



Growing Community Assets evaluation  
Year 1 summary report



## Growing Community Assets evaluation

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### Further copies available from:

Email                           enquiries@biglotteryfund.org.uk

Phone                           0845 410 20 30

Textphone                   0845 039 02 04

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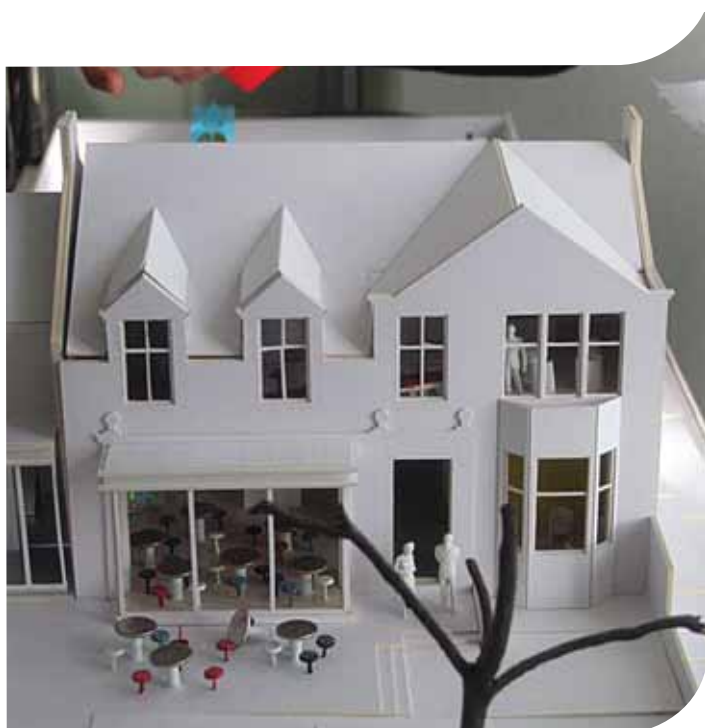
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# Growing Community Assets: Learning from the first year

This document summarises the key findings from the Big Lottery Fund's first year evaluation of the Growing Community Assets investment area.

It is our interpretation of the first year of the main evaluation report, which can be downloaded from our website at [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk).



# What is Growing Community Assets?

The Growing Community Assets (GCA) investment area was developed by the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) to enable communities in Scotland to have more control and influence over their future development through owning and developing local assets. These are usually physical assets, such as land, buildings or equipment, but may also include other types of asset such as energy. The programme started in May 2006 and the last grants were awarded in April 2010. Community groups can apply for between £10,000 and £1 million<sup>1</sup>, with a total of £50 million of funding being distributed.

The outcomes of the programme are:

- Communities are stronger, with shared aspirations and the ability to achieve these together
- Communities have services and amenities that meet people's needs better and are more accessible
- People have more skills, knowledge and confidence, and opportunities to use these for the benefit of their community
- Communities have a more positive impact on the local and global environment
- Communities are more able to grasp opportunities, and are more enterprising and self-reliant.

In its first year, development support and assessment of GCA applications was provided by a consortium of organisations, led by Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE). The delivery partners comprise Community Energy Scotland (formerly Highlands and Islands Community Energy Company), Social Investment Scotland, Community Enterprise in Strathclyde and Forth Sector. Decisions regarding funding rested with BIG's Scotland Committee.

# Why has BIG funded the GCA programme?

GCA invests in communities to help them acquire assets, and then develops and manages them into the future. It builds on a previous BIG programme, the Scottish Land Fund, which complemented the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 by enabling rural communities with a population of 10,000 or less to buy or manage their local assets. GCA extends the asset-based community development approach from purely rural communities to both rural and urban communities.

These initiatives fit with the wider UK policy on community assets. **The Quirk Review**, published by the UK Government Department for Communities and Local Government in 2007, recognised that community organisations can realise their potential by taking on the management and ownership of community assets. The report highlighted the relationship between community involvement and economic development. Its recommendation was that communities should have access to guidance, funds and support that would empower them to plan their futures.

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<sup>1</sup>£1 million is an indicative maximum and in exceptional circumstances projects which have a strong fit with outcomes can receive more.

