

# **EVALUATION OF THE SCOTTISH LAND FUND**

## **Year One Interim Report**

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March 2005

## CONTENTS

<b>Section</b>	<b>Page</b>
1 Introduction and methodology .....	1
2 Review of project objectives, activities and outcomes.....	7
3 Key issues and conclusions so far.....	28
4 Issues for discussion and next steps .....	33

# 1 Introduction and Methodology

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## Introduction

- 1.1 This interim report presents the findings from the first year of the evaluation of the Scottish Land Fund (SLF). The full evaluation is being undertaken by SQW and Land Use Consultants (LUC) over three years and commenced in early 2004. The Fund was originally set up in 2001 with £10m and was supplemented in 2003 with a further £5m. As at March 2005, 180 awards totalling £10,659,019 in approvals and £9,911,165 committed funds had been made. This means that 66% of funds have been allocated with a figure of £5,135,882 remaining in the pot.
- 1.2 The Scottish Land Fund's aim is: to contribute to sustainable development in rural Scotland by assisting communities to acquire, develop and manage local land or land assets. The Fund was established by the New Opportunities Fund, now the Big Lottery Fund, and is administered by Highlands and Islands Enterprise in partnership with Scottish Enterprise. It can be used to support three types of projects:
- **planning and preparation of bids** - to acquire or manage land and land assets. This may include undertaking feasibility studies, legal advice, valuations, business planning and community consultation. Usually required pre-acquisition, but may also be required for land development projects
  - **acquisition of land** - This can involve large areas of land on which communities intend to undertake a range of management and development projects. It can also involve smaller plots of land for environmental or recreational uses, like the management of woodland, or discrete development purposes such as social housing, recreational areas, and the provision of building-based activities
  - **land development projects** - These can include initiatives to undertake land development projects, investment in management of natural resources, infrastructure developments to meet local servicing needs, and the provision of facilities with clear economic and social benefits

1.3 The Fund's objectives are given as:

- to improve opportunities and reduce disadvantage both for communities and individuals in rural areas
- to encourage community involvement and participation in land ownership and management
- to enhance the environmental diversity and quality of rural Scotland
- to facilitate positive use of the land reform legislation on the community right to buy
- to diversify the pattern of land ownership in rural Scotland

**The evaluation - work done so far**

1.4 At the start of the evaluation in January 2004, the Scottish Land Fund (SLF) had made 127 awards to 86 projects and these formed the basis of the selection of the 20 case studies interviewed in the first year. These have been carried out by SQW working with LUC. Ten were interviewed in the first half of the year and ten between August and November 2004. Over the next two years, these projects will be interviewed again to assess the impact on the communities that are leading them.

1.5 With many of the projects still at a relatively early stage, the case studies and the visits themselves were primarily about understanding the projects and collecting details of the activities that have been funded. Based on the evaluation structure proposed, the main areas covered are:

- understanding the project rationale and context
- engagement of the community in the initial project idea and in subsequent decisions
- the activities that have been supported by the funds
- the benefits generated by the project (economic, social and environmental)
- views on the support received

### **How the sample was chosen**

- 1.6 A systematic process was used to identify a suitable portfolio of projects covering a range of sizes, geographies and types. The starting point was to prepare a project typography based on the 127 grants awarded at the time the evaluation started. However, more than one grant can be given to the same organisation. For example, a technical assistance grant may be awarded followed by a larger sum for an acquisition and potentially a further grant to aid the development of the land. To analyse the portfolio of SLF funded projects, grants relating to one piece of land were grouped together to represent one project. This gave a total of 86 projects.
- 1.7 In order to cover a good range of projects in the sample, several key variables were used. These were:
- The type of grant i.e. whether it has been provided for technical assistance, an acquisition or development work or a combination of these
  - size of grant, or total value of grants received if one project has had a number of types of grants
  - progress of project, which can be measured roughly by the percentage of the total grant that has been drawn down by the applicant
- 1.8 A shortlist of projects was compiled using the above variables. We also chose projects to provide a mixture of rural land and settlements, and provide a geographical spread across Scotland.

### ***Types of grant awarded***

- 1.9 The database supplied by SLF has been used to categorise the projects in terms of the key variables. The number of cases in each category is set out in Table 1.1 based on the figures which were available at the start of this evaluation (April 2004). While most grants at this stage were for acquisition, there were also a reasonable number for technical assistance. The number of development grants has been low, reflecting the early stages of the project. Ten awards have been over £100,000, but the majority are less than £50,000.

**Table 1.1: All projects by type and value of grants and spend to date at the start of the evaluation**

Category	Type of grant	Frequency
T	Technical assistance	19
A	Acquisition	37
D	Development	4
M	Multiple of T, D or A	4
C	Combination of any of the above	22

  

Category	Value of grant (£)	Frequency
0	< 1000	11
1	1000 – 9,999	21
2	10,000 - 49,999	24
3	50,000 – 99,999	20
4	100,000 – 199,999	7
5	200,000 – 1m	1
6	> 1 m	2

  

Category	% spent to date	Frequency
A	100	20
B	80 – 99	32
C	50 -79	12
D	1 -49	4
E	0	18

1.10 Each project was tagged using the categories specified above and then sorted firstly by grant type, then by the size of grant and lastly by the project's progress. Twenty were then chosen on the basis of these three variables. Smaller projects were selected for the ten telephone interviews as they were less complex and tended to involve a smaller group of stakeholders. The larger projects were allocated for the ten face-to-face case studies as they required more in-depth analysis and consultation with a larger spread of stakeholders and interest groups. The projects were investigated in 2 phases throughout the first year of the evaluation; one in April 2004, and a second batch in August 2004. The projects covered are shown in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.2: Sample of projects identified for first year evaluation**

Award date	Applicant	Location	Final amount £	Progress category
<b>Phase 1</b>				
Feb-02	Loch Katrine Community Trust	Callander	£961	A
Feb-03	Morven Community Dev Co	Lochaline	£2,901	A
Jun-02	North Harris Community Steering Group/ North Harris Trust	Isle of Harris	£1,673,016	B
Jul-02	Auldearn Community Trust	Nairn	£8,010	B
Jul-02	Birse Community Trust	Banchory	£120,913	D

Jul-03	The Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust	Kinlochbervie	£28,509	B
Aug-01	Gordon Community Woodland Association	Gordon	£70,691	B
Oct-02	Dornie Community Projects Group	Inverness	£11,824	A
Oct-02	LUCE 2000	Galloway	£19,422	B
Sep-01	Ballantrae Rural Initiative Care in the Community	Girvan	£26,690	A
<b>Phase 2</b>				
Jan-02	North Ronaldsay Trust	Orkney	£50,835	E
Jun-02	Fort Augustus Abbey	Fort Augustus	£2,000	B
Jun-02	Laide & Aultbea Community Woodland Group	Achnasheen	£54,512	B
May-01	Comrie Millennium Footpath Association	Crieff	£4,381	C
Dec-02	Dunnet Forestry Trust	Thurso	£35,640	C
Mar-02	Killin Care Trust	Killin	£90,400	A
Jul-02	Dalmally Community Company	Dalmally	£34,720	A
Sep-01	Gigha Land Steering Community Group/Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust	Gigha	£3,617,974	B
Sep-02	Strathfillan Community Development Trust	Tyndrum	£58,331	D
Nov-01	Iomairt Chille Choman Community Group (Port Charlotte)	Isle of Islay	£116,388	B

