**Forestry’s contribution to community empowerment and the delivery of community benefits and community wealth building**

1. **Introduction**

[Scotland’s Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan 2022-25](https://forestry.gov.scot/component/edocman/1413-scotland-s-forestry-strategy-implementation-plan-2022-2025/download?Itemid=0), sets out a shared ambition to develop and implement a framework for increasing forestry’s contribution to the delivery of local community benefits and community wealth building.

This discussion paper begins by providing a context for this ambition, before presenting a small selection of case studies to help inform discussions at the meeting on how it can be delivered. These case studies illustrate some of the ways in which Scottish forests and woodland of different types and scales, with different governance arrangements and management objectives are already delivering a range of community benefits and contributing to community wealth building.

1. **Context**

**Community empowerment and land reform**

The [Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/6/contents/enacted) was passed in 2015. It provides a legal framework to empower community bodies through both the ownership of land and buildings, as well as through strengthening their voices in the decisions that matter to and affect them.

The following year, the [Land Reform (Scotland) Act](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2016/18/contents/enacted) 2016 was introduced: It includes a requirement for Government to produce a statement of land rights and responsibilities, the first of which was published in 2017. This articulated the Government’s vision for the ownership, use and management of land; and the balance between the rights of land owners, managers, local communities and society at large.

In 2022, the Government published a refreshed [Scottish Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement 2022](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-land-rights-responsibilities-statement-2022/). It is underpinned by seven principles, which include the principles that: more local communities should have the opportunity to own, lease or use land which can contribute to their community’s wellbeing and future development; and that there should be meaningful collaboration and community engagement in decisions about land.

**Community benefits and community wealth building**

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring a just transition as the changes required to achieve a net zero, climate resilient, wellbeing economy are implemented. This includes both the outcome – a fairer, greener future for all – and the process to get there. To support the delivery of this ambition, the Scottish Government has committed to lead the production of just transition plans in key sectors, including land use and agriculture. These plans will be developed in a way that is co-designed and co-delivered by communities, businesses, workers and unions.

Woodland creation is a key part of the Government’s approach to tackling the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, so as forest cover in Scotland expands, it is critical that this is done in a fair and sustainable way, with positive impacts for everybody, those living now, and future generations to come.

The Scottish Government’s [National Strategy for Economic Transformation](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-national-strategy-economic-transformation/) (NSET), was published in 2022, setting out the ambition for a fairer, wealthier and greener country. It recognises that private investment in natural capital is critical to enabling the pace and the scale of action required to achieve net-zero by 2045 and reverse biodiversity loss, but that the market for investment must be designed in such a way that it creates benefits that are shared between public, private and community interests, supporting a just transition and securing a vibrant future for communities.

In support of this goal, the [Interim Principles for Responsible Investment in Natural Capital](https://www.gov.scot/publications/interim-principles-for-responsible-investment-in-natural-capital/) were published. These principles are aligned with those set out in the [Scottish Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement 2022](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-land-rights-responsibilities-statement-2022/), particularly the principle that land ownership, management and use should deliver a wide range of social, environmental, economic and cultural benefits.

The Scottish Government has also adopted the internationally recognised Community Wealth Building (CWB) approach to economic development as a key practical means to achieving wellbeing economy objectives outlined in the [NSET.](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-national-strategy-economic-transformation/) CWB aims to ensure the economic system builds wealth and prosperity for everyone and thus incorporates the principle of a socially just use of land. A [consultation](https://consult.gov.scot/economic-development/community-wealth-building-consultation/) on the introduction of community wealth building legislation is currently under way and will run until 25 April 2023. The definition of CWB used in the consultation can be found in Annex 1 of this paper.

**Scotland’s Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan 2022-2025**

[Scotland's Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan 2022-2025](https://forestry.gov.scot/component/edocman/1413-scotland-s-forestry-strategy-implementation-plan-2022-2025/download?Itemid=0) includes a number of actions that the Scottish Government and its partners will deliver to promote these ambitions and principles. The plan was developed with the input from members of the national stakeholder group and key delivery partners. The actions include to continue to: promote opportunities for community groups and organisations to be involved in using, managing or owning woodland; and support the provision of independent advice for community woodland groups. In addition, actions that are a particular focus for this Implementation Plan period are to:

›› Work with the forestry sector and communities to promote the principles set out in the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement and improve the opportunities for communities to be involved with the development of forestry proposals and plans; and

›› Develop and implement a framework for increasing forestry’s contribution to the delivery of local community benefits and community wealth building.

