

The Langholm 2nd Stage Community Land Buy Out

'Doubling the size of the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve'

Frequently Asked Questions

Written on 27/10/2021

The purpose of this document is to address questions that have been submitted directly to us over the past few months. It will be a live document and we will update it with any further questions come into us.

As has been the case throughout the community land buy-out process, if you would like any further information or your own question is not answered below, please feel free to contact the Langholm Initiative directly through admin@langholminitiative.co.uk.

Question	Answer
<i>Why the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve and not Langholm Moor?</i>	<p>Langholm Moor covers a much wider area than the area in community ownership. It is important that we are clear on what is owned by the community and there was a concern that an assumption would be made that the entirety of Langholm Moor was being managed as part of the new reserve.</p> <p>If the second stage purchase is successful the new reserve will include the catchment of the River Tarras which flows North to South through the heart of the reserve.</p> <p>It was also important to reflect that the reserve includes habitats other than moorland such as ancient woodland, river valley, peatlands and meadows.</p>
<i>What is likely to happen to this land if the community don't buy it?</i>	<p>If the community does not achieve its aspiration to purchase this area, it is likely that the land will be sold on the open market.</p> <p>Over the past two years since the original valuation was carried out land prices have increased greatly. This is much to do with the increasing value on carbon on land. If we are unable to raise the funds and the property goes on the open market it is likely that it will push this land beyond community reach. We will have very little or no say in the future of this land. This may limit our plans for achieving landscape scale nature recovery and playing a key role in regenerating our community.</p> <p>If we are unsuccessful the most likely purchaser is a private investment company (or similar organisation). There is currently a high level of corporate land banking happening in the area for commercial forestry and wind farms.</p>

	<p>This opportunity to own the land is highly unlikely to happen again so it's so important we do our best to secure it for the benefit of the community into the future.</p>
<p><i>Why do you need more land when you already have 5,200 acres?</i></p>	<p>The original aim was always to purchase the full 10,500 acres and this is what the original business plan was based upon; so this is not something new.</p> <p>We were unable to progress the purchase of this remaining 5,300 acres last time due to funding deadlines so this has been held exclusively for our community until May 2022 to try and raise the funds to buy it and complete the Tarras Valley nature reserve.</p> <p>It's about finishing the job that we originally started in our last campaign.</p> <p>Achieving national nature reserve status, developing eco-tourism, contributing to climate change through ecological restoration will all have greater impact at a bigger scale.</p>
<p><i>Why didn't you buy it all last time and why is there a second stage buy-out?</i></p>	<p>We wanted to purchase the full 10,500 acres first time round but a number of our major grants were time limited so a pragmatic decision was taken to proceed with the purchase of the southern piece of land to ensure we secured those grants.</p> <p>However, when this decision was taken it was always on the basis we would still look to fundraise for the purchase of the northern piece in order to complete our aspirations.</p>
<p><i>Will this reserve ever go back to grouse shooting?</i></p>	<p>There is no intention to run the nature reserve as a driven grouse shooting enterprise under community ownership.</p>
<p><i>The second buy-out area is hefted with 750 sheep as an upland sheep farm, what will happen to that under community ownership?</i></p>	<p>This farm is part of the in-hand farming operation. We will take on the farm as part of the community purchase. There is currently great uncertainty over future agricultural subsidies following the UK's withdrawal from the EU.</p> <p>One of the objectives of the reserve will be to demonstrate that high quality food production can be achieved sustainably along with our ambitious environmental goals.</p> <p>The method in which the farm is managed in future will firstly be determined by choosing the best financially sustainable option for the community in the long term which allows us to achieve our objectives.</p>
<p><i>If I can already access this land under 'right to roam', what difference</i></p>	<p>It is true that nothing would change with the right to roam, regardless of who owns the land. However, the project proposed by the LI covers a number of different objectives</p>