### Changing policy context

- 1.11 The Land Reform (Scotland) Act received Royal Assent in 2003, and provisions relating to communities' right to buy came into force on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2005<sup>1</sup>. There has been growing interest in the provisions of the new Act, and communities throughout the country have been inspired to consider purchasing local land and property to retain for future local access and use. It is anticipated that the Act will have a significant impact on the number of future applications for SLF funding.
- 1.12 Some recent high profile cases have further raised awareness of the provisions of the new legislation, including most recently the 'hostile' buy-out plans which a crofting community on the Pairc Estate on the Isle of Lewis recently agreed to take forward. This is likely to be one of the first real tests for the provisions of the Land Reform Act which allows for crofting communities to purchase land without the consent of the owner, provided that the majority of residents are in agreement about it. This case is likely to be followed by other communities, such as crofters on Lewis's Galston Estate who are currently considering taking forward similar plans. Alongside this issue are concerns that some landowners may seek to avoid the provisions

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scotland-legislation.hms.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2003/20030002.htm>



of the Act by making use of legal loopholes. As a result, 2005 is likely to prove an important period for the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and, by implication, the Scottish Land Fund. A previous emphasis on consensus based schemes could potentially be overshadowed by more controversial moves.

- 1.13 In addition, a recent amendment to the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 comes in the form of the Community Right To Buy (Definition of Excluded Land) Order 2004<sup>2</sup>. This essentially allows communities with a population of up to 10,000 (as opposed to the previous 3000 limit) to take up the community land purchase provisions of the Act. Thus, if 10% of the community are in agreement, an interest in the land can be registered, allowing the community first refusal on the purchase of the land should it become available for sale. This is likely to have significant implications for the way in which the Scottish Land Fund is prioritised and distributed and the amendment opens up the right to buy to another 117 communities. The subsequent years of monitoring and evaluation of the SLF should therefore be undertaken with these changes in mind.

### **Report structure**

- 1.14 The next chapter presents findings from the case studies, the third chapter sets out the conclusions and some of the issues raised, and the final chapter identifies the next steps for the evaluation.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/justice1/or-04/j104-1402.htm>

## 2 Review of project objectives, activities and outcomes

2.1 This chapter reviews the projects covered within the evaluation in the first year. Specifically we consider the range of projects covered their objectives, activities and outcomes. A common theme throughout the analysis is that most of the projects are still in the early stages of development and as a result, their impact tends to be *potential* rather than actual. Even so, there has been sufficient activity in most cases to draw out some interesting messages.

### The projects covered

2.2 The selection of cases in the first stage of the evaluation gave an exceptionally wide spectrum of projects to review. They ranged from the major land acquisitions of Gigha and North Harris to small grants that allow community development trusts to carry out feasibility studies or development work and even included two failed bids. In terms of grant size, the three largest in our sample were awarded to island projects; Gigha, North Harris and Port Charlotte on Islay.

2.3 The spread and diversity of projects supported is also shown in Table 2.1 where we have categorised projects as property, small land, woodland and large land. The Table provides a short description which helps set the rest of the analysis in context. (The project titles in brackets indicate a failed purchase bid.)

**Table 2.1: All projects described by type**

#### **Property Purchases**

<b>Birse Community Trust</b>	Three grants for the purchase of a church hall, the old school where BCT is based and a small area of land next to a sawmill
<b>Ballantrae</b>	Acquisition and management of a local building which is operated as a social or drop in centre for older members of the community
<b>Kinlochbervie</b>	Acquisition, management and letting of a house within the community to help overcome a shortage of affordable accommodation for key workers in the village, thereby supporting local services and facilities such as the village's school
<b>Killin Care Home</b>	Acquisition of a care home for elderly people to ensure that facilities are maintained locally.
<b>North Ronaldsay</b>	Acquisition of the buildings associated with the lighthouse, although not the lighthouse itself. Subsequently developed as a range of facilities including holiday accommodation, craft shop and workshops
<b>(Fort Augustus)</b>	Given SLF and Community Land Unit grants towards commissioning a valuation of Fort Augustus Abbey and the costs of the group incorporating itself as a company limited by guarantee

**(Loch Katrine)** To cover legal fees incurred when becoming a Company Limited by Guarantee with Charitable Status and to cover valuation of Garrison Farm

**Small Land Purchases**

<b>Whitefields Loch (LUCE 2000)</b>	Acquisition of a loch and riparian woodland, in order to maintain community fishing rights and provide improved facilities for disabled anglers.
<b>Port Charlotte, Islay</b>	Acquisition of a football field and surrounding fields on the edge of the settlement to provide a range of benefits including improved recreation facilities, a new island centre, sustainable crofting, environmental management and interpretation
<b>Comrie</b>	Project to create a footpath suitable for all abilities and ages with a surface and gradients suitable for wheelchair/ pushchair access
<b>Strathfillan</b>	Acquisition of shelterbelt land to retain its use for local residents, with plans for a number of facilities
<b>Dalmally</b>	Acquisition of site to develop a sports pitch and associated facilities
<b>Morven</b>	Acquisition of a three acre area in the centre of Lochaline surrounding a war memorial
<b>Auldearn</b>	Acquisition of an area of land adjacent to Auldearn Primary School to provide additional facilities for the school and community
<b>Dornie</b>	Acquisition of a small area of land on the edge of the village to provide environmental improvements including a community garden, place for interpretation and visitor orientation, and space for car parking.

**Woodland**

<b>Gordon Community</b>	Awarded two Grants by SLF: a technical assistance grant, and an acquisition grant to purchase woodland for the community
<b>Laide &amp; Aultbea</b>	Acquisition of woodland to provide improved woodland management and allow for community access to the area.
<b>Dunnet</b>	Management of woodland for nature conservation and community access

**Large Land Purchases**

<b>Gigha</b>	Major land purchase of the island by the community with range activities and responsibilities
<b>North Harris</b>	Major land purchase of the North Harris estate with range of estate management and community activities.

2.4 With the exceptions of Fort Augustus and Loch Katrine, all the projects have successfully acquired either land or property or, in the case of Dunnet, management rights over assets.

2.5 Funding for the small land projects is largely to support recreational activities of some form. For example, Port Charlotte, Auldearn and Dalmally all include proposals to develop sports pitches. Whitefields proposes to provide access to the loch for fishing, while projects in Comrie and Strathfillan intend to improve access and develop pathways. The woodland projects give the community management over the woodlands and include improving access and protecting the environment. The large land purchases are the most significant investments and include a variety of community led activities.

