



Morvern Community Woodlands

Community Right to Buy Application for Killundine

Aims and Objectives

June 2018

Context

This report has been written by Rhona Sampson on behalf of Morvern Community Woodlands (MCW) and is based both on independent research and two public community consultations that took place in Lochaline, Morvern run by MCW and Morvern Community Development Company (MCDC); “The Future of Morvern’s Forests” March 6th 2016, Lochaline Village Hall and “Who Manages Morvern’s Landscape?”, Lochaline Village Hall, March 17th 2017. Full reports from these consultations are available at <http://www.morvern.org>.

This report sets out the needs within the community that Morvern Community Woodlands considers community ownership of the Killundine Estate would help to address.

It is written within the context of submitting a Community Right To Buy (CRTB) Application. A CRTB application would allow the community the time and resources to conduct a more detailed study and in depth consultation within the community.

The CRTB application is not about MCW buying the estate, but starting the process to give the community the opportunity of ownership.

The CRTB application would allow the community to bring in qualified experts to conduct a financial feasibility study of the estate and create a detailed business plan. Partnerships with other organisations and community bodies could also be considered at this stage.

On this basis a decision could be taken as to whether to apply for public funds and raise the finance to purchase the estate and through which community body this should be done. The final decision to proceed would be made through an independently run ballot of the resident community of Morvern.

For clarification MCW considers “the community” to consist of all of the residents of the Morvern peninsular as defined by postcode.

Overview

This report focuses on three main questions:

1. What needs within the community might community ownership of Killundine help to address?
2. How would these be prioritised?
3. Which of these proposals might generate income to help meet running/operational costs?

We have identified the needs of the Morvern community that community ownership of Killundine would help to address:

The need to rebuild the connection between people and land in Morvern

The need for affordable housing with accompanying land

The need to diversify the population and attract skills to the area

The need for young families to maintain the existing school role

The need to retain and attract young people to the area

The need to create opportunities for enterprise and employment

The need to support the existing ageing population

The need to protect natural habitats in Morvern and prevent the loss of natural heritage

These needs can be met by ensuring a balance between the social, economic and environmental aspects of development in Morvern. They address the issue of the long-term viability of the resident community. Of these needs the priorities based on community consultation are:

Increasing opportunities for 21st century crofting

The preservation of the peninsula's rural heritage

Increasing engagement with Morvern's forestry

The conservation and restoration of the peninsula's natural heritage

The capitalisation of visitors to the area through minor tourist enterprises providing benefit to existing local businesses and opportunities for new businesses

The main activities that might generate income are:

Forestry and Woodlands

Energy and Enterprises

Business creation and tourism

Agriculture

Property and land rental

Stalking

Detailed Report

1. What needs within the community might community ownership of Killundine help to address?

The Morvern peninsula shares many issues common to rural communities in the West Highlands and Islands. Most notably, a marked depopulation over the preceding century, (driven by changes in agricultural policy and land management), has coincided with a demographic shift from young to old, as a result of increasing youth migration to urban centres, and an influx of ageing or elderly residents from other parts of the UK. The resultant drop in the working age population, correlated with a lack of available employment opportunities on the peninsula, has led to a corresponding drop in families and children, reducing the school roll to precarious levels (currently around 20). Those children who are brought up in the area often move away after school, occasionally to the city, but usually to better-connected rural areas with a larger proportion of younger residents and more diverse employment opportunities.

Youth migration may be anecdotally attributed to two main factors: lack of employment, but more importantly, lack of opportunities for progression, or personal and professional development within existing available employment. Young people in Morvern with an interest in agriculture, woodlands or horticulture, are generally unable to remain in the area either for training or employment, since existing landowners have neither the resources nor the requirement for additional personnel, and leasing or purchase of land for agricultural purposes is nearly impossible. While a lack of affordable housing may also be considered a contributing factor, the lack of employment or business development opportunities (including a lack of business premises) form a crucial sticking point.

Through the acquisition of Killundine Estate, the aim would be to provide opportunities for employment and skills development, focusing on rural and agricultural pursuits, in an attempt to encourage people of working age to remain in the peninsula. The Killundine buyout would therefore go some way to addressing the demographic shift and the resulting stress on public services, such as schools, the NHS and emergency services, many of which are run on a voluntary basis and provide vital support to the population.

Connections with forestry and land management in Morvern are vital but lacking. Community ownership of the forestry on Killundine would go some way towards a route to bring back large and small-scale forestry skills into the community.

The estate has a total of five uninhabited properties, the aim would be to bring these back into use as tenanted properties, generating a modest rental income and providing accommodation for those involved in the management of the estate. The aim would be to engage the services of local residents where possible.

The long-term degradation of natural habitats in Morvern and loss of our natural heritage was identified as a key priority for many local residents. In particular Morvern has some of the most outstanding native woodlands in Europe and yet these are under

significant threat. The Drimnin to Killundine Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest is in unfavourable declining condition. Management by the community would aim to bring this site into favourable condition as caretakers for future generations.

Community ownership of the Estate could be compatible with the proposed development of a forestry link road for timber haulage from the Estate and from neighbouring landlocked commercial forestry blocks to the north-west, where this development facilitates the Estate's forest management, delivers wider community benefit and permanently safeguards the public road infrastructure from heavy goods traffic.

2. How would these be prioritised?

Multiple consultations and community meetings have indicated strong support for crofting and the restoration of the peninsula's rural heritage. The formation of new crofts or starter farms to support families and young people would be a priority.

Another key priority would be the protection and preservation of existing habitats within the Killundine estate boundary. In addition to hill grazing and pastures, Killundine contains a number of habitats of particular interest, including native broadleaved woodland, which could offer further potential for employment through expansion and management of productive woodland areas. Increasing the scope and diversity of woodland on the Estate could offer direct employment or training opportunities, and present further opportunities to capitalise on this asset through sustainable/eco-tourism.

Finally, the attraction of visitors to the area through minor tourist enterprises would be of benefit to local businesses. The remote location, coupled with an ageing road infrastructure, means that the wider community (in its existing form) is unlikely to be able to sustain a substantial increase in visitors numbers without some detrimental consequences. However, capitalising on existing visitors to the area and a small-scale increase, could offer opportunities for a range of different types of small business.

3. Which proposals would generate income to help meet running/operational costs?

A basic understanding of profit and loss teaches us that land or property that costs more to maintain than it generates in revenue, is likely to be unsustainable.

Based on the premise that a large proportion of the land purchased would be managed in accordance with a crofting/farming model, with small rents countered by responsibility for maintenance of boundaries and drainage, the on going costs of the Estate would be any liabilities incurred during the buyout, and the maintenance of property. Each element of the estate, (woodlands, enterprise, property, energy) will contribute to overall costs, and where possible, to generate an overall profit which may be used to cover additional overheads or liabilities.

As a majority of the estate has been operated as a working farm until very recently, the land is reasonably maintained, with the majority of pastures in good condition. It is therefore anticipated that on going maintenance of land and boundaries by tenant farmers or crofters, undertaken at their own expense, would satisfy the estate's obligations in this regard.

However, additional schemes required to add value and generate income to the estate will be required to support the ongoing maintenance of property and the provision of employment, and repay any liabilities incurred during the buyout. The following proposals have been considered as potential sources of revenue generation over the short, long and medium term:

1. Forestry and Woodlands

There is an opportunity to generate an income stream in the short-term from commercial conifer harvesting given that the majority of the Estate's commercial conifer woodlands have reached economic maturity. This income stream will support woodland management and investment in other areas of the Estate, such as upgrading property.

The on going management and maintenance of woodland could generate returns over the medium-to-long term. Forestry on the estate could become a major source of income, with a portion of this income staying within the community through value added wood and timber products.

2. Energy and Enterprises

Several estates on the Morvern peninsula have benefited from the opportunities that renewable energy has to offer, in the form of hydro schemes on qualifying waterways. Killundine Estate has a river running through it, and substantial areas of hill ground, which could offer opportunities for investment in renewable energy. If demonstrated to be feasible, this could offer a sustainable source of income to the estate across its operational life, perhaps eventually providing power to the estate itself. Opportunities for sustainably energy generation lie mainly on the hill ground of the estate with a number of feeder burns with hydro potential.

3. Business creation and tourism

Killundine Farmhouse and the surrounding outbuildings offer an excellent opportunity to develop this area as the 'Estate Hub', potentially providing either direct tourist services, or premises for local businesses and start-ups, generating revenue from premises rental. Woodland and environment-related tourism could also generate revenue across the short, medium and longer term. There is also an opportunity for craft-based business in Morvern.

The sustainable contribution of tourism as a revenue stream has yet to be fully ascertained, bearing in mind the desire to balance visitor numbers with the hidden costs of: 1) increased traffic on a primary transport, 2) seasonal employment, and 3)

potential damage to the environment. However, the proximity of a local distillery at Drimnin is likely to increase visitor numbers to the area.

Once any liabilities have been fully repaid, the community body managing Killundine (through the appropriate democratic structures) will be able to reassess the needs within the community, and the current financial climate, and adjust the running of the estate to suit. The inclusion of residents in the management of the local landscape is the key driver behind MCW's exploration of the Community Right to Buy (CRTB), and the involvement of the community with the estate's ongoing management is crucial to the bid.

Rhona Sampson May 2018