# How do we know what impact our funding is having?

**The Community Empowerment Action Plan (CEAP)** was launched in 2009 by the Scottish Government. One of the key recommendations set out in the plan was that “support for communities to own assets” is needed to help build capacity within communities to deliver empowerment.

Communities who wish to pursue asset ownership often face barriers which prevent them from achieving this. These barriers can relate to limited access to funds or information and they can also take the form of co-ordination challenges. BIG is addressing these issues through providing information and assistance with co-ordinating activities via specialist teams.

By the end of the first year of evaluation, BIG had awarded more than £23 million across 74 projects. Grants varied in size, with the majority between £100,000 and £249,000.

Over half of the projects funded relate to the construction, purchase or refurbishment of buildings and around 15 per cent concern the purchase or development of land. Ten per cent of projects are energy focused, for example, the use of wind turbines to generate electricity.

The GCA initiative is already reaching a wide range of communities across Scotland. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation indicates that of the 74 projects funded, 55 per cent are in areas below the Scottish average in terms of deprivation.

BIG commissioned SQW Consulting to evaluate the GCA investment area over a period of five years. The evaluation will be looking in particular at the social, economic and environmental impact of the funded projects. It will also explore the effectiveness of the asset-based approach in rural and urban settings and the key factors that support successful community ownership and sustainability.

The evaluation is conducted in three stages. Stage 1 focused largely on the acquisition process and setting up baseline indicators to measure future progress. Stage 2 will explore project impacts and the process of establishing and maintaining ownership, and Stage 3 will focus on future plans and sustainability.

This summary covers the findings from Stage 1 of the evaluation. The key objectives were as follows:

- to establish baseline indicators around social, economic, environmental and population issues and to collect data on projects
- to identify key factors in the process of communities initially identifying the issue and moving into acquisition and ownership
- to evaluate the effectiveness of the delivery contract against the contract specification and views of stakeholders.

Figure 1.1 (p7) lists the indicators BIG will use to measure the impact of the GCA funding overall as the programme progresses and projects become established.



**The project leader survey** was an electronic-survey sent to the 74 projects that had been awarded a grant by summer 2008. Of those, 24 projects responded. The survey captured activities, progress, issues and both user and community engagement.