A package of measures is currently being developed to help deliver the first of these actions. The second of these actions is the focus for discussions at this meeting.

1. **Timeframe for delivery**

The Scottish Government is committed to working in partnership – notably with the Community Woodland Association which is helping co-ordinate the delivery of this action – to develop andimplement a framework for increasing forestry’s contribution to the delivery of local community benefits and community wealth building by 2025.

Our aspiration, therefore, is to work with CWA and other partners to develop the framework over the next 12 months.

1. **Work already under way**

A number of pieces of work are already underway which will help contribute to the development of this framework, in particular:

1. A scoping study is underway in the South of Scotland to explore practical opportunities to increase the delivery of local community benefits and community wealth building from woodland creation in the region. The study was commissioned by South of Scotland Enterprise in partnership with Scottish Forestry and is being carried out by Forestry Policy Group. It will be completed by the end of March and the output from the project will be a report detailing recommendations on the practical next steps to support the implementation of identified approaches.
2. The Scottish Government has established a programme to explore how to deliver on its commitment under the NSET to establish a values-led, high-integrity market for responsible investment in natural capital. The programme has six working groups, one of which is focused on the delivery of community benefits and the implementation of the related [Interim Principles for Responsible Investment in Natural Capital](Develop%20and%20implement%20a%20framework%20for%20increasing%20forestry’s%20contribution%20to%20the%20delivery%20of%20local).That group is developing draft guidance to support delivery of community benefits which will be shared with interested stakeholders for input and comment.
3. To complement this work, the Scottish Land Commission (SLC) has also commissioned a two-year study on community benefits from investment in natural capital which is currently underway. The project will include piloting approaches to delivering a range of community benefits with willing landowners and agents. This work will support investment in and use of Scotland’s natural capital that delivers shared benefits between public, private and community interests. The commission has also recently published a [discussion paper](https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/news-events/news/public-body-sparks-discussion-on-scotlands-changing-landscape?p_slug=news) on delivering community benefits from investment in natural capital, which includes a working definition of community benefits[[1]](#footnote-1).
4. **How are Scotland’s forests already delivering community benefits and wealth building?**

Communities are already directly benefiting from forestry in Scotland as owners, managers, project partners, users and neighbours and the following are examples from across the country.

**Case studies**

***Castlemilk Park[[2]](#footnote-2)***

Castlemilk Woodlands cover an area of around 30ha and are situated within the wider 109ha Castlemilk Park in south-east Glasgow, owned by Glasgow City Council. During the 1950s, the area was developed as a housing scheme to accommodate thousands of people from inner city areas. Over the years, social problems associated with poverty and unemployment grew.

In 2009, the Cassiltoun Housing Association (a community ownership housing cooperative), working with a range of partners including Glasgow City Council and Forestry Commission Scotland, set out to improve Castlemilk Park and transform it into a well-used community space that brings significant environmental, community and economic benefits to the area. Following a feasibility study and the development of an action plan, in 2011 a Community Woodland Officer was recruited.

Since then, the Community Woodland Officer has co-ordinated and enabled the delivery of over 900 free events, activities, and outdoor education in and around the woods of Castlemilk Park. This post has provided a catalyst for environmental and social regeneration, developing recreational and employment opportunities for the local and wider community. A large part of this success is due to direct contact between the community and the woodland, helping visitors to engage with their natural environment through safe and supported experiences.

Many people’s attitudes at the outset were negative, thinking the project would not make a difference. However, the local community has benefitted from the various events that have been held in the park and these events have in turn encouraged them to use it. Through an employability and other activities, more people have been able to learn new skills, gain qualifications and find employment. The project has helped provide the local community with life skills, social skills, qualifications, confidence building, and mental and physical health improvements, including through the well-established weekly health walks and the Branching Out programme. The success of the project means local people now have a real sense of pride and ownership of the woods.

***Carsphairn Community Woodland[[3]](#footnote-3)***

In March 2021, Carsphairn Community Woodland Ltd, took ownership of 48.8ha of Muirdrochwood from Forestry and Land Scotland under the Community Asset Transfer Scheme. The woods are on the outskirts of the village of Carsphairn in Dumfries & Galloway, about 25 miles South East of Ayr. Funding came from the Scottish Land Fund, Carsphairn Renewable Energy Fund Ltd. and followed South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) support to develop the project.