<p>does it make if who owns it?</p>	<p>that were produced through the various community consultation activities. These include community regeneration, combating climate change, wildlife conservation and ecological restoration.</p> <p>The goal of ownership here is to have control over the management of the land to restore damaged peatland, manage the regeneration of ancient woodlands along the Tarras Valley, maintain open areas of moorland, increase scrub habitat and undertake any further management to protect ground nesting birds including Hen Harrier (for which the site is also a Special Protection Area, SPA).</p>
<p>Doesn't a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) mean that you can't do anything with the land?</p>	<p>In short, the answer is no, SSSI designation does not mean that you cannot do anything with the land. It means that there are restrictions on what can be done and how the land can be managed.</p> <p>However, carefully planned infrastructure for access to the land could be permitted and initial discussions with NatureScot regarding this have taken place.</p> <p>Existing buildings on the land such as derelict or disused steadings could be developed as additional residential housing, business units or holiday accommodation.</p>
<p>Who owns the reserve that's already been bought?</p> <p>Who would own the additional section of the reserve if the campaign is successful?</p>	<p>The legal owner is the Langholm Initiative which is managed by the volunteer board. An executive committee has been established (responsible to the board of Langholm Initiative) to oversee the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve.</p> <p>Community ownership requires a suitable vehicle to undertake a community buyout and own the asset which the Langholm Initiative as a Scottish Incorporated Charitable Organisation (SCIO) is.</p> <p>As is stated in the business plan the Langholm Initiative will be the asset holding community organisation. This is the same as for other community landowners across Scotland and you can find a list of these on the Community Land Scotland website:</p> <p>https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/members</p>
<p>If I give £10 to the fund, do I own a bit of the reserve?</p>	<p>Firstly, thanks so much for your donation, it helped us get over the line and bring this land into community ownership!</p> <p>Any contributor to the buyout was contributing to the purchase of the moor by the Langholm Initiative who will manage this land on behalf of the community.</p> <p>Community ownership requires a suitable vehicle to take it forward and the Langholm Initiative have employed staff to</p>

	<p>help take it forward and ensure it has the dedicated resources it needs to achieve its aims.</p>
<p>Obviously the biggest funders will have an influence on how the reserve is developed. What will happen if the local community disagrees with what is being done?</p>	<p>The only funder of the buy-out where there is any commitment is the Woodland Trust, as part of their funding to help us secure the land, we committed to creating a new native broadleaf woodland on the land which is known as 'the Haunches' outside of the SSSI.</p> <p>The creation of a new woodland as well as encouraging naturally regenerating woodland was something that we promoted during the buyout process in our reserve brochure. We are still working out the details of the new planting and how the community will have an opportunity to be part of this process.</p> <p>Asides from funding, we are also the owner of a SSSI and SPA, there are obligations from a regulatory side of things through NatureScot with regard to management for these two designations on the reserve. We are still working out what they mean for us in practise as we develop the reserve. How we make decisions regarding the land and the approach we take will be set out in the management plan which we'll be developing with the community.</p> <p>We have a fantastic foundation of clear objectives which were developed with the community and partners during the buy-out so our focus now is to put more detail on these - everything from how we facilitate large ecosystem recovery to sustainable and responsible eco-tourism.</p> <p>There were no onerous conditions attached the funding for the purchase. The community, through the voluntary community board of the Langholm Initiative have the decision making power over the land.</p>
<p><i>Why is this section of land cheaper than the other section even though they are similar in size?</i></p>	<p>The difference is just down to what's on the land to make the prices different.</p> <p>The first stage buy out area contained 6 properties, a substantial area of commercial forestry, area near town offered further sustainable development opportunities which resulted in an agreed purchase price of £3.8m.</p> <p>The second stage area of land is different to the first, its predominantly upland/moorland with 3 properties meaning the price is lower. Our fundraising goal is £2.2m to purchase this land.</p> <p>We're really excited about the opportunities that it will bring in doubling our reserve.</p>

Archived FAQ's – October 2020

For interest, these older FAQ's have been left within this document to answer any historical context from Langholm's first stage community buy out.