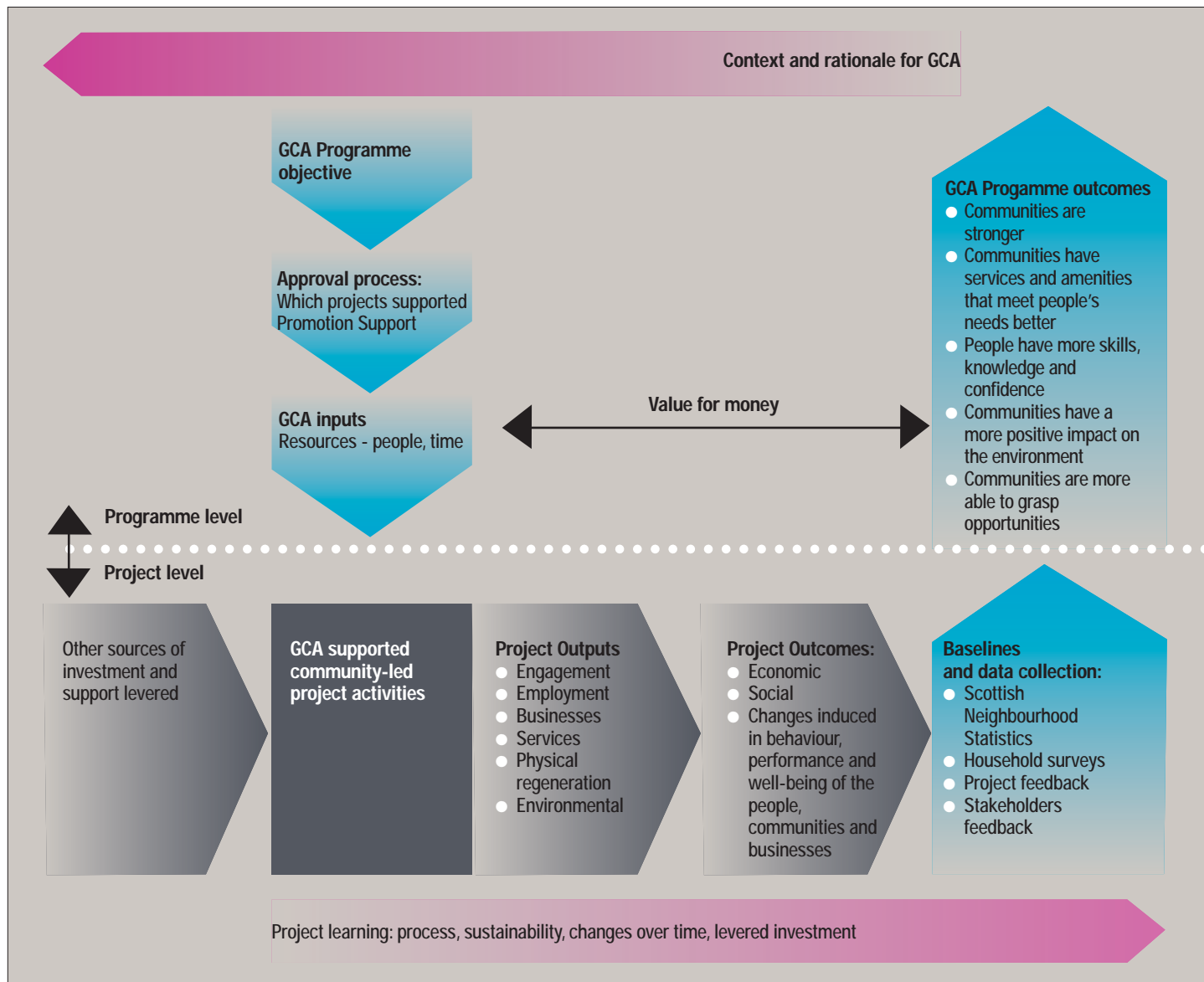
**Case studies** involved visits to the projects to gather detailed information about the background, objectives, achievements and challenges of the projects.

These aimed to clarify why the community wanted to make the investment and how the project is progressing. Twenty of these were undertaken in Stage 1 of the evaluation. A further 40 case studies will be conducted across Stage 2 and Stage 3 of the evaluation.

A face-to-face household survey was conducted in 15 of the case study areas. The surveys were used to gather wider community views about the local area and quality of life.

This combination of approaches allows the evaluation to capture not only the diverse nature of the projects funded by the GCA investment area, but also views from different parts of the community.

# Figure 1.1 GCA evaluation framework



# Key themes emerging

At this early stage of the programme there are relatively few project outputs that can be measured and no outcomes as yet. There are however some key themes emerging from the evaluation around the process of communities initially moving into acquisition and ownership and the views of stakeholders about the delivery of the programme.

This table outlines the learning that has been drawn from the project surveys and initial case study visits.

<p><b>Community motivation to purchase assets</b></p>	<p>The community right to buy legislation was utilised by projects for different reasons; some chose to use it while others felt it was their only option. However, the overall aims of the projects tended to be very similar.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ To ensure the community has a say in how the asset is managed.</li> <li>▶ To allow for sustainable development.</li> <li>▶ To ensure preservation/development of the asset/service.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Project development</b></p>	<p>Project development took a variety of forms depending on the experience of those applying for the grant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Local community organisations or individuals within communities were generally responsible for generating the project idea.</li> <li>▶ There were two main avenues by which projects were taken forward – via pre-existing community groups or paid project development officers.</li> <li>▶ Several projects were run by well-established organisations who were expanding tried-and-tested models of asset transfer.</li> <li>▶ Some projects were building on Scottish Land Fund projects.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Role of local authorities</b></p>	<p>Early indications are that local authorities provide GCA projects with varying degrees of support. Local authorities have tended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● be supportive of, but not heavily involved in small initiatives (e.g. village halls) that they may have previously funded</li> <li>● take more interest in larger-scale land buy-outs which are in line with local authority aims of regenerating local economies and reviving declining populations.</li> </ul>

## GCA processes

Several community groups faced delays in establishing their projects and some challenges in the delivery of support, which should be addressed in the development of future programmes. In particular, these related to:

- the length of time that passed before organisations heard whether their application to the programme had been successful, resulting in concerns that match funding would be lost
- legal hurdles in establishing trading arms and dealing with the receipt of income
- some confusion about the respective roles of BIG, HIE and the case officers allocated to projects
- a potential conflict of interest in case officers having a dual role of supporting and assessing projects<sup>2</sup>.

## Community involvement

Some projects faced resistance from local residents and offered the following advice for getting community members involved.

- ▶ Reduce the dependency of the project on a few key individuals by inviting a wide range of community members to become involved with the group leading the project.
- ▶ Actively encourage younger members of the community to contribute or provide their views so that their needs are reflected.
- ▶ Use postal ballots as a fair method of electing directors and committee members and remove the pressure involved in casting a vote at a public meeting.

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<sup>2</sup>Although in practice actual conflicts did not appear to arise, from April 2009 procedures were altered to address this matter. Case officers no longer have responsibility for assessing the applications they help to develop.

# What have we learned so far?

As discussed earlier, Stage 1 of the evaluation sought to establish baseline indicators of social, economic and environmental issues. Through this fieldwork, early learning about the benefits of the GCA investment area have emerged.

## Social benefits

- It is not enough to give communities the capital to purchase assets. If they are to become truly empowered, they need to possess enough social capital in order to maximise the impact of asset ownership. Communities need skills, knowledge, contacts and confidence. GCA is helping communities to develop these skills.
- Projects which are investing grant money in community transport are already bringing social benefits to communities by helping to reduce social exclusion. The Rural Development Trust's Camglen initiative is one such example. This initiative provides transport for elderly people to access health and social activities.
- Projects which have provided community hubs have also brought social benefits to communities. Hubs provide a place for residents to interact with each other and build strong social networks.
- Through case studies, it has become evident that the strengthening of community spirit is happening in several projects as a social benefit of their grant.

## Case study: Community purchase of South Uist estate

The community organisation Storas Uibhist, with members and directors drawn from the local area, was awarded the largest of the GCA grants (£2.25 million) to purchase and manage 93,000 acres of land covering almost the whole of the islands of Benbecula, Eriskay and South Uist, as well as a number of other small islands. A raft of ambitious projects are being put in place, some of which have already been delivered, to generate income that can be invested back into the community and start to address the systemic decline that the area has seen over recent decades.

One such project aiming to achieve economic regeneration, is the Lochboisdale Port of Entry project. This will transform the port of Lochboisdale from a run-down, deprived harbour area into a vibrant and prosperous community. Plans for the regeneration of the area include improved access to facilities, leisure pontoons, a range of housing developments and a public amenities area.

# Environmental benefits Phase 2: Next steps

At this stage it is only possible to report on the intended environmental benefits that will result from GCA-funded projects.

Some projects have specific environmental outcomes but it is evident that many other projects where environment is not the primary focus are keen to operate in an environmentally-friendly way. Project leaders reported the following about the projects they were involved with:

- ▶ “The building itself was designed to reduce use of resources and a ground source heat pump currently supplies energy to the building.”
- ▶ “The project helps to reduce car use, since it saves people driving to Castle Douglas to access services. The building is heated by a ground source heat pump.”
- ▶ “The new hall will use ground source heat pumps and will also have solar panels, which should result in lower energy costs. The aim is for the centre to be carbon neutral. Recycling facilities have been established in the community but it is hoped that the land can be used to create easily accessible and broader recycling facilities to encourage greater use.”
- ▶ “Community transport helps to reduce the number of cars on the road (although this effect is minor, given that many users will not own cars). Our vehicles run on bio-diesel, with the double benefit of reducing waste and saving money.”

Stage 2 of the GCA evaluation will further explore the social, economic and environmental impacts the projects have had on communities and gather evidence relating to the process of establishing and maintaining ownership.

The evaluation will involve a further round of surveys and case study visits. A Stage 2 report will be available in summer 2011.

## Further information

To download a full copy of the evaluation report please visit [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk).