The social enterprise set up by the community has objectives to regenerate the local population which is declining, create jobs and provide accredited rural skills training to assist young people into local employment. To help deliver these objectives, using support from SOSE, a community forest shed/hub has been built to provide office space, a processing area for a wood fuel enterprise supplying firewood locally, a volunteer space, and is also used socially. Two jobs have been created with the aspiration of creating a total of 12 posts (8.5 FTE) by year 4, all but one of which will be funded by earned income.

In addition to the regeneration focus, events have been hosted for local school children, as well as open days for all. A programme of events also takes place using the wildlife hide built since the community took ownership of the woodland.

Woodland management is focussed on harvesting the existing Sika spruce crop over a 30 year time scale, producing a regular income and material for the woodfuel and wood product businesses. Restocking sensitive to the local area will improve the environmental and amenity value of the woodland leading to a mix of productive conifer broadleaves. The creation of 3km of new trails will link existing routes and create a network of 10km with links to the surrounding area.

***Cormonachan Community Woodlands[[4]](#footnote-4)***

Cormonachan woodlands constitutes 63.9 ha of ancient semi-natural woodland and part of Scotland’s rainforest. It lies between the villages of Lochgoilhead and Carrick Castle on the west shore of Loch Goil in Argyll. Woodland management objectives focus on protecting and enhancing the woodlands, including improvements in age class diversity, reduction in invasive non-natives, conservation of veteran oak and hazel groves, and implementing best practice management of historic woodland pasture.

The woodland is managed by volunteer-run Cormonachan Community Woodlands Ltd (a not-for profit limited company by guarantee) under a 20 year lease from Forest and Land Scotland (FLS) and with a Memorandum of Understanding with nearby Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre.

Ardroy Outdoor Centre uses the woodlands for educational activities including aspects of Children 1st’s Bide Oot project. They also maintain a resource centre and provide accommodation for volunteers working in the woods. One thousand children access the woodland for outdoor education every year.

Since 2015, the group has received £360k to fund its activities which has largely been spent on infrastructure development, with new routes planned linking the woodland to neighbouring estates. Current infrastructure includes 2 car parks, 4.5 km of paths, a squirrel hide, a labyrinth, a tool shed and resource hut, along with a contemplation shelter. These items support woodland management and provide facilities for the 10,000+ visitors to the woodland each year.

Cormonachan Community Woodland hosted two visits from COP26 delegates, which resulted in an award winning film: The Ghost Rainforest. It hosts Raleigh International Groups and a number of arts based organisations hold events and activities in the wood every year, including outdoor theatre, sculpture and arts trails. The site is also used for weddings, memorials and other events.

***Dundreggan Estate – Trees for Life[[5]](#footnote-5)***

Trees for Life (TfL) is an environmental charity formed over thirty years ago. Its vision is of revitalised wild forestry in the Highlands of Scotland, providing space for wildlife to flourish and communities to thrive. The charity purchased the 4,000-hectare Dundreggan Estate in Glenmoriston in 2008. It has since planted nearly two million native trees and has protected numerous natural areas. It has run successful projects to re-introduce red squirrels and protect Scotland’s remaining Caledonian Pinewoods, as well as operating a Skills for Rewilding Traineeship scheme and volunteer programme. Future plans include a rewilding centre at Dundreggan with accommodation for volunteers, accessible woodland trails, café, events space and children’s outdoor play area.

The charity has a board of trustees with 10 members and 29 paid members of staff and works with a number of strategic, conservation and volunteering partners including Scottish Forestry, Rewilding Scotland, NatureScot, and the Highland Green Health Partnership. Funding comes through personal donations and grant funding applications to a wide number of public and private funders as well as from the sale of carbon units. Carbon units are validated by the UK Woodland Carbon Code and sold to corporate buyers who want to offset emissions.

TfL has shared income from carbon unit sales with two local groups: West Glenmoriston Community Company and the Glenmoriston Improvement Group. Two annual payments totalling £20K and £19K respectively have been made to the groups to date, who will use the funds to improve warning wildlife signage around their villages (red squirrel and toads), invest in a children’s playpark, and make environmental improvements in and around the West Glenmoriston community hub building.

