for use in the forest
- Development of a gathering and picnic area at an old fank
- Implementation of environmental and cultural interpretation throughout the forest
- Development of a hydro scheme to help decarbonise the grid and generate a source of income for the local community and SCT.

Community benefits were initially identified via a community consultation that was facilitated by an external advisor (provided by FCS to ensure impartiality) as part of the feasibility study into the purchase of the land. The opportunities have been added to/amended via various open days, AGMs and other public meetings held in the years following acquisition of the land. All subsequent engagement has been organised by the Board of Trustees following feedback from the community. SCT have found that these sessions work best if there is a clear structure to the overall objective of the session, as well as having a fixed agenda. This stimulates discussion and wider thinking which can raise additional points/benefits to consider.

Several community benefits have been achieved from the project including access to locally produced sustainable wood fuel, health and wellbeing benefits, education and recreation benefits, improved access and trails, cultural heritage information and restoration of derelict sites. Economic benefits have also included the creation of part-time employment as a machine operator to move and process wood and one-off contracts with local businesses, e.g. artists, ecologists, and education providers.

# Threave Nature Reserve

The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) owns Threave Nature Reserve, a former dairy farm, and manages the land in partnership with Galloway Glens Partnership Scheme (GGLP), a coalition of multiple local and specialist organisations. Whilst the initial driver of this project was ecosystem restoration, there was a recognition that the community needs to be and feel included and a willingness to ensure the community could benefit from the changes too. Community concerns about the impact of land use change have been consistently identified and addressed. Community buy-in to the project objectives was a challenge early on but a deliberate approach to engagement has reduced conflict. The community benefits from improved access as well as education and volunteering opportunities. However, some local farmers remain concerned about the loss of quality farmland.





## Detailed Study

The National Trust for Scotland (NTS), a registered charity, owns Threave Nature Reserve and manages the land in partnership with Galloway Glens Partnership Scheme (GGLP), a coalition of multiple local and specialist organisations. The reserve has been converted from a dairy farm to a landscape restoration project aimed at redeveloping a healthy and sustainable ecosystem. This ecosystem restoration will transform the estate from a net carbon emitter to a net carbon sequesterer over time.

NTS and GGLP collaborated on a 100-year vision for the estate, which covers 81 hectares. Funding for the restoration comes from GGLP, National Lottery Heritage Fund, HSBC and the NTS. A natural capital baseline has been established and will be monitored and reported on by local environmental consultants. Whilst the initial driver of this project was biodiversity, and not community benefit, there was a recognition that the community needs to be and feel included and a willingness to ensure the community could benefit from the changes too.

Community buy-in to the project objectives was a challenge early on but a deliberate approach to engagement has paid off. At the start of the project, the local community expressed several concerns. One of the main

worries for local inhabitants was that the wetland restoration, which includes changes to the dam system, could increase the risks of flooding locally. In response, NTS and GGLP commissioned a hydrological survey which showed no increased risk of flooding and discussed the results in community consultations. The topic has not been brought back up by local inhabitants since. Another issue raised was dogs not being able to be let off-leash to protect biodiversity, so a special space was developed where dogs can be off-leash. There was also concern about cows being allowed to roam more freely which was addressed through education and the development of 'smart cows', where cows are fitted with GPS trackers and their locations can then be viewed on an app.

The site is well used by residents and a variety of education and volunteering opportunities take place. Events, storytelling and catchy names for volunteer days – such as the 'dam buster' event removing dams to relood the area – have been beneficial for the reserve and community. Thanks to the work on communicating and involving the local community, the support has grown over time and volunteers provide valuable labour to progress the project. When access to the site was temporarily closed while building better access, the community was very understanding.

Access to the reserve is completely free for the public. The space was already used by local walkers before the restoration project started. Now, the improved paths, the increased biodiversity and the events organised in the reserve are attracting more people. Board walks have been developed to allow access to some of the flooded areas, alongside a better access for wheelchair users and buggies. Local people continue to use the reserve for walks and dog walking. In addition, schools come regularly, alongside amateur biologists, bird watchers and photographers.

Some local farmers have expressed that they view the use of the land for a nature reserve as a waste of high-quality farming land. Indeed, the land of the nature reserve is of high value and could be used for dairy farming. The Galloway Glens Scheme reflects on this as one issue they encountered in this project due to the value of the land, which would not arise in the case of peatland and forest restoration on low-value land. They estimate that the 81 hectares could be an economically viable farm. While some farmers have changed their views since and value the restoration, other local farmers have kept the view that it is a waste of the land.

