

## **Langholm Initiative (LI) FAQs: Tarras Water and Holm Hill Estate (Part of Langholm Moor)**

### **Community Buyout**

The purpose of this document is to address questions that have been submitted directly to us over the past few weeks. As has been the case throughout the 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](mailto:admin@langholminitiative.co.uk).

#### **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.

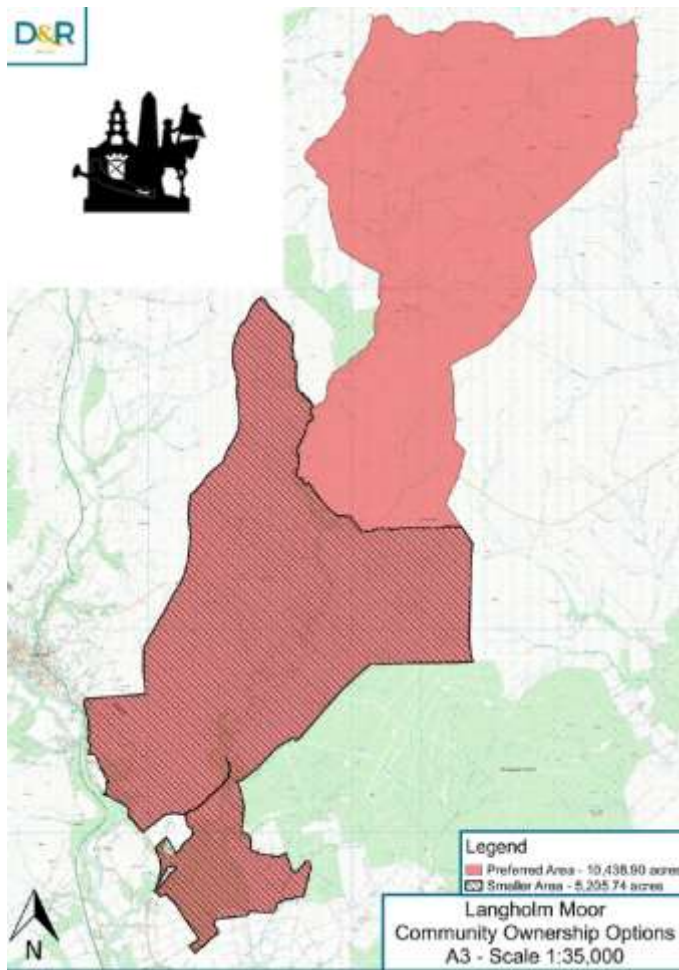
#### **Q2. £6.4m seems high for moorland?**

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.



**Q3. Doesn't a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) mean that you can't do anything with the land?**

A1. 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. For example on the SSSI itself it is unlikely that commercial plantation and wind turbines could be placed on it (although this may not be the case for the land immediately surrounding the SSSI). However, carefully planned infrastructure for access to the land could be permitted and initial discussions with Scottish Natural Heritage regarding this have taken place.

Existing buildings on the land such as derelict or disused steadings could be developed as additional residential housing, business units or holiday accommodation.

**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 damage 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.

**Q6. We have access to the SSSI land already through right to roam, why purchase it?**

A6. 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 that were produced through the various community consultation activities. These include community regeneration, combating climate change, wildlife conservation, ecological restoration and small scale renewable energy.

The LI have therefor put forward an ambitious project to address each of these issues in the best way the available land/assets allow. Specifically relating to the SSSI this includes the creation of the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve. 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 and increase scrub habitat and undertake predator control to protect ground nesting birds including Hen Harrier (for which the site is also a Special Protection Area, SPA).

#### **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 25<sup>th</sup> 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.