## **Project objectives**

- 2.6 Objectives vary significantly between projects, and although most have initially focused on actual acquisition of the land, they have also tended to include a range of broader developmental aspirations and ideas. Some projects have more explicit and achievable aims than others. A good example has been the structured way in which the Port Charlotte project was taken forward with Iomairt Chille Chomain seeking to strike and maintain a balance between strategic objectives of recreation and sporting, environmental and crofting. In Birse, SLF money has been used to complement a range of other community development work, including the preservation of the historic mills, the purchase of the Bucket Shop and the old Sawmill, and smaller projects such as tree planting, improvements to the war memorial site, development of broadband, and GIS training.
- 2.7 In some of the smaller scale cases, objectives were much less clearly defined and as a result several may have drifted from their original aims. In one specific case, a lack of consensus, possibly as a result of limited consultation early on, has resulted in delays and disagreement over how to take it forward.

## **Community participation**

- 2.8 One of the striking features of all this activity is the high level of participation by local communities. There is of course some relationship between the size of the project and the level of community involvement, but even very small grants have encouraged considerable community interest.
- 2.9 There are three levels of engagement:
- the development of the initial ideas
  - involvement in the early decisions over the shape of the project
  - ongoing involvement in the management of the land or property
  - leadership

### *Development of the initial ideas*

- 2.10 Most drivers for these projects come from a small group of individuals who recognise the opportunity and raise it with the rest of the community. Often the response has had to be fairly rapid given that the opportunities for purchase have, to date, been governed by when the asset comes on the market. Usually this requires some leadership within the community, often from within an existing group and in the larger cases has involved some effort to persuade other residents. In several cases this has involved visits by the CLU staff, as well as other agencies, to explain the potential benefits and issues involved in the pursuit of community ownership.

### *Involvement in the early decisions*

- 2.11 Community involvement in making the key initial decisions has, for virtually all the projects, been very high. It is not uncommon for nearly all the households to be represented at the first few meetings. On Islay 115 people attended the first meeting for the Port Charlotte project, in Comrie over 100 people attend two meetings a year, in Birse over 100 people attend the AGM from a community of 260 households and on Gigha all the households are usually represented at meetings. All of the projects have community groups with a high level of membership and this has usually given them a good base from which to build. The two projects which did not result in purchases, Fort Augustus and Loch Katrine, also had a great deal of support for their proposals.

### *Ongoing involvement*

- 2.12 For most of the projects the most important indicator of community involvement is the ongoing or sustained engagement of the community. This can depend on the type of project. It is not realistic to expect the entire community to continue to be involved in decision making on the operation of specific buildings or for small areas of land, once the main decisions have been taken. It would be expected that after the project has taken shape the community's involvement would decline. **The key is whether the community believe that although they may not participate in every meeting they continue to have the opportunity to influence the use or development of that asset.**
- 2.13 It is too early for most of these projects to assess whether community interest and engagement is declining. On Gigha, despite some initial scepticism over the buy out, the community's response has been exceptionally positive. A sum of £200,000 was raised by a community of just 100 people through an enthusiastic local fund raising effort. The regular meetings are attended by representatives from nearly every family and, most importantly, feedback from

the community indicates that they genuinely feel as though they are able to influence the direction of development. There continues to be no shortage of volunteers to take positions on the numerous committees that have been set up.

- 2.14 At Port Charlotte, there is also evidence that engagement is being sustained. Birse Community Trust have continued to generate interest, with over 100 attending AGM's, helped by the inclusion of cultural events such as poetry and traditional songs as part of the meetings. Ballantrae has 32 volunteers working at the drop in centre and the Killin Care Trust has 52. It is probably easier to maintain involvement in the larger mixed activity groups than in some of the others.
- 2.15 Laide and Aultbea Woodland reported that it has been hard to get the community actively involved in *managing* the project (as opposed to attending community events and 'hands on' open days). The actual planning and management is left largely to a core group. In Auldearn issues about the use of land and negotiations have delayed progress and interest. At Whitefield Loch there has been no community consultation for some time, and in Dornie management of the project was effectively handed over by the originators of the initiative when ideas for development varied. However, since the 'leaders' stepped back from the project it would transpire that the community has subsequently lacked the necessary level of commitment to progress the plans.
- 2.16 For woodland projects community events appear to have been well attended. The Gordon Community Woodland is a good example of this. Aside from the initial thorough consultation process, it has held planting days, educational trips with the school and other groups, a "walk through the woods" event attracted 40 people and there is an evening walk planned. However, there is some concern not to saturate the market with too many fund raising activities and it has proved difficult to get sufficient volunteers to work during the week.
- 2.17 All of the projects make provision for long term community engagement, although the level of active involvement in decision making does vary from projects allowing those who are interested to participate, to those which more actively inspire involvement from the wider community. The following mechanisms were noted in the case studies:
- AGMs/ formal public meetings: most of the groups have regular open meetings, although somewhat less frequently following acquisition. These are generally well attended, although in certain cases such interest may have subsided to some extent (e.g. Dornie, Dunnet)

- issue based consultation: many of the projects were run by a smaller core group, who took issues to the wider community as they arose. For example, in Islay meetings were held to discuss the options and design proposals for the island centre, and this was well attended and facilitated
- newsletters and general correspondence are sometimes used to good effect
- informal word of mouth: given that many of the communities are quite small, there is a degree of reliance on general knowledge and word of mouth. For example, in Kinlochbervie, whilst the community are not actively involved in maintaining the property they all remain generally aware of the project
- events: nearly all groups have organised events and celebrations in order to stimulate use of the land by the wider community. In Laide and Aultbea a photographic competition has been held, and schools visits have been organised. In Dunnet a community open day proved an inspiring way of generating interest amongst people of all ages

2.18 Overall, we would conclude that the vast majority of these projects have been very successful in engaging their communities. This has been evident both at the start, and during, the development of the project and fund raising. Whether or not this level of enthusiasm is retained will be crucial over the next couple of years and will to some extent depend on the quality of the management of the projects. It is not always necessary that the community directly participate, but the feedback from most of the projects and from individuals within the communities that we consulted, is that they are satisfied that they are able to influence activity when necessary.

2.19 What is also perhaps surprising is the lack of serious disagreement over the direction of the projects. The degree of consensus within the Trusts and communities is testament partly to the skills of the management of the Trust but also the capacity of the community to work together. These are important issues in making the projects work and we will come back to this later.

### ***Leadership***

2.20 Leadership is a key influence on the success and inclusiveness of the projects. Different styles have emerged in different communities, largely as a result of specific personalities and local contexts. In Port Charlotte and Auldearn, local Councillors have taken a lead role in progressing the projects, and this has proved particularly effective in the former case where

the community has now employed the Councillor as a part time development officer, which has been very beneficial in terms of achieving the original aims of the project. In some places, volunteers appear to be willing to take on board a high level of responsibility for developing the projects, which could potentially have failed without this commitment. However, there remain questions over how sustainable this is in the longer term. The Birse Community Trust for example, does not use volunteers but instead provides short term paid contracts to local people to deliver specific projects and this is probably a more sustainable approach longer term.