# Thorlux

Thorlux, a manufacturer of industrial and commercial lighting, purchased land to afforest for carbon offsetting purposes in Wales.

The company employs local workers, maintains and allows access for the community, and addressed community concerns about the planting proactively.



CASE STUDY 5



## Detailed Study

Thorlux, a manufacturer of industrial and commercial lighting, started assessing its carbon emissions in the late 2000s and decided to invest in the afforestation of land in Wales (Devauden, Monmouthshire) to offset scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas emissions. It purchased the site on the open market with its own funds and received a grant for approximately 50% of the planting costs from the Welsh Government. Thorlux planted (predominantly native) tree species on the land that it purchased and manages the trees throughout the year. The project was the pilot site in Wales for the now-established Woodland Carbon Code, a government-backed initiative that details a framework for afforestation with regards to carbon offsetting.

Thorlux did not take a targeted approach to delivering community benefit, but community benefits have naturally arisen from its tree planting activities. Thorlux employs nearby workers (within a 30-mile radius) to do the

planting and a local village landscaper manages the hedges. It allows free access to the plantation site and maintains the primary pathway, meaning the local community can enjoy the woodland, and manages the woodland in an environmentally responsible way which has led to an increase in biodiversity over time.

Thorlux also strived to limit the negative impact on the local community as a result of the tree planting activities by engaging with them on the planting taking place. As a result it took a strategic approach to planting trees so as to not disturb the community's views and sold some land to neighbouring residents to create a buffer between the trees and their houses.

It also continued to lease a portion of the land which had not yet been planted on to the farmers which were leasing the land before Thorlux bought it.



Thorlux

CASE STUDY 5

# Trees for Life

Trees for Life is an environmental charity which owns and manages Dundreggan Estate in Glenmoriston. Its vision is for revitalised wild forestry in the Highlands of Scotland, providing space for wildlife to flourish and communities to thrive. A range of environmental projects have been undertaken, including the planting of native woodland at Allt Ruadh. Carbon units generated by the plantation are verified through the Woodland Carbon Code and sold to corporate buyers for offsetting. One-third of the sale price of carbon units is passed on to the local community through two community groups. Volunteering, access and recreation opportunities bring additional community benefit as well as the project increasing visitor numbers which supports the local economy.





## Detailed Study

Trees for Life (TfL) is an environmental charity formed over thirty years ago. Its vision is of revitalised wild forestry in the Highlands of Scotland, providing space for wildlife to flourish and communities to thrive. The charity purchased the 4,000-hectare Dundreggan Estate in Glenmoriston in 2008 and has planted nearly two million native trees and has protected numerous natural areas. It has run successful projects to re-introduce red squirrels and protect Scotland's remaining Caledonian Pinewoods, as well as operating a Skills for Rewilding Traineeship scheme and volunteer programme. Future plans include a rewilding centre at Dundreggan with accommodation for volunteers, accessible woodland trails, café, events space and children's outdoor play area.

The charity has a board of trustees with 10 members and 29 paid members of staff and works with a number of strategic, conservation and volunteering partners including Scottish Forestry, Rewilding Scotland, NatureScot, and the Highland Green Health Partnership. Funding comes through personal donations and grant funding applications to a wide number of public and private funders as well as from the sale of carbon units. Carbon units are validated by the UK Woodland Carbon Code and sold to corporate buyers who want to offset emissions.

TfL has shared income from carbon unit sales with two local groups: West Glenmoriston Community Company and the Glenmoriston Improvement Group. Two annual payments totalling £20K and £19K respectively have been made to the groups to date, who will use the funds to improve warning wildlife signage around their villages (red squirrel and toads), invest in a children's playpark, and make environmental improvements in and around the West Glenmoriston community hub building.

Moving forward, TfL will continue to support local groups with a percentage of funds raised through the sale of carbon credits. The amount to be shared is one third of the price obtained by Trees for Life for each carbon unit sold from 01 April 2022 until the final carbon offset unit from the Allt Ruadh woodland plantation scheme has been sold. This amount will be split evenly between the Glenmoriston Improvement Group and the West Glenmoriston Community Company. Payments are made following each sale of 500 carbon units and the groups are free to use the funding "to help people benefit from their local landscape in any way they see fit" (Community Carbon Agreement between Trees for Life and the Glenmoriston Improvement Group).



SCOTTISH LAND COMMISSION  
COIMISEAN FEARAINN NA H-ALBA

## Contact us

@ [info@landcommission.gov.scot](mailto:info@landcommission.gov.scot)

☎ 01463 423 300

🌐 [www.landcommission.gov.scot](http://www.landcommission.gov.scot)

Find us on:

