

***“Have you ever wondered how a community-owned Estate would benefit our village?”***

## **PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

**Leadhills Village Hall, Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> January**

The public meeting started at 2.40pm with the attendance of 93 people.

Andrew Foley opened the Public Meeting welcoming the attendees and introducing the speakers.

David Cameron, chair of Community Land Scotland, and former chair of the North Harris Trust, talked about community land ownership in Scotland.

John Hutchison, chair of Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust, spoke about the achievements of their Trust. Eigg Estate was purchased by the community.

Andrew Foley spoke about how community land ownership had a potential to benefit families and the community of Leadhills.

Robert Campbell spoke about community land ownership being instrumental to keep the pub-hotel in business and contribute to local employment.

Anjo Abelaira spoke about how community land ownership could be used to develop tourism, benefit local businesses, and provide local employment.

Matt McColm spoke about how community land ownership could be used to develop land-based business such as farming to the benefit of the community.

Pat Wilders spoke about community land ownership and the village built environment and infrastructure.

Sean Henderson spoke about how community land ownership could provide employment opportunities in the village.

Emma Dolphin spoke about community land ownership being a decision to be taken by the community.

The talks were followed by a question & answer session where the following issues were discussed:

**Q: Given the conservation status of the village, how would the South Lanarkshire Council allow things to happen if land was community owned?**

A: This is an issue that needs to be taken into consideration and there are clear restrictions. This issue will need to be brought up with the local authority. It was noted that planning issues can be looked at more favourably in community-run Estates. There are also examples from other community-run Estates, such as North Harris, where they have created a working relationship (they have turned the negatives into positives and receive £15,000 a year for conservation purposes). It was also mentioned that having a community body can give more credibility in this respect.

**Q: What land boundaries are we concentrated on?**

A: These decisions would be made by the Steering Committee formed after the public meeting. There is an option to buy the entire Estate or a part of the Estate.

**Q: What is the legal basis for community-based acquisitions? Can community force it or do you need a willing seller?**

A: In order for the community to buy the land, there needs to be a willing seller. In the first instance, the community registers an interest in the Estate or parts of the Estate. This gives the community the right to buy over anyone else if the Estate decides to sell at any point in the future. Once the community has registered an interest to buy, there is no obligation to buy.

The forthcoming review on Land Reform legislation may or may not change the conditions of the acquisition. At this point, the MSPs present at the meeting, Aileen Campbell and Claudia Beamish, noted that they are happy to keep the village updated with regards to the Land Reform review and provide any support needed.

**Q: Has Lord Hopetoun been approached to sell the Estate?**

A: No approach has been made by the Estate to sell the land. The purpose of the meeting is to bring the idea to the community before approaching Lord Hopetoun.

**Other interventions:** In this context, Lord Hopetoun's Estate factor introduced himself to the attendees and gave his full commitment to engaging in an open dialogue and cooperation with the community with any ideas that come through.

**Q: Is the purpose of this meeting to ask the community whether they want to register the right to buy?**

A: Yes.

**Other interventions:** it was emphasised that sustainability of local businesses such as the shop and the hotel are dependent on the continued support of the locals and visitors alike. In this respect, it was also noted that should people have the choice to be based locally (rather than commuting elsewhere) there would be more support for local businesses. It was also noted that there is evidence that the more sense of community ownership there is, the more support there is likely to be for local businesses.

**Q: What would be the role/power of local authority if the community decides to buy the land, for instance with respect to potential school closures?**

It is important to look at the make-up of the Community Company. There is scope to have local authority representatives in these.

In North Harris they are currently trying to find the best way of working together with the local authority.

An example was given with respect to Sweden where they have successfully managed to make rural schools successful and attract children from surrounding areas (under the label of 'turn the school buses around').

It was also noted that in Leadhills there has been successful cooperation with the local authority with respect to past projects (e.g. the swing park).

**Other interventions:** At this point it was noted that in the village the issue was focused on whether things were owned by the Council or the Estate (e.g. roads). The village has major infrastructure issues in Leadhills. Many of the houses are not connected to the sewage system. Many of the roads are not surfaced in an adequate way. It was pointed out that together with the involvement of the Council, the Estate and the community the aim should be to improve these. An opinion was voiced that if these key issues could not be agreed on, then a community buyout is a red herring. At this point, it was also noted that as a community we could address these issues. In this respect, a point was made that the smaller you make the potential buyout the more difficult it can be work-wise. A suggestion was made to purchase as much land as possible in the Estate.

**Q: How will this be funded?**

A: This was to be discussed as part of the next steps presentation by the Scottish Government

The floor was given to representatives of the Scottish Government's Community Right to Buy department, Stuart Hartil and Colin Gray, and a representative of the Scottish Land Fund, Catherine Francis, who summarised the next steps in the right to buy process.

The following issues were mentioned:

- The need to form a company that is limited by a guarantee.
- At the time of registering an interest, there is no need for many details (e.g. in the form of a business plan etc.). What is needed is broad ideas (e.g. improvement of infrastructure, social housing etc.). The most important question to address is why this is in the public interest.
- There is a requirement of at least 10 percent of community support in order to register an interest to buy the Estate or part of the Estate.
- It is useful to have a feasibility study ready. When the land comes to the market, having a feasibility study will help the ministers to take a decision and help to get funding.
- The right to buy legislation has been round for 10 years and there have been many examples of communities who have chosen this way. Hence, there is plenty of experience and plenty of contacts available for guidance.
- Scottish Land Fund can provide funding for a community buyout. It is funded by the Scottish Government and there is funding available when a community reaches the stage of buying land.

Andrew Foley pointed out that Support forms and Feedback forms were available at the entrance of the Hall and asked for those interested to sign them and hand them over to the speakers or at the pub. Should village support to register an interest to buy the Estate be over 10 percent, a Steering Group would be created with the purpose of creating a community company, put forward proposals for a community-owned Estate, and register an interest to buy the Estate on behalf of the Community.

The following attendees volunteered to be part of the Steering Group which would be formed should there be over 10% of community support: Anjo Abelaira, Andrew Foley, Robert Campbell, Jan Halfpenny, Sean Henderson, Phil Matthews, Matt McColm, Callum McKelvey, Harry McRandle, Martin Pinkus, Rachel Price, Heidi Vironen, Pat Wilders.

Meeting closed at 5.30pm.