- 2.21 The Killin case study shows that a Board of Directors working on a voluntary basis can achieve as much as several full time employees might be able to, and indeed the success of the project is wholly reliant on this level of commitment. In other places community representatives have felt that their time needs to be supplemented with that of a full or part time employed development officer.
- 2.22 Some community leaders have struggled with the level of commitment required and have been acutely aware of the responsibilities that go with their role in representing the wider community. It is often a much more substantial role than is anticipated at the outset. Clearly the projects have been stressful for some community leaders, but this is largely attributable to relationships within the community, as opposed to the nature of the SLF or the acquisition per se.
- 2.23 There is no doubt that where a full time project manager can be justified it understandably makes a major impact on the success of the initiative and is a feature shared by the projects that have made the most progress. Given the small number of development grants provided by the SLF (as noted previously), there is perhaps an opportunity to use development grants to fund project manager posts more frequently as a means of providing increased value for money from the existing investments.

### **Additionality**

- 2.24 There are several elements to this, but in essence we are concerned with how the availability of the fund has changed activity. The main types of additionality are:
- would the project have gone ahead in the same form without the fund
  - would it have gone ahead, but perhaps much later



- would it have gone ahead but on a smaller scale
- 2.25 In all but three cases, the projects would not have gone ahead without the funding. In one we understand that the community would have been able to make the acquisition anyway, although it did allow further funding to be made available for development. In another, a private purchase may have led to the development of similar facilities, but not the same level of access. In another case, Birse school hall, BCT would have been able to continue to lease the office, but would not have had the same security of tenure.
- 2.26 The difference that the Fund has made is complex. We cannot know what the alternative position would have been if the land or property had been sold to a private buyer or not sold at all. In several cases, the rationale for the purchase included concerns over what would happen if the land or facility was lost. In Killin, the Care Trust believed that the building they purchased would have been developed as backpackers' accommodation (which may have had more economic benefits than the social centre that it has been developed as). In Aulder there was a concern that the land would be used for another development and for the woodland projects, the rationale was often that their condition was declining and access becoming more difficult.
- 2.27 There is a careful balance to be struck between negative or protective rationales for community ownership like those above and positive reasons that are more about opportunities for better use of land and property. It is not hard to imagine that some communities might seek to buy land to prevent new housing development, while at the same time part of the aim of community development in remote areas is to increase population, an objective which some existing residents might not like.
- 2.28 The availability of the SLF raises a number of other questions. There is no doubt that the existence of SLF triggered the idea of community ownership for some of these projects and that the concept of such a means of ownership would not have arisen as a possibility otherwise. Additionally, the SLF has a relatively high profile compared to other grant schemes and it attracts significant press attention, for example when Gigha and Fort Augustus Abbey were under negotiation the stories made national papers and news channels. This high level of awareness may mean that even the most inexperienced fundraisers are aware of the existence and availability of SLF over and above other funding sources.
- 2.29 This is a real benefit in terms of pushing the objectives of SLF, but in some ways is also a disadvantage. The very fact of SLF existence may change the market if sellers know that community groups have access to SLF funds and this makes the negotiations critical. There could be a disincentive for communities to negotiate as aggressively if they have the backing

of the fund or for sellers to accept lower prices. This may become more of an issue over time, particularly where landowners access high quality advice. Elements of this may be seen in relation to former owners retaining specific rights on the land such as mineral, or shooting rights, or rights over the income generated by windfarms.

- 2.30 In Laide and Aultbea the community purchased land from a private estate owner, and part of the reasoning behind this, as in Dunnet, was the poor condition of the woodland, its lack of use and its potential value to the community. However, as the land was being sold on the open market regardless of community interest in the purchase (with the group having been unsuccessful in initial bids) it is likely that the community's view that the woodland would remain in private ownership and continue to deteriorate, was well founded and sufficient reasoning to support the SLF application.
- 2.31 However, at Whitefields Loch in Wigtownshire, the community purchased the loch and riparian woodland in order to maintain their recreational use of the area and avoid it being passed into private ownership when Forest Enterprise (FE) was selling it. Whilst this case is likely to provide benefits for the community as a result of its improvement and development plans, it does raise a question as to whether some public bodies are more likely to put land which has community interest on the market, in the hope that it may be acquired by a community and managed for public benefit, in line with their requirements. It could be argued that such organisations have a responsibility to deliver these objectives. Acquisition means that the community takes on responsibility for delivering on these aims. Similar conclusions could be drawn in relation to Scottish Natural Heritage in the case of Dunnet.
- 2.32 This raises the issue of the differences between land acquired from the public and private sectors, particularly where the public sector has an existing obligation to maintain the land and provide specific forms of access. There is perhaps a danger of SLF money and specific communities being targeted by public sector agencies in order to relieve them of legislative obligations and financial burdens.
- 2.33 It is important to consider that not all projects need to demonstrate direct benefits. The rationale for many of them is to end economic or environmental decline. For example, in Gigha, years of lack of investment had resulted in poor housing and facilities. A similar pattern occurred in North Harris. In the woodland cases and some of the property projects, lack of maintenance and investment has resulted in, or could result in, the declining quality of the assets. In these cases the additionality is in terms of avoiding the further negative effects rather than necessarily generating new activities.

## **Progress**

- 2.34 Most of the communities are now using the land in some way, although in some cases this is limited to a few people with specific interest, or irregular use by the wider community which has to be stimulated by organising and advertising special events. For most projects there is some way to go before the land is fully recognised as a shared resource and responsibility, despite seemingly high levels of community engagement and involvement.
- 2.35 The projects show varying speeds of progress, with some communities including those in Islay, Killin, Kinlochbervie, Gigha, BCT and North Ronaldsay having achieved a large proportion of their original objectives. Dunnet, Dornie, Auldearn, Laide and Aultbea and Dalmally have been slower to take forward their plans, although the former is benefiting from the employment of a development officer to assist in taking forward the project.
- 2.36 The others are still at an early stage (Table 2.2) and as a result, the benefits tend to be potential rather than actual. Many are currently working to develop the assets, for example, Morven, Ballantrae, Strathfillan and Comrie are all at early stages.
- 2.37 Several projects have faced delays. There are various reasons why some of these initiatives appear to have stalled following acquisition of the land, but the explanation usually involves negotiations with the local authority. In Dornie the community has purchased the land but progress in developing it as an accessible and shared resource has been limited. The community feels that working with Highland Council and meeting their requirements, particularly in terms of more technical roads standards, has contributed to this. Similarly in Auldearn, the broader community was encouraged to assist with taking forward plans for the site, but a lack of agreement on the priorities and site development plans has restricted the progression of the project. Dalmally now needs to get agreement from Argyll and Bute Council to develop the sports pitch and Whitefield Loch has had issues with changing ownership.
- 2.38 For the big land purchases, Gigha and North Harris, the management of the estates is a major ongoing task in itself, particularly early on in developing some of the specific proposals that were made. Gigha has made exceptional progress given the range of activities it is developing. It has been helped by the progress made on the housing refurbishment which has been a tangible demonstration of the benefits of community ownership. The windfarm is being put in place, house plots have been sold and there is new construction on the island. There are also eight new businesses with more proposed. Progress in North Harris has been somewhat slower as the community and their purchase partner have sought to ensure that the project planning is sustainable and fits with the wider strategies for the area. Many of their

projects require a good deal of pre-planning, partnership working, and appraisal prior to being implemented, for example work on the Whaling Station, work with SNH on deer culling, sale of land for affordable housing, and the consideration of sustainable energy solutions. Overall much of the work has been around planning and putting in place structures for management and sustainability.

