

Summary of Morvern Community Woodland’s presentation and discussion event

Lochaline Village Hall, 29th July 2018

Attendance: Veronique Walraven Chair MCW, Alasdair Firth Vice Chair MCW, Sally Semple Secretary MCW, Sam Firth Treasurer MCW, Tim Barnes, Director MCW, Nick Tordoff, Director MCW, Ian Hepburn, Chair Community Land Scotland, Angela Williams, Vice Chair Community Land Scotland and 42 members of the public (approx. 36 local residents).

The meeting was opened by Sam Firth, who outlined how it was proposed to run with presentations followed by small group discussions and then questions.

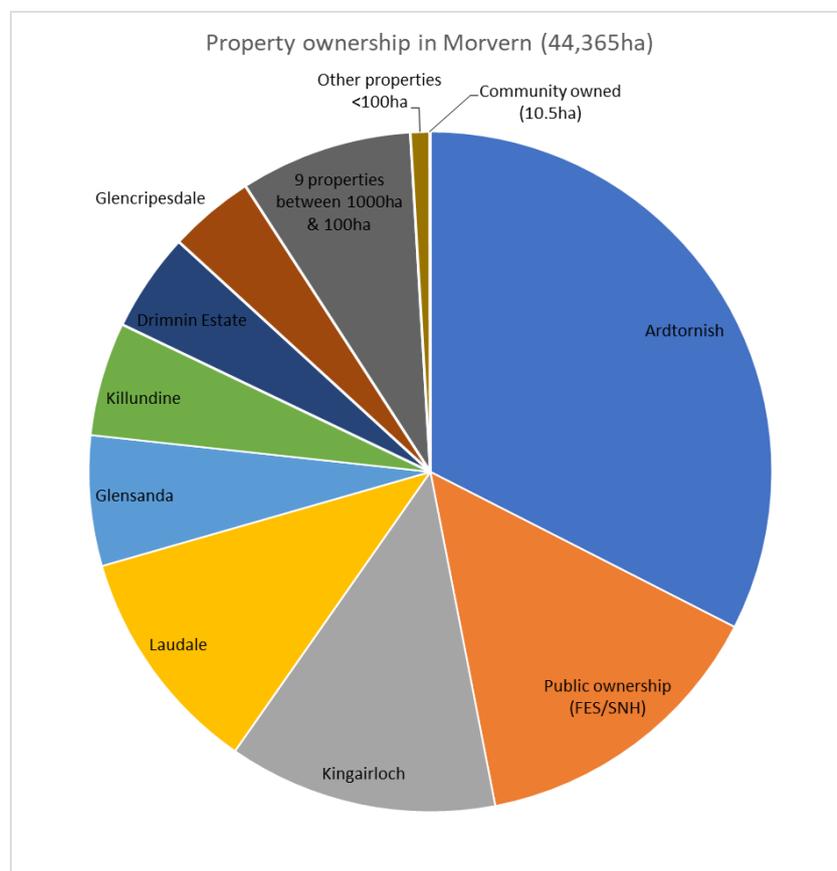
Presentations

Presentation 1 - Veronique Walraven, chair of MCW

Veronique Walraven gave a presentation on the work MCW is currently doing on community ownership.

Killundine Estate – feasibility of community ownership

In the last two years MCW – in cooperation with MCDC (Morvern Community Development Company) – have held two well attended consultations about land management in Morvern. MCW also organised a visit to community owned sites in North West and South West Mull and engaged a consultant to look into the creation of woodland crofts in Morvern. It is clear through those consultations and community engagements that there is a strong desire in Morvern for people to connect with the land they live on. This could mean people working on the land they live on, or working with land in other ways. But it is nearly impossible to achieve this because the community doesn’t actually own any substantial amount of land.



Veronique illustrated these points with a pie chart showing current land-ownership in Morvern.

Killundine Estate is approximately 2400 hectares. It has a wide variety of different land-uses, including woodlands, some of which are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (areas of high conservation value), conifer plantations, good fields, substantial hill ground and 5 residential properties. The residential properties are all currently unoccupied and there are ongoing changes in the way the farm is being managed. MCW has been made aware that the current owners are minded to sell in the near future. MCW thinks that Killundine has the potential to fulfil the needs that have been established in consultations and in other discussions and are in the process of putting a CRtB application together for the estate.

CRtB stands for Community Right to Buy. If CRtB is registered on the Estate, this would give the community first refusal, if and when the estate comes on the market. It will give the community time to establish the facts, get a full feasibility study done and business plan made. It will give time to do several community consultations to establish what the community would like to do with the estate. After that a ballot will take place in which the majority of the voters need to be in favour. CRtB application does NOT mean that the community WILL buy the estate. It just gives the community the opportunity to work out whether this would make sense.

In the last few months MCW has made contact with the land agent for the estate, has sought advice from Scottish Government's Community Land Team and Highlands & Islands Enterprise, as well as Kate Forbes, the local MSP and Community Land Scotland, the representative body for community landowners. Ian Hepburn and Angela Williams (chair and vice-chair of Community Land Scotland) also attended the meeting in Lochaline.

MCW has written a short report about the established needs in the community and how Killundine can potentially help the community to address these needs. This has been published on the local website, morvern.org. <http://www.morvern.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Morvern-Community-Woodlands-Community-Right-to-Buy-Aims-Objectives-for-Killundine.pdf>

Veronique gave an outline of the work that MCW have done so far to bring together information about currently unfulfilled community needs. So far, MCW have identified the following needs that community land ownership could help address:

- Building a connection between people and land. People who live and work locally have little say in how their environment is managed for future generations and have difficulty in being actively involved in working on the land or influencing its management.
- Supporting the school roll. Without a school you don't have a community. To give an idea of the importance of this, if no families move into the area within the next year, the school roll will drop below 18 which means that it is likely that the school will be losing half a teacher.
- Affordable housing with land. About half of the houses closest to Killundine Estate are second homes. The Scottish national average of second homes amongst dwellings is 4%. In the Highlands the average is 6%. We recognise that second home owners contribute to the community, but they also raise the price of houses, and this means that almost all young people cannot buy a house here and have to live in low quality accommodation or stay with parents. In a place where access to urban centres is always going to be an issue, land

associated with housing can mitigate some of these issues and provide opportunities for work.

- Bringing new skills into the community. There is a lack of locally skilled people for many jobs including building work, infrastructure, medical and care work and other crucial support services.
- Supporting local young people who want to stay in the community. There is a lack of training and job opportunities in the community.
- Enterprise and opportunity. There is a lack of land for developing small business enterprises.
- Supporting an ageing population. A support network needs to be built around maintaining or bringing in a similar number of workers to that which currently exists, and at the moment that continues to decline.
- Protection of Morvern's special habitats. MCW consider that the people who live and work in Morvern are the custodians of these habitats and have a moral obligation to look after them.

Of these needs, MCW consider some a priority and are considering actions which would address them:

- Crofts can genuinely connect people to the land. MCW have investigated woodland crofts to some extent, but other forms of crofting also have potential and these can be investigated further.
- Not enough people living in Morvern are working in forestry. There is potential for an increase in commercial forestry on the estate and silvicultural management of broadleaved woodlands.
- Protection and restoration work of some of the natural habitats like peat restoration, and the removal of rhododendrons can be incorporated into wider estate management and supported by grants as well as expertise from the non-governmental sectors.
- Capitalisation of tourism can be improved upon. It will be difficult to increase tourist numbers, but low volume high value tourism has currently unfulfilled potential.

How will this financially stack up?

The main activities that can generate income that have been considered so far are:

- High value tourism
- Forestry and woodlands
- Renewable energy
- Business creation

- Agriculture
- Property and land rental
- Deer management and stalking

The protection of natural habitats in Morvern sounds expensive, but for many conservation initiatives like woodland restoration, an organisation such as MCW is likely to get 100% funding. Wherever possible, this money will go directly to someone locally doing the work. This means that although it might not generate money, it should not cost money either, and the real value is in local work. MCW recognises that in a small community this has to be managed carefully to ensure that all involvement of individuals is fair and transparent.

Veronique said that MCW are very lucky in having a board of directors that stands with their feet in the community. Directors have done decades of community work in other committees on the peninsula, including Morvern Games and Gala Week, Lochaline Primary School parent council, MCDC, Drimnin Village Hall, Lochaline Village Hall and Morvern Players (among others).

MCW are keen to take any queries of any member of the community on board. The following questions have been asked previously:

Q: When will you be putting your CRtB application in?

A: There is a process that we need to follow: a change of constitution (which we will be approving at AGM), a form that we need to fill in, signatures of 10% of local voters (already achieved), a very precise map and some other additional information. This is taking more time than anticipated but will be complete in the near future.

Q: Will a CRtB application delay the timber road?

A: MCW have sought advice about this. MCW is in support of keeping the heavy transport off the Drimnin road. This is the real community need and MCW are all grateful to the community council for making sure that that need has been satisfied. A timber road is not the only option for getting the timber out. Extraction by sea is also being considered. However, if it turns out that the timber road is the best solution, we understand that the landowners who will be benefitting financially from this timber road, can put in an application to the Strategic Timber Transport Fund, even if it is unclear at the moment who will be owner of Killundine in the future. A community buy-out of the estate should not delay the process.

Q: Aren't crofts really complicated to set up? What about de-crofting?

A: Crofts are indeed complicated to set up and MCW would need the services of a crofting lawyer to do this, as other community land managers have done. However, MCW feel that crofts will be incredibly beneficial for Morvern as a whole and it is possible to set them up in such a way that they cannot be de-crofted. This is what MCW consider "twenty-first century crofting" may be.

Presentation 2 – Jamie Bolt and India Annand, local residents

Jamie and his partner India gave a short presentation about prospects for young people in the community like themselves.

Jamie and India are looking for affordable housing that comes with land in order to develop their businesses. Without this, there are low prospects for young people to stay on the peninsula and many have to live with parents or relations. This means that many young people like themselves with a connection to Morvern and contributions to make to the community are forced to move away.

Jamie said that a community buy-out of Killundine could help him and India to develop their business. He has a vision of expanding the business and hopes to employ someone in the future. To achieve this, they would need a place to live and to work, which Killundine could provide.

Presentation 3 – Sam Firth, treasurer MCW

Sam Firth gave a short presentation about community land ownership in Knoydart and how this has affected the peninsula.

Sam lived in Knoydart for seven years before coming to Morvern and was chair of the Knoydart Trading company. Knoydart was purchased for the community in 1999 and is about to celebrate 20 years of community land ownership.

In Knoydart, the community land ownership model is continuing to present new opportunities both for community projects and for new small business created by young people who are moving to the Highlands and who have grown up in the area and are returning. There are also several young people on the island under the age of forty who are now running small scale farms.

Community land ownership has also enabled people to buy land to build their own houses through a shared equity scheme.

Sam gave examples of community enterprise in Knoydart and the establishment of a larder to process and package venison from the state and a community shop. Knoydart Forest Trust have won awards for both their community and conservation work. The organisation also sells firewood and mills timber for local housing.

Sam suggested that all these enterprises and opportunities were ones that the community hadn't even dreamt of when they purchased the estate.

Most current community projects require permission to use land, and this is most easily achieved if the land is in community ownership.

MCW believes that the best way to conserve our natural habitats and heritage is by ensuring people stay in engaged with the land and are invested in it for future generations.

Question on the timber transport road

Following the presentations, a question was raised about MCW's commitment to the timber road. This was with regard to many residents' concerns that timber may be extracted and transported on the B849 Drimnin road, which would damage the road and cause a major nuisance and potential hazard for local residents. The issues surrounding timber transport in Rannoch were mentioned in relation to this.

MCW's chair and directors re-iterated their commitment to finding a solution to the issue of timber transport on the Drimnin Road and stated that community ownership of Killundine would make this even more of an imperative for the organisation, since timber also needs to be extracted from Killundine Estate. This would be one of the first priorities of the six-month feasibility and consultation process. It was also suggested the existing landowners could put together an application to the STTF without the owners of Killundine Estate on the understanding that ownership of Killundine may change hands before April 2019.

There was mention of a weight limit being placed on the Drimnin Road, however this caused some concerns that the timber would then be transported in smaller loads causing more nuisance. MCW subsequently received a complaint that this issue was not discussed or answered properly at the meeting. MCW replied to apologise for this.

In response to these and other concerns, MCW are now in discussion with neighbouring landowners about the timber road.

Discussion session

A round-table discussion session followed. Specific questions were referred to, which some groups addressed directly while others focussed on specific issues. Following discussion, a participant at each table presented their discussion to the whole room. The asked initially were:

- 1) *What might be the benefits/advantages of the community owning Killundine Estate?*
- 2) *What might be the risks/disadvantages of the community owning Killundine Estate?*
- 3) *How might we reduce those risks?*

The following tables summarise the round-table discussions

Type	Benefit	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group E	Group F	Group G	Group H
Economic	Income generation for the community	✓	✓			✓			
Environmental	Balanced and community-controlled land management	✓		✓	✓				
Environmental	Restoration of farmland	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓
Environmental	Restoration of buildings and heritage	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓
Environmental	Protection of natural environment and heritage						✓		
Environmental	Landscape scale management	✓							
Environmental	Opportunities for conservation management	✓				✓			
Social	Employment opportunities					✓			
Social	Increase working age population	✓							
Social	Support aging population	✓							
Social	Opportunities for young people	✓							✓
Social	Opportunities for farming	✓	✓			✓			✓
Social	Opportunities for small business	✓	✓		✓	✓			
Social	Provide affordable accommodation with land	✓			✓				✓
Social	Opportunity to exploit or profit from natural assets	✓							
Social	Increase community robustness	✓							
Social	Building new community	✓	✓			✓			
Social	Provide access for recreation	✓	✓						
Social	Bring new skills into the community							✓	
Social	Opportunities for education and learning	✓	✓			✓			

Type	Risk	Solutions identified by participants, including MCW directors
Economic	Taking funding away from other opportunities	MCW should balance community land ownership against other community needs.
Economic	Risk management	The strategy and full business plan should incorporate sections on risk management.
Economic	Lack of possibilities for income generation	The full business plan must explore this in detail. If it is not feasible, the community should not pursue it.
Economic	Difficulties of finding funding	The full business plan must explore this in detail (additional note by facilitator: Highlands and Islands Enterprise are likely to input funding towards developing business plan and identifying funding sources).
Economic	Lack of expert knowledge	Planned management must incorporate expert input from within and outwith the community. Management committee must include people with relevant experience (additional note by facilitator: Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Community Land Scotland and Community Woodland Association have experience and are supportive).
Environmental	Overdevelopment	Plan should identify acceptable limits of development.
Environmental	Increase in road traffic	Focus should be on low volume high value business, including tourism.
Environmental	Lack of expert knowledge	Planned management must incorporate expert input from within and outwith the community. Management committee must include people with relevant experience (additional note by facilitator: Woodland Trust and Scottish Wildlife Trust are supportive).
Environmental	Poor land management – environmental	Ongoing oversight and monitoring is needed to enable adaptive management. This must be incorporated into the plan.
Environmental	Crofts can be detrimental to other interests	Balance needs to be sought between crofting and other landuses. Management structure should permit maximum oversight of landuse.
Environmental	Killundine fold of Highland cattle's bloodline lost	Efforts can be made to maintain the genetic and heritage interest of the Killundine fold.
Environmental	Assets on the estate could be sold off to its detriment	Plan must identify acceptable limits of future asset transfers.
Social	Delay resolution of timber transport	Negotiations over timber road will initially be highest priority.
Social	Remoteness of location, distance from Lochaline	Unavoidable – no solutions identified. Has positives as well as negatives.
Social	Taking focus away from other opportunities	Improving the relationships between different community groups and spreading the load between different parts of the population is crucial.
Social	Housing needs assessment (query)	Housing needs assessment was completed a few years back (2015). May need updated?
Social	Community anxiety	Openness and transparency will allow community to be fully involved. There is a need for more integration and mixing.

Social	Failure could make the community look bad	Having a clear message of why this is being done and involving the wider community in this can help minimise negative publicity. MCW recognise that adverse publicity could be an issue.
Social	Difficulties selecting who lives and works there	Structure needs to incorporate system for independent allocation of tenancies or asset transfer.
Social	Structure could be abused for minority interests	Structure needs to reflect the wide community, be inclusive and be democratic. Trust or charity structure may be relevant.
Social	Conflict with Lochaline/Drimnin	This has been an issue in the past. However, lying between the two communities, Killundine is an opportunity to bring different people together.
Social	Lack of expert knowledge – social	The full business plan will explore this in detail. HIE will input funding towards developing business plan and identifying funding sources and support. James Hutton Institute and Plunkett Foundation have also expressed interest in being involved.
Social	Population increase effecting the peninsular	Limits need to be identified. However, this is necessary if community is to remain sustainable while aging.
Social	Crofts are not fair use of land	Crofts are fairer than many other landuses, including private landownership by a single owner.
Social	Issues with crofting tenancies which can lead to poor use or abandonment of land	Crofting tenancies will be set up taking into account the complexities of crofting legislation. Solicitors who can support this have been identified.
Social	Drain on voluntary resources	There is a need for more and wider input from the community. Need to engage more widely. Long term, a paid employee is needed.
Social	Creating a culture of handouts	Management structure will enable hard work to be rewarded. Structure could incorporate means for assets to be taken back into community ownership if they are not being used towards wider objectives.
Social	Crofts can look unsightly	Basic conditions will be put in place to ensure that development or activities on crofts have no overall negative impact. The plan will be to move away from clearfell forestry towards continuous cover, so there would be less issue with this in the long term than in other areas of forestry in Morvern

Questions to the MCW board and Community Land Scotland

Questions were opened up to the floor.

1. Where are we in the CRtB process? How long will it take to register and interest and where are we in the process?

Veronique Walraven & Sam Firth: The board started the process of registering an interest in Killundine in February this year. There are only a couple of things for the application we need to complete and these are 1) adopting our new constitution 2) providing a draft business plan and 3) providing maps to accompany the deeds for the estate.

2. How much will the government fund the purchase? Would this be a grant or Loan?

Ian Hepburn: The Community Land Fund committed 94% funding to the purchase of Ulva which was 100% grant. We would hope for a similar proportion.

3. How will the community manage risk, especially financial risk where grants may be needed for sustainability?

Ian Hepburn: The community should always consider the worst case scenarios and work back from there. The Estate would need to be run as a business – but all profit would be directly re-invested in the Estate and the community. The assets should be looked at from scratch – how they could be used best, rather than how they are currently being used. At the same time, it is essential to have a clear vision and not to follow grants opportunistically. It always needs to be clear what the business' vision is: investment back into the community

4. How long did Knoydart take to become financially sustainable?

Angela Williams: The condition of Knoydart Estate when it was purchased by the community was very poor and it was a very difficult project because of the sheer amount of dilapidated buildings and the condition of the village hydro scheme. It was a significant challenge.

5. Are MCW still planning to go ahead with registering an interest?

Veronique Walraven: Yes. We feel we have a mandate as 35 people were present at our AGM last year when we proposed it and over 50 people have signed a petition supporting the registration. However, the only way of really knowing the full level of community support is an independently run ballot of residents.

6. No-one is currently living on Killundine. Has a community purchase ever happened on land where people don't live?

Angela Williams: Yes. One of the very first community buy-outs was at Assynt where crofters bought land which none of them lived on at the time.

7. What structures will MCW put in place?

Veronique Walraven: MCW are looking at developing a steering group which will have MCW directors and individuals from the community with knowledge and expertise in different areas. In the longer-term, management structures for Killundine would be developed following CRtB phase, but they could be on similar lines to this and would ensure balance of interests.

Additional points

MCW directors are aware that points may have been made that were not noted down during or after the table discussions. Many points were made and it was hard to summarise them all in the time available. It is planned that future consultations would have independent moderators.

A number of people left before the discussion session. It is important that people feel their contributions will be listened to and taken on board. There needs to be opportunities created for anyone to give views by other means, formally or informally. MCW were aware few people attended the meeting from the village of Lochaline which has the highest density of population in Morvern. The number of people at the meeting who had come from Drimnin may be because of its proximity to Killundine but also demonstrates that the issue of timber transport on the road remains a concern.

Further efforts need to be made to engage with Lochaline residents and a stall is planned at games day.

There have been previous discussions with other individuals and community groups. MCW are continuing to liaise with these groups and have approached Morvern Community Trust to ask for their input.

MCW - 09/07/2018