Moving forward, TfL will continue to support local groups with a percentage of funds raised through the sale of carbon credits. The amount to be shared is one third of the price obtained by Trees for Life for each carbon unit sold from 01 April 2022 until the final carbon offset unit from the Allt Ruadh woodland plantation scheme has been sold. This amount will be split evenly between the Glenmoriston Improvement Group and the West Glenmoriston Community Company. Payments are made following each sale of 500 carbon units and the groups are free to use the funding “to help people benefit from their local landscape in any way they see fit” (Community Carbon Agreement between Trees for Life and the Glenmoriston Improvement Group).

***Glen Dye Moor – Aviva and Par Equity***

Glen Dye Moor is a new woodland creation initiative that is currently being developed. The 6,300 ha moorland site in Aberdeenshire, north-east Scotland, was bought by Aviva Investors (a global asset management business) and Par Equity (a Scottish-based forestry investment fund manager). They are working with Scottish Woodlands to develop and implement the project.

The intention is that the project is undertaken fully in accordance with the Scottish Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement and the Interim Principles for Responsible Investment in Natural Capital. The proposals currently include 3,000 ha of new planting (including up to 1,000 ha of productive conifer and 2,000 ha of native woodland) and 1,800 ha of peatland restoration. Scottish Woodlands has been carrying out consultation and engagement activities with various local bodies, including community councils and national, regional and local activity groups before they submit their proposals to Scottish Forestry for approval.

Chief Investment Officer at Aviva Investors, Daniel McHugh has said that “This is the first of many investments we expect to make in this space, and the intention is for our carbon removal programme to be considered a best-in-class initiative which not only sequesters a vast amount of carbon over its lifetime, but does so in a way that takes into account the surrounding habitats and community.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

The project therefore aims to not only contribute to the transition to net zero and provide a return on investment, but also to deliver multiple social, economic and environmental benefits. The project webpages[[7]](#footnote-7) detail the following community benefits it intends to deliver:

* Employment – over 40 years of FTE over the first five years – sourced locally where possible;
* Potential for graduate and apprentice positions to be created within the supply and management framework;
* Opportunities for local schools, colleges, universities and industry participants to utilise the site for educational and research purposes;
* Enhancing public access through improvements to paths and trails throughout the site; and
* Opportunities for the public and local communities to use buildings and land to contribute to community wellbeing.

***Tormore Forest - Sleat Community Trust[[8]](#footnote-8)***

In 2011, Sleat Community Trust (SCT) purchased 400ha of forest from Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS – now Forestry and Land Scotland) with a mixture of income from the local community, grant and loan funding. The forest lies on the Sleat peninsula in the southern part of the Isle of Sky and the aim of the project was to improve biodiversity and to create a community asset that, initially, provided a sustainable wood fuel source and a tree nursery. The income from these business operations would then create a funding stream to help establish different social enterprise activities such as vocational training programmes, access projects, trails, conservation/outdoor education areas, cultural heritage and environmental interpretation, and green burials.

The management of the forest includes adhering to commitments and development opportunities outlined in the Long-Term Forest Plan (LTFP). Habitat and natural capital projects have been developed, including:

* Peatland restoration to increase biodiversity, community access, improve water quality and sequester carbon;
* Native tree planting to improve biodiversity, health, wellbeing, and education;
* Development of a path and trail network to link different areas of the woodland and improve access;
* Development of a Forest School site to promote outdoor education;
* Development of a tree nursery to provide locally grown trees for use in the forest;
* Development of a gathering and picnic area at an old fank;
* Implementation of environmental and cultural interpretation throughout the forest; and
* Development of a hydro scheme to help decarbonise the grid and generate a source of income for the local community and SCT.

Community benefits were initially identified via a community consultation that was facilitated by an external advisor (provided by FCS to ensure impartiality) as part of the feasibility study into the purchase of the land. The opportunities have been added to/amended via various open days, AGMs and other public meetings held in the years following acquisition of the land. All subsequent engagement has been organised by the Board of Trustees following feedback from the community.

Several community benefits have been achieved from the project including access to locally produced sustainable wood fuel, health and wellbeing benefits, education and recreation benefits, improved access and trails, cultural heritage information and restoration of derelict sites. Economic benefits have also included the creation of part-time employment as a machine operator to move and processed wood and one-off contracts with local businesses, e.g. artists, ecologists, and education providers.

1. **Conclusion**

Scotland’s forests and woodlands current deliver significant economic, environmental and social benefits. The Scottish Government is committed to working with partners to identify opportunities to increase the scale of these whilst enabling more people, in particularly local communities, to directly benefit in the sustainable expansion and management of the country’s forests and woodlands