- 2.39 Only a couple of projects have been completed. The Killin Care Trust has been refurbished, the house in Kinlochbervie is occupied and Port Charlotte has made good progress in developing a number of activities on the land purchased, although there are still plenty more opportunities open to development. Birse has also completed all its acquisitions, is well established as a trust with local trustees, and carries out detailed monitoring of participation in its events.

**Table 2.2: Project progress**

Birse Community Trust	Complete
Ballantrae	Work on property ongoing
Kinlochbervie	Complete and tenancy taken up
Killin Care Home	Main work complete
North Ronaldsay (Fort Augustus)	Renovations of buildings complete, workshop leased, shop Bid failed
(Loch Katrine)	Bid failed
Whitefields Loch (LUCE 2000)	Only recently acquired and development only just starting
Port Charlotte, Islay	Much of the physical work complete and tenants in two crofts
Comrie	Part of footpath completed and survey done
Strathfillan	Working on planned activities
Dalmally	Geological survey done on land, but now stalled until agreement with Council
Morven	Car park built other work ongoing
Auldearn	Feasibility but now negotiating over shape of development with Council
Dornie	Part of site had been cleared but delayed in negotiating road standards with Council
Gordon Community	Tree planting, events and wet area constructed
Laide & Aultbea	Some events held but development still ongoing
Dunnet	Officer in place, planting and some environmental works
Gigha	Housing refurbishment underway, windfarm being constructed, private plots sold and other projects underway
North Harris	Management of estate, housing plans, feasibility study for windfarm, lease of cottages

- 2.40 We would conclude that the vast majority the projects supported are still ongoing. Perhaps a quarter have in place the core elements of their plans. Given that most of the benefits will flow from how the land or property is used rather than simply owning it, it will be several

years before the real impact can be assessed. It also means that very few of these projects have put in place adequate monitoring frameworks. Typically, their focus has been on progressing the project rather than developing indicators for future monitoring purposes.

2.41 None of the projects have been abandoned although there have been delays. It will be interesting to see how much progress is made over the next 12 months as these first visits have provided us with a good baseline. One of the lessons is clearly that the purchase of the asset is only the beginning of the work and that development can take a long time, particularly where partners are unclear of the objectives.

### **Benefits**

2.42 The benefits, both reported and anticipated, can be categorised as:

- social
- economic
- environmental

2.43 All the benefits from the twenty projects were reviewed and a summary is set out below. The aim is to identify the scale and type of these benefits and also to identify any patterns that will help in managing projects in the future.

### **Social benefits**

2.44 Most of the actual and potential benefits reported are categorised as social. These fall under several categories

<b>Engagement /participation</b>	The evidence given earlier indicated that nearly all the projects had generated substantial community participation, particularly at the early stages and that so far this has been sustained. In some of the smaller communities, virtually every household had been represented. Voluntary jobs are included in the social impacts.
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<p><b>Empowerment</b></p>	<p>The transfer of ownership to the community can in itself provide a greater sense of empowerment. This is only true where there is genuine community engagement and this has been the case in nearly all the projects covered. The extent of this effect depends on the type of project and its scale. The two big land purchases report substantial impacts. On Gigha the sense of empowerment is reflected in the willingness and level of engagement with all the activities on the island. During the course of the consultations one Gigha resident claimed that the effect of the community buy-out was like a big cloud lifting from the island. On Harris, residents also referred to a positive impact and more optimism in the community.</p>
<p><b>Skills and capacity building</b></p>	<p>One of the less tangible benefits is the extent to which the communities involved develop both formal and informal skills. These can lead to better local decision making processes and, ultimately, to economic impacts.</p> <p>Although there were some examples, there appears to be relatively little formal training for the communities involved in the projects. This is not necessarily a bad thing as learning on the job and informal development are just as vital and valuable skills.</p> <p>Training has included training in health and safety, directorship, IT (including CAD for the directors for the Comrie Millennium Footpath project).</p> <p>On North Ronaldsay, a new graduate had been attracted bringing new skills and ideas</p>
<p><b>Education</b></p>	<p>Several projects have links with local schools. The woodland projects have all had school trips, including tree planting and there are plans for further interpretation. The Auldearn project is for a facility linked to the school. In Comrie, school children have been encouraged to get involved in planning by submitting entries to a competition and a similar process has been used in Strathfillan.</p>
<p><b>Quality of life</b> <b>Access to facilities</b></p>	<p>Examples include, the increased use of the Birse Church Hall by community, up to three times a week</p> <p>Whitefield Loch is increasing the number buying fishing permits</p> <p>The football pitch at Port Charlotte is used regularly by the local community and the rest of the island</p> <p>Retaining the Care Home in Killin and the social facilities in Ballantrae, add substantially to the quality of life for the elderly in these communities and their families.</p>

<p><b>Quality of life</b></p> <p><b>Security of tenure</b></p>	<p>This has been crucial in the big land purchases. On Gigha this is the single biggest impact, allowing improvements to be made and releasing new confidence and investment. In North Harris it is hoped that tenure arrangements will also generate optimism and retain population.</p> <p>For communities, ownership of assets also builds confidence and allows investment. In Birse, ownership of the old school has allowed the community to invest in facilities, but the other physical projects on North Ronaldsay, Killin and Ballantrae have also led to longer term investment than previously would not have been possible</p> <p>Improvements to the quality of housing on Gigha have had a major impact on living standards. There is a proposed housing assessment on North Harris and several other projects include refurbishments of existing properties including the provision of a rented accommodation for teacher in Kinlochbervie.</p>
<p><b>Inclusion</b></p>	<p>For the elderly, Ballantrae and Killin are projects which allow people to remain within their community and support intergenerational links.</p> <p>The play park, part of the project on Islay, is a meeting place for parents who might otherwise find social interaction more difficult. The football pitch provides a facility that involves many in the community and brings the islanders together</p> <p>Several projects will help special needs access. The paths in Comrie will provide disabled access and the original proposals at Whitefield Loch are intended to provide access to fishing.</p> <p>School children have been involved in competitions for several projects and in Strathfillan, a youth club has been reconstituted to provide views on developing part of the shelterbelt as a “kick about” area.</p>
<p><b>Strengthening social networks</b></p>	<p>Most of the projects could claim some impact to this through a number of routes.</p> <p>Management of decision making processes and the projects themselves will bring people together. In many cases meetings are frequent and contribute to the development of social capital. An example is the Gordon Community Woodland where it is claimed that people who never met before have got to know each other. This is reflected by an increase in the number joining Neighbourhood Watch. In Dunnet, involvement in the Woodland project is reported to have increased the community’s self-policing.</p>

<b>Fundraising</b>	<p>In all cases that concern the acquisition of land and/ or buildings, the community is expected to contribute a minimum of 6% of the total project costs. By the nature of these projects it is usually during the post acquisition stage that significant additional funds are levered into the project. There is no target figure for this leverage and it is difficult to suggest an average at this stage of the evaluation as many of the projects have only just commenced their post-acquisition activities.</p> <p>Many of the projects have involved substantial amounts of local fund raising. This is also an indication of community support and interaction. The most impressive example is Gigha where less than 100 people raised £200,000. Other examples include £1000 raised in Dornie, the Gordon Woodland, Strathfillan and North Ronaldsay.</p>
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**Economic**

2.45 Economic benefits are rarely the main motivator for these projects. Even where they are expected to have economic benefits, few of the projects could provide much evidence. There are several examples.

<b>Job creation (paid employment)</b>	<p>Since the buy out on Gigha, the number of FTE jobs on the island has increased from 50 to 75. Given that prior to the buy out this was a falling trend, we would credit it with generating at least 25 jobs and more are likely. Also apprenticeships for housing work</p> <p>In North Harris, jobs at the hatchery (4) and castle (4) and 22 seasonal jobs were safeguarded. Management of the project and estate has generated a further 1.5 FTEs</p> <p>Development officer jobs on Islay, Gigha, North Harris, Dunnet, Strathfillan</p> <p>New full time post and safeguarded part time jobs in Killin Care Trust</p> <p>2 new posts on North Ronaldsay in community business</p>
<b>New businesses</b>	<p>Use of local contractors in a number of projects. Gordon Community Woodland has used 10 – 15 local companies or individuals, a high proportion of BCT work uses local people</p> <p>Killin Care Trust uses local contractors for supplies and repair work</p> <p>On Gigha eight new businesses have started since the buy out and more proposed, including several young entrepreneurs. The island has also set up a consortium of local builders to work on major housing refurbishment.</p> <p>There is a community business on North Ronaldsay and craft shop and café</p>



<b>Income</b>	<p>BCT receives income of over £3,000 from renting out business units. It now generates up to 20% of turnover through its own activities</p> <p>On Gigha, the windfarm will generate income of £75,000 a year, the sale of land plots and operation of the hotel are also sources of income</p> <p>In North Harris, the lease allowing the erection of a communications mast on a remote site in Govig generates £3,000 a year and there are plans to secure rental from other lease/ rental activities</p> <p>Lighthouse and mill tours on North Ronaldsay generate £2,500 a year. Café and craft shop generates £6000 a year</p> <p>Crofts on Islay are a source of income for community and crofters</p>
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**Environmental**

2.46 Although most projects have an environmental element the stage of the projects means that this tends to remain as potential.

<b>Landscaping and environmental improvements</b>	<p>Many of the projects involve environmental improvements as part of the development of land or property. Most of these are still to be complete, but the key examples are:</p> <p>The clearance and future development of the car park in Dornie has been reported by local residents as having “greatly improved the environment”</p> <p>In Morven, landscaping improvements have been carried out and have encouraged an increase in the number of walkers, although numbers are not recorded</p> <p>On Islay improvements have been made to boundaries and anecdotally the path is better used.</p> <p>Killin Care Trust’s improvements to the home have impacted on the quality of the main street</p>
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<p><b>Protection of wildlife diversity</b></p>	<p>Whitefield Loch has been restocked although this will continue to be monitored</p> <p>The Gordon Community Woodland has constructed bird and bat boxes and there have been increased sightings by residents. There are also more reported sightings of badgers, foxes and red squirrels. Shooting has been stopped and the native deer population has grown</p> <p>In North Harris, a deer cull is planned to stop overgrazing and the Trust are working with SNH to make the whaling station safe</p> <p>Laide and Aultbea has prepared a baseline survey of trees and otters that will help monitor any change</p> <p>On Islay, the Trust is working with SNH to monitor corncrakes after improvements to their habitat</p> <p>Dunnet Forest Trust has carried out a baseline survey of stock and has undertaken new planting</p> <p>Comrie has also carried out a biodiversity analysis and has thinned out some of the woodland to allow more light and encourage growth</p> <p>North Ronaldsay has contributed to three bird hides</p>
<p><b>Energy efficiency</b></p>	<p>The housing refurbishments being carried out will exceed energy efficiency recommendations making savings in energy use. The construction of the windfarm which supplies the grid, will contribute to Scotland's renewable energy targets.</p> <p>On North Ronaldsay, a joint study with Scottish Hydro considers the opportunities to use wind turbines to heat the buildings.</p>
<p><b>Protection of heritage</b></p>	<p>Purchase of the Old School in Birse retains an important local building that might otherwise have been lost</p> <p>The project on North Ronaldsay protects some historic buildings, halting their decline</p>

**Overview of benefits**

2.47 The most immediate benefits have been social - through the development of the projects, the capacity building and strengthening of social networks. There are also substantial benefits in quality of life for those living in these communities. Moving forward the issue will be whether these benefits can be at least sustained and possibly built upon. It is easy to underestimate the importance for small communities of strengthening networks and, in particular, building social capital. In urban areas access to expertise, advice and support is often taken for granted. In rural and remote communities, social networks are arguably more

important where it is difficult to travel to find alternatives. The examples from Islay, Gigha and Birse in particular highlight how once the Trusts have the strength, confidence and critical mass of support, they can go on to develop a much wider range of projects. Where this works, the SLF funding can legitimately be seen as kick starting a much more substantial process.

- 2.48 One of the impressive aspects of Gigha was the substantial amount of capacity building that had taken place within the community. With so many residents involved in the management of projects, there was a strong understanding of how the island worked and the opportunities that existed. The high degree of consensus on development plans was also an example of how well the group was working with only limited training for the directors.
- 2.49 Currently, the economic benefits from all but the two major investments are fairly limited. However, on Gigha in particular there are significant economic impacts measured principally by the increase in employment on the island and new businesses. On Harris, the impact to date has been mainly in safeguarding existing activity rather than attracting new business – though this in itself is a very valuable and viable activity. There are other small scale examples, such as North Ronaldsay, but otherwise the impacts are very small scale.
- 2.50 The environmental benefits are similarly at an early stage. Where monitoring has been done, it is still a baseline as much of the project work is still ongoing. Most projects will contribute initially to improving the landscape, but there are also potentially important benefits in protecting wildlife. There are some early anecdotal signs that these projects are making a difference, but it will be much longer before this can be demonstrated. The most imaginative Trusts are also looking at developing their own renewable energy resources. This is in part driven by an opportunity to generate income as well as save money. For example, windfarms and bio-mass schemes are being investigated. At present only Gigha is actually constructing a windfarm, whether or not the other schemes go ahead remains to be seen. It does however raise some interesting issues for the SLF, particularly in respect to the potential value of the land.

### ***Sustainability of benefits***

- 2.51 Many of the communities have invested a considerable amount of time and effort and are unlikely to let projects lose momentum as a result of commitments already made. Others have got off to a slower start, but continuing enthusiasm suggests that development will progress on a steady basis in line with clearly defined objectives. Some of the smaller projects with less clear objectives, including Auldearn, Laide and Aultbea and Whitefields Loch may be

more difficult to sustain and will require renewed inputs and wider public involvement as well as a clearer focus if they are to continue to provide benefits in the longer term.

- 2.52 The case of Dunnet raises questions about the use of SLF development funds, which are not likely to lead to actual acquisition and therefore the sustainability of the project. The community currently have no intention to purchase the woodland, but are willing to maintain it and ensure it is accessible for locals, whilst SNH maintain ownership. Although any increase in the value of the land as a result of improvements made by the community will be discounted should SNH sell the land to the community in the future, it remains to be seen whether this case will be entirely successful in fulfilling the aims of the legislation or indeed the SLF, given that ownership has remained the same. It effectively allows SNH to give up its responsibility to maintain the forest, whilst the community may not benefit any more than they would have if SNH's remit to deliver community and environmental benefits was being fulfilled.
- 2.53 The benefits reported tend to be potential rather than achieved, so we would expect them to increase over the next couple of years. Whether they are sustainable will depend on the continued engagement of the community and this will be in part down to the management of the Trusts. The projects that have flourished tend to be those with strong and imaginative management. The projects will increasingly need this kind of leadership to realise their potential to maintain momentum. Given the importance of this, SLF should consider how the best practice and lessons from the various projects they have supported can be used to strengthen all the projects.

### **Quality of support**

- 2.54 Virtually all the consultees felt that the SLF staff had been very positive and helpful in relation to their projects, and indeed it appears that some of them would not have had successful applications had it not been for the guidance provided by SLF staff. On the bigger projects in particular the support of SLF and HIE CLU staff has been critical. There was considerable praise for the level of information provided, as well as the encouragement. Other organisations such as the Crofters Commission, the Forestry Commission and SNH were also given credit. In a lot of cases the local authorities had been very helpful and some projects had been given further financial or staff support.
- 2.55 Given the low level of knowledge and expertise within communities at the outset of some of these projects it is perhaps not surprising that any help, particularly financial is warmly received. However, we need to be careful how we interpret this. Even amongst community leaders, who are often more versed in dealing with public institutions, the feedback has been

very positive. Only one project had any serious criticism of the support. As community capacity and experience grows, the level of support expected might also grow and this could cause more friction. At the moment the availability of funding is seen as a welcome surprise, but in future it may become an expectation.

- 2.56 Many of the projects were endorsed by a wide range of organisations prior to their approval, but it is more difficult to define the extent to which these supporters continue to collaborate with the groups following acquisition, when plans for the land are being taken forward. Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Highland Council appear to have played an important role in projects within their boundaries, but participation from less well resourced organisations, including the voluntary sectors, appears to be less consistent over time. Schools have often been a particularly effective channel for encouraging action and participation, with several projects having provided scope for environmental awareness raising and education.

#### **How linked up are projects with other local initiatives?**

- 2.57 There were some cases of joined up working within communities. The main ones again include Port Charlotte, where Iomairt Chille Chomain consider themselves to be facilitators of wider community aspirations. This project originated as a result of a need to level the football pitch and maintain use of it, but rapidly extended to provide opportunities for crofting (thereby helping to provide housing and employment for two local families), environmental management and interpretation which links with the aspirations of Scottish Natural Heritage, and provision of a site for a play area which has long been planned and a focus for fund raising within the wider community. The Birse Community Trust is also engaged in a number of joined up community projects that link up the management of woodland with the provision and management of a number of local services. The other examples are Gigha and North Harris, because of the range of activities they are engaged in. On a smaller scale, North Ronaldsay is developing a portfolio of activities, as is Comrie.

#### **Paths and right of access**

- 2.58 Some of the woodland projects including at Laide and Aultbea, Dunnet, and Whitefields Loch included access (to land and to water) as a key objective. This raises questions to some extent about the overlap and consistency between the two key aspects of the land reform legislation which make provisions for land ownership and access. As the latter component introduces a new right of responsible access to all land (with limited exceptions), the legitimacy of community access to an area of land as a reason for land acquisition could be being undermined by the same legislation. Notwithstanding this, the provision of paths in some of

the projects is likely to play a positive role in confirming shared ownership and use of the site, and would therefore support as opposed to contradict the new access rights. There may be scope for using acquisition provisions in the future to achieve core path planning, although again it should be stressed to communities that ownership of land will no longer be necessary in order to justify its use by the public for responsible non-motorised access.

## 3 Key issues and conclusions so far

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### Overview of achievements and conclusion

- 3.1 The evaluation has so far covered a range of 20 projects that have supported the purchase of land, property and management rights for communities across Scotland. One of the difficulties of the evaluation is looking across such a range of different projects, yet the scope of activities does not seem to be the main indicator of success. There are examples of successful property projects, large land acquisitions and smaller projects. The factors of success seem to be related to the management of the project and the community.
- 3.2 At this stage we would conclude that the projects have nearly all made a major contribution to the community development primarily through their impact on social networks. There are several examples of economic benefit, but with the exception of Gigha and potentially North Harris, these are not substantial. All the projects offer significant environmental benefits, but this currently remains largely potential. The benefits are considered to be nearly all additional. In other words without SLF, these outcomes would not have been achieved.
- 3.3 As a group, it would be reasonable to conclude that the projects have built impressive community participation. This continues to be sustained in most projects but there is a longer term issue with ensuring sustainability and this in turn will depend on the quality and imagination of project management. The purchase of the asset is only the starting point, how it is developed is the key. Where projects have worked well they have tended to link a number of activities, bringing together a wider range of aims which attract broader community support and interest, for example, on Gigha, North Ronaldsay, Islay and in Birse. These projects can also be held up as evidence of the success of asset based community development, where the ownership of community assets provides the catalyst and basis for strengthening communities. Over the coming years, it will be interesting to see whether these projects are able to maintain this momentum.
- 3.4 There are sufficient successful examples to indicate that the community ownership model can and is working, but that the success of individual projects depends on the qualities of the management and the community.

### **Progress against objectives**

3.5 The Fund's objectives are given as:

- to improve opportunities and reduce disadvantage both for communities and individuals in rural areas
- to encourage community involvement and participation in land ownership and management
- to enhance the environmental diversity and quality of rural Scotland
- to facilitate positive use of the land reform legislation on the community right to buy
- to diversify the pattern of land ownership in rural Scotland

3.6 Of these the latter two are largely accomplished through the number of awards made and their diversity. The projects directly change the pattern of ownership and the fund's existence facilitates the use of the land reform legislation. The more challenging objectives are the first three:

#### ***Reducing disadvantage***

3.7 Disadvantage in this context may relate to issues around access, poverty, information or access to services and support. In traditional terms there does not appear to be a particular correlation between the projects included in our sample, and rural need as defined on the basis of higher levels of social exclusion and deprivation. However, most of the projects interviewed have contributed to this objective either directly as in Ballantrae, Killin, Port Charlotte and Comrie, by providing services to specific groups or indirectly as on Gigha (through major housing improvements), the sports pitches on Islay and potentially Dalmally.

3.8 Other projects have provided work for local suppliers who otherwise would have found it difficult to find employment, as in Birse or Gordon Woodland. With only a couple of exceptions the projects have strengthened community participation and social networking



which will help to reduce the disadvantages of remote rural life. To some extent, and with varying degrees of success, the projects have provided opportunities for members of the community to be part of the projects encouraging social inclusion. There are several examples of younger and older people being encouraged to participate.

### ***Community involvement and participation***

- 3.9 The projects have all generated a great deal of involvement and participation, perhaps the single biggest benefit. This objective is being achieved. The critical issue is how this will be sustained in future and built upon. Many of the issues in this report reflect this.

### ***Enhance the environmental diversity and quality of rural Scotland***

- 3.10 Although most projects include environmental elements, the outcomes remain somewhat limited at this stage in the evaluation. The most obvious are the environmental improvements that each project makes to the land or property it is managing, from the refurbishment of property to the landscaping of car parks. There are examples of initiatives designed to provide protection for natural habitats and wildlife and the woodland projects aim to reverse a decline in the quality and condition of woodlands, including through natural regeneration. Windfarms and other energy generating schemes will also contribute to this objective.
- 3.11 Most of the projects are set within relatively high quality environments and so the sample does not particularly allow for exploration of the role which acquisition might play in stimulating derelict land reclamation or environmental enhancement (e.g. remediation of contaminated land). However, this might be anticipated as communities are more likely to acquire land which becomes a shared asset as opposed to a potential liability (at least in the short to medium term).

### ***Which projects are most successful***

- 3.12 It is still too early to identify clearly which projects are most successful. Because they aim to achieve slightly different things with different levels of resources any comparison would be misleading. However, there are some factors which seem to be associated with the stronger projects.
- **Clarity of objectives** – where projects have been delayed it has been because the original objectives are insufficiently clear and as a result there is disagreement over how the project is to be developed.

- **Support of the community** – most projects have had this and it needs to be maintained. One of the keys to this is seeing some tangible progress to enthuse the community. These can be called “quick wins” and for larger projects can be a useful tool for carrying community support.
- **Existing strength of community** – interesting that the island projects appear to be among the strongest. Perhaps this is because they are well defined communities, used to working with each other and more dependent on local services and facilities. In less remote communities there are options for some to travel to use other facilities.
- **Quality of leadership** – there is a direct correlation between the perceptions of the quality of the leadership and satisfaction with progress
- **Range of activities** – Projects seem to work well where the ownership of the asset is part of a larger portfolio of activity. This offers “something for everyone” in the community, rather than one project for a specific group. The more successful projects link a number of activities.
- **Location of the project** – in more successful projects, the asset is usually central to the community rather than physically at the margins of the community.
- **Responding to community need** – this is rather subjective, but the more important the asset to the community the greater the participation and benefits. For example, how important to the whole community is management of a woodland, compared to management of assets such as a local shop or care home?

3.13 Another dimension is the type of project. The property projects tend to be simpler to manage and more focussed. They may produce less community engagement, but in this sample they have produced direct tangible community benefits. Even where this is less clear we would argue that they have added some resilience to the community organisation leading them.

3.14 Of all the issues that the evaluation has identified so far, the most important is the extent to which projects are meeting the Land Fund’s overarching objective of contributing to *sustainable development* in rural Scotland. The main measure is how successfully the projects are able to build on the opportunities the Fund provides. This means looking beyond the immediate benefits of land ownership and management to a much wider set of community opportunities. The very act of land ownership strengthens the credibility and robustness of the Trusts or community groups and it is how this is then used to impact on wider community development which determines sustainability and long term impacts. In the good project

examples this is happening. In Killin for example, the ownership of the Care Home has also triggered thinking about how other services might also be provided. It is where the SLF and its projects act as a catalyst to bigger things that it will have the most significant impact on sustainable community development.

## 4 Issues for discussion and next steps

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4.1 This interim report covers the first year of the evaluation and the first 20 case studies. In starting the second year there are four main issues to consider:

- which projects should we return to and which new ones should be added to the sample
- is there a role for a wider community survey
- planning consultations with some of the partners
- refining the focus – particularly on projects that we are returning to

### Revisiting the projects

4.2 From the list of 20 projects in the current sample we suggest that it would be appropriate to revisit 15, via a telephone call in 2005. We would then identify five new projects to cover through face-to-face interviews and consultations, followed by a telephone interview the following year (2006). Given that so few projects have been fully completed it will more valuable to build on the results so far and identify benefits over time rather than start from scratch with a new sample. Many of the benefits reported were still ‘potentials’ at the time of the first visit, so a return to these initiatives would enable us to monitor progress.

4.3 Also, after several years, there will start to be a turnover of staff and volunteers leading these projects. This may impact on project development. The interviews undertaken as part of year two should investigate how any change in management is impacting on the original goals of the projects.

4.4 It is suggested that the 5 new case studies in 2005 should look to include two new variables: projects which have used the right-to-buy provisions of the new legislation, and projects which have been funded under the new rural community population threshold as mentioned previously.

Cases	Revisit
Morven Community Dev Co	Yes
North Harris Community Steering Group/ North Harris Trust	Yes
Auldearn Community Trust	Yes
Birse Community Trust	Yes
Gordon Community Woodland Association	Yes
LUCE 2000	Yes
North Ronaldsay Trust	Yes
Laide & Aultbea Community Woodland Group	Yes
Comrie Millennium Footpath Association	Yes
Dunnet Forestry Trust	Yes
Dalmally Community Company	Yes
Killin Care Trust	Yes
Gigha Land Steering Community Group/Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust	Yes
Strathfillan Community Development Trust	Yes
Iomairt Chille-Choman Community Group	Yes
Dornie Community Projects Group	No
Loch Katrine Community Trust	No
The Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust	No
Ballantrae Rural Initiative Care in the Community	No
Fort Augustus Abbey	No

#### Is there a role for a wider community survey

- 4.5 So far none of the case studies has involved a community survey. In part this is because the initial contact was needed to understand the project and meet the community groups before this could be considered. It is also because the community groups have not generally been particularly keen on the idea. In several cases they have done their own surveys and do not want the community bothered with more. In other cases they believe that they have no need for one and were reluctant to let consultants organise one.
- 4.6 Now that we have interviewed all the projects, it may be appropriate to consider which projects would be most appropriate for a beneficiary study and how it could be used to support the community group. This could be done as part of the second year work, restricting it to 1 or 2 case studies and surveying through schools to reach a wider group of potential project beneficiaries.

### **Consultations with some of the partners**

4.7 One element still missing from the work so far is input from the Fund's main partners, particularly HIE and the CLU. These should be carried out early in 2005 to provide another perspective on the results to date. Suggestions for consultations include:

- Scottish Enterprise (Julian Pace - who is also an SLF Committee member)
- Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department
- SNH
- Forestry Commission
- Highland Council
- SLF Committee

### **Refining the focus – particularly on projects that we are returning to**

4.8 The evaluation thus far has raised many interesting issues around the use of the Fund and particularly the way that it can contribute more widely to community development. We have sought to identify the benefits and some of the factors that have influenced the success or otherwise of the projects. This leads to a number of hypotheses that can be tested during future visits and as part of the assessment of new projects. For example, one of the most critical aspects of the support will be how the engagement and participation of the community is sustained over time. It will also be important to identify some of the spin off benefits. For example, have projects actually realised some of the potential benefits that they are aiming for but has it also led to other services or facilities being developed.

4.9 The interview guide that was developed in stage one should be revised for the follow up interviews with less emphasis on the activity that has taken place and more on the wider influence that the SLF project has had on the development of the community.

4.10 A final aspect to revisit in 2005 will be to review the overall data on SLF awards to date. This will not change the findings from the projects which have been covered so far, but will help to put the evaluation in context and provide a current account of what support has been given to different types of projects across Scotland.