Q1. How was the valuation reached for the land and the buildings Langholm Initiative are attempting to purchase reached?

A1. In order to apply to the Scottish Land Fund (SLF) an applicant is required to provide an open market (or Red Book) valuation of all assets associated with the prospective purchase. This must be done by a Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) registered surveyor. This is a joint process by the Landowner and the community organisation, in this case the Langholm Initiative and takes several months.

Q2. £6.4m seems high for moorland?

A1. There are a couple of parts to this answer. Firstly, as is stated in the document "Creating the Tarras Valley Nature reserve" the LI have agreed two options with the landowner (please see the map below). The assets of the preferred option (10,500 acres) which includes land and buildings are valued at just over £6m. The amount we are trying to raise also includes all transaction fees, livestock purchase, legal fees and some working capital to kick start projects.

A smaller option of just over 5000 acres which removes the most northern end of the moor and Cooms Farm is valued at just over £4m.

Moorland (SSSI will be discussed in a separate answer) makes up only part of the purchase area. Other land located to the South and East of the proposed purchase area has a much higher value due to the potential it has for commercial woodland. However a commercial wood is not what Langholm Initiative proposes to do with the land, however it has a significant impact on the open market value of the land.

Other assets which contribute to the valuation include 9 residential properties with associated outbuildings, existing commercial plantations (Tarrasfoot, Tarras Valley and Cooms.), broadleaf amenity woodland at Broomholmshiels (Longwood), Regenerated woodland at Tarrasfoot, the rights associated with the land (mineral, sporting, wayleaves, airspace), existing agri-environmental agreements and basic payment scheme.

Q4. What if the community does not buy the land? Who is likely to purchase the land?

A1. Buccleuch Estates announced the decision to sell The Tarras Water and Holm Hill estate in May 2019. This was done prior to the LI's involvement and the land to be sold contributes to a portfolio with a variety of revenue streams (as noted in answer to Q2.) This could be attractive to a number of different purchasers. For the time being the LI have exclusive access to the agreed sale area and as such no other organisation/company have been allowed to discuss the sale with the landowner.

If the community are not able to secure the agreed assets, the most likely outcome would be for the land to be sold to private investment firms that represent commercial forestry. The properties may be sold individually, most likely as holiday/second homes and the farm at Cooms disposed of.

The purchase of land is seen as a secure investment, especially during times of economic difficulty. This is because land is a vital, finite resource holding and then increasing its value over time. There are also a number of financial incentives to holding land as an asset.

Although the SSSI is unlikely to be able to be planted with commercial conifer, investment companies acting on behalf of commercial forestry do also purchase land that cannot be planted as long as there is sufficient surrounding land that can. This is potentially one of the reasons that Buccleuch Estates have put together the portfolio the way it is.

Q5. What is the implication for the SSSI if it was to be planted with commercial forestry on the surrounding land?

A5. There is increasing concern in the South of Scotland regarding the impact of upland forestry design on sensitive sites. The likely outcome for the SSSI here that there could be an increased risk of predation on ground nesting birds and uncontrollable self-seeding of commercial plantation trees (Sitka spruce as an example).

There is precedence for a SSSI to be degraded so badly by neighbouring activity that its protection is downgraded. This occurred in Aberdeenshire where planning for a golf course was granted. It was seen as the perceived economic value outweighing the environmental value of the SSSI. Just 4 years later the site was so badly damaged that the SSSI designation was removed. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-48789620>

A number of local people have raised the concern of what will happen to both the wildlife they feel is important and the Common Moss on the SSSI area. These concerns are addressed by creating a nature reserve where the management of this land will be to increase biodiversity and combat climate change. The Common Moss itself can be kept clear of Sitka Spruce saplings which are already starting to regenerate.

Q7. Is there community support for the LI's plans?

A7. There has been significant local support demonstrated for the plans put forward by the LI. Letters of support for the purchase that were submitted as part of the SLF application came from the following local organisations:

1. Langholm Common Riding Committee
2. Langholm Academy Cluster
3. The Langholm Alliance
4. Xcel Youth Project
5. Outpost Arts
6. MTAF
7. Langholm Probus Club
8. Langholm Digs For Victory
9. Langholm Playcare Ltd
10. Langholm Archive Group
11. Langholm & District Art Club
12. Langholm Day Centre
13. Langholm Chilli Club
14. Eskdale and Liddesdale Archaeological Society
15. The Church of Scotland Parish of Langholm, Eskdalemuir, Ewes and Westerkirk
16. Langholm, Ewes and Westerkirk Community Council
17. Canonbie Primary School
18. Langholm Academy Eco-group
19. Oliver Mundell MSP
20. Joan McAlpine MSP
21. Colin Smyth MSP

833 individuals that reside in postcodes DG13 and DG14 signed a petition supporting the LI in its investigation on community ownership.

The LI membership has increased from approx. 90 total members at the start of the project to 367 full members, 202 associate members and 11 junior members.

A number of local people have contributed to the crowdfunding either through the online page or directly to the LI. Some people who have contributed have opted to do this anonymously.

(Letters of support for the LI plans were also provided by regional and national organisations including: John Muir Trust, RSPB Scotland, Borders Forest Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage, Woodland Trust, Dumfries and Galloway Small Communities Housing Trust, SURF (Scotland's Regeneration Forum), Community Land Scotland, Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS) and Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway).

Q8. Buccleuch Estates should give the assets to the community or lower the price.

A8. The statement below was publicly released by Buccleuch Estates on 25th June 2020.

“The valuation of the moor has been jointly agreed by the Langholm Initiative and Buccleuch and was set by following a professional process conducted by RICS surveyors. Langholm Moor has been the subject of very significant investment from Buccleuch over many years. The area being purchased includes houses, woodland and tracks. We are a rural business and any sale of any property goes to reinvesting in other projects which create jobs and helps the rural economy. It is equitable that any purchase is transacted following a professional RICS valuation process – a process that has already led to an agreed price between the two parties and will not be deviated from.”

The Langholm Initiative understands the difficulty surrounding the historic ownership of certain areas of land or assets associated with the potential community buyout. The working group that have undertaken most of the work on behalf of the LI was not set up to challenge the historic ownership. It was set up to try and use the current available mechanisms to bring land and assets under community ownership so that we might provide more control and a better future for the town and our children.

Business Plan Questions

A Vision for the Future

Q1. You state that “Langholm Initiative has a track record of delivering successful projects...” Where is the evidence to substantiate this statement?

A1. The Langholm Initiative has been delivering community projects for over 25 years. Its success is evidenced by its continual ability to attract funding for its projects, its extensive networks with partners and its reputation. The LI also gets repeat funding from organisations which are confident that we always deliver. They monitor the projects closely and recognise high quality of delivery. The LI has also received a number of awards over the years for both its personnel and its projects.

Examples of our projects include: The Moorland Education project, Making the most of the moorlands (both were given LEADER Dumfries and Galloway Awards), the Wild Eskdale project, Powerdown project funded by Community Energy Scotland, the Prehistoric Trail, Building a future for Eskdale – employability and enterprise, Richer Lives.

Until 2013 the Council core funded the organisation – LI supported local groups such as the Music and Arts festival – which was probably the forerunner of the Buccleuch Centre - the Bonnie Langholm group for environmental improvements round the town, the tourist information service after Visit Scotland pulled out of the town – there were over 2000 visits to the Welcome to Langholm office last year, the Langholm Walks group – supported the development of 14 waymark walks, assisted in the setting up of the Muckle Toon Adventure Festival and acted as its main address, The 250th anniversary of Thomas Telford project in 2007.

We currently work with parts of the council such as the Developing the Young Workforce and are a key local partner for them. LI acts as a job coach and the Annan job centre refers people to the LI regularly. LI had a contract with Business Gateway for 8 years.

LI is recognised by the Development Trusts Association for Scotland as an anchor organisation and in that capacity was asked to bid for funding in 2020 for local groups delivering services related to Covid – it secured £34,000 for groups in the town including for the Langholm Day Centre for Older People which has been delivering meals on wheels to older people since March.

Q2. You then go on to say under the same bullet point “...Langholm Initiative has significant existing capacity”. What does this mean? Does it mean that redundant LI staff with skills in tourism, community development and nature guiding can or will be redeployed as land and property managers under the new scheme?

A2. Taken in the context of community buyouts it means that it is not always the case that communities are fortunate enough to have existing organisations let alone organisations with full-time staff. The business plan states that it will be important for the LI to increase its capacity. The organisation has a large skills base both in its staff and in its board members, it has over 600 members and can draw on up to sixty volunteers, some of whom have considerable skills and experience to help it deliver its projects. The capacity of an organisation also relates to its networks and the Langholm Initiative has extensive networks with partner organisations both across the region, in the south of Scotland and in other parts of Scotland and the UK as a whole. It will strengthen and increase these in managing the land.

General Questions about the business plan and Langholm Initiative.

Q1. The business plan is not “main-stream” and has a number of extremely high risk elements such as housing (restoration and building costs are estimated), Agriculture (equipment renewals not considered), Forestry (disease, Larch already under pressure), Business Units (uptake/occupancy unknown), Field Centre (no colleges or university have committed) and moorland management (volunteer labour from a “no volunteers” base level). If only one of these elements under-performed how would you meet your objectives and financial commitments?

A1. The business plan is an overarching document which is meant to be viewed as an illustration of how the development of the estate could be structured. It should be seen as a working document that is constantly being refined. Each different project within the estate will require its own business plan as its foundation post purchase. Individual projects will be undertaken as they are financially viable to do so.

The key financial indicator of the business plan is that the base case scenario (taking over the estate from day 1 and running as is) for both the larger purchase area and the smaller result in modest surplus. This is a very strong position to begin community ownership from.

The South of Scotland Enterprise, Scottish Land Fund and other funders such as the John Muir Trust and other private trusts have recognised the strength of the business plan by committing funding to support the community buyout.

Q2. The plan describes a c£500,000 business loan from a bank to provide capital to build “new” “affordable” properties for sale or rent. This element is not part of the Community Buyout Scheme. Why have you included it in the Business Plan – is it because without it the plan doesn’t work? If the answer is yes – why haven’t the “community” had it explained to them?

A2. The plan does not include a £500,000 business loan to develop new affordable housing. It contains a total capital cost of £500,000 for the development of new affordable housing. That total has an assumed breakdown of 50% grant funding, 40% loan and 10% own funds. The level of grant funding is a conservative view and may well be higher than 50%.

The entire plan is the community buyout scheme and it is not dependant on new affordable house development. The provision of housing is not to shore up a weak business plan but the result of a sound business plan enabling surpluses to be reinvested in projects that benefit the community.

Community and Partner Representation

Q1. Why are the sub-committees formed at the discretion of the LI board? Shouldn’t they be agreed and embedded in the structure now?

A1. The structure in the first instance to complete the purchase of the assets and then protect the LI from trading activity is to set up 1 or more trading subsidiaries. As the business plan indicates, post purchase a number of additional business plans for specific activities are required. It is likely that for a number of these activities steering groups would be beneficial. As these activity specific plans are developed the LI board would seek to form these groups to assist in the development and delivery of the plans. The LI is likely to draw on both local expertise and the expertise offered from regional and national partners.

Q2. Why is the reporting channel back to the board via the Lead Officer and not via the chairman of the sub-committee (if sub-committees are formed)?

The structure does not allow full transparency and community and partner interaction with the board.

A2. The management structure figure this questions refers to is intended to be illustrative of the necessity of having a trading subsidiary to protect the asset holding charity. The staff are placed next on this structure to show that they will be responsible for the day to day running of the estate. The final layer is to illustrate the likely activities that will be part of the day to day running of the estate. This final layer is not the working/steering groups but the activities. What the business plan is acknowledging is that to increase the capacity of the organisation steering/working groups for the specific activities could be beneficial and formed. In our indicative structure we are following a model that works elsewhere – a lead ‘land manager’ is the person who is responsible for overseeing and co-ordinating the work and reporting to the Board

Cost of House renovations

Q1. Clearly a Housing survey has not been done to inform the Business Plan and the estimated figures are extremely coarse and could have **Major errors**, do you agree that the

renovation budget could exceed your highest figures and could realistically snuff-out your 20-year operating profits?

A1. As part of the valuation of the estate a Report on Condition was carried out by experienced Land Agents Davidson & Robertson. They conclude that the properties are generally well maintained. The figures in the business plan are for illustrative purposes to provide an overview of how the estate could be run. As is highlighted in the various “Action” tables specific business plans for specific projects will be undertaken. This will allow the community to decide when and if specific projects are undertaken.

Q2. The sale of one or two properties is “fixed asset stripping”, how can you receive a grant/s to purchase properties and then sell them under the fiscal rules and covenants of public funding?

A2. No it is not asset stripping as the capital from the potential sale would be invested back into the estate in order to improve other assets and possibly increase the value of them.

Cost of Farming

Q1. Mechanical equipment such as tractor, quad bike and pick-up need to be replaced as they age. Total cost could be over £60,000. Where is the earmarked budget heading for these renewals?

A1. A capital amount for repair/replacement is included in the expenditure heading of “Gross Agricultural Expenditure”. This expenditure is based on data supplied by Buccleuch Estates and available industry wide data.

Key Findings of the Feasibility Study.

Q1. The Galloway Kite Trail is based around a species that is resident in high numbers all year round and visits a feeding station in high numbers 60+ birds per day. Eagles on Harris are also resident and can be seen all year round. How can you compare the potential of Langholm Moor based on these two studies when the primary species, the rare Hen Harrier, is only resident for 4 months and at that time they are extremely vulnerable due to disturbance?

A1. The purpose of referencing the Galloway Red Kite Trail and the Eagle observatory on Harris is to demonstrate that nature based tourism, if sensitively developed can be economically beneficial to an area.

Langholm Moor not only benefits from being a nesting site for hen harriers it also has a number of other iconic species present as a draw for nature based tourism. Birds of prey can be seen throughout the year.

The South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project is currently attempting to increase the number of Golden Eagles present in the South of Scotland. It is possible in time that these could become an additional draw for Langholm.

The business plan also states that any access or viewing areas have to be carefully designed and part of the full integrated land management plan to avoid disturbance to sensitive species.

The nature reserve will not only be focused on birds but also on plant and animal species, reptiles and offer visitors the opportunity to experience open spaces through walks.

Other

Q1. If the 5,200 acres (or less) option is taken up, does this impact on the funding pledges?

A1. Both the larger and smaller purchase options have been included in funding applications. On the crowdfunding page under Use of Donations it states that if the LI do not raise sufficient funds for the larger area it will purchase a smaller area.

Q2. Will this project be owned by the Langholm Community as stated in your brochure or by the Langholm Initiative?

A2. Community ownership requires a suitable vehicle to undertake a community buyout and own the asset which the Langholm Initiative as a Scottish Incorporated Charitable Organisation (SCIO) is. As is stated in the business plan the Langholm Initiative will be the asset holding community organisation. This is the same as for other community landowners across Scotland and you can find a list of these on the Community Land Scotland website: <https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/members/>