



SCOTTISH LAND COMMISSION
COIMISEAN FEARAINN NA H-ALBA

Community Land Leadership Group

Thursday 5th December 2024, 2pm, Online
Summary note of meeting

Present: Lorne MacLeod (SLC – Chair), Michael Russell (SLC), Hamish Trench (SLC), Gemma Campbell (SLC), Patrick Kirkham (Scottish Government), Sandra Holmes (HIE), Kirsten Logue (SoSE), Ailsa Raeburn (CLS – until 2.30pm), Josh Doble (CLS), Linda Gillespie (COSS), Katie Alexander (CES)

Apologies: Dave Thomson (Scottish Government), Jamie McCaw (National Lottery Community Fund)

Introduction

The chair welcomed group members.

Topic Discussion: Financing large land acquisitions

Gemma introduced the topic with a short presentation on the Commission's work on community ownership funding and mechanisms to date. This introduced the questions for discussion:

- What are the issues specific to large scale land ownership that need to be tackled?
- How could SLF be changed to best support large scale acquisitions
- Does community benefit/wealth fund thinking have a role to play?
- Are there governance models that could be used to leverage additional support

There was then a discussion which covered the following points and questions from attendees:

- How can communities be encouraged to buy income generating assets.
- Need for change to SPFM to allow greater flexibility.
- Potential for SLF to support partnership acquisitions.
- Impact of constrained resources funding
- Are there barriers to larger land purchases or is there a lack of appetite for larger purchases?
- Communities responding to change rather than being proactive – need to understand reasons for this better.
- Is appetite limited by an expectation from community groups that they won't succeed.

- Need for policy intention from state to be supported with financial and legal measures.
- Need for intervention in the land market and a meaningful land reform bill
- Opportunity vs threat – in early days of community ownership there was a strategic approach to asset ownership but now communities are responding to threats with large scale disposals of assets.
- Challenging environment for development funding – can get money to buy land but difficult to secure funding for post-acquisition development.
- Community wealth building – need to see money generated from projects such as renewables being circulated in economy.
- SPFM – CWB principles give framework for investing as public sector but restricted by measures like increases in turnover and creation of jobs. How can we capture benefits systematically?
- Capacity to look proactively is a key consideration – earlier large acquisitions probably already had development officers in place to take it forward. Project officers make a huge difference. Resource in initial phases is essential.
- SLC want to crystallise into clear advice. Want to pull together advice on changes to SLF – ideas for operation of next fund.
- Role of public land ownership (especially in relation to housing) is key.
- Meaningful public sector engagement requires changes due to current restrictions in operations (e.g. need for Green Book business case).

Community Right to Buy Review

Terms of Reference for a reference group to support the review of Community Right to Buy legislation were circulated for agreement. The group will include representation from the private landowning, crofting and legal sectors. This will function as a separate group and meetings will be timed to feedback on key stages of the review.

ACTION: SLC to work with SG to finalise arrangements for group.

Land Reform Bill – update on progress

Busy time with committee evidence sessions on Part 1. Stage 1 debate scheduled for end of March.

SLC advising on potential changes – to strengthen and simplify and will publish advice in January.

Scottish Budget Update

SG government manifesto commitment to double SLF looks like it is not happening – will this be publicly acknowledged?

Assuming until told otherwise that £5m will be SLF capital budget (based on publicly available information).

Future Chairing Arrangements

Michael will chair the group when Lorne's term as Commissioner ends.

Information sharing

SoSE – KLTR have been invited to speak to staff at SoSE about proactive bona vacantia project.

ACTION: Invite KLTR to future meeting of the group.

HIE – Scottish Land Fund now has an approved subsidy scheme. HIE is working to create a scheme for communities, which will hopefully be operational from April 2025 (tbc). Sharing learning with SoSe on this. Now more difficult to fund more commercial projects due to limits on intervention rates.

DTAS / COSS – Additional resources from Historic Environment Scotland and National Lottery Heritage Fund to work with communities on churches that are being disposed of to help communities choose appropriate assets.

Date and focus of next meeting

In the New Year – date and topic to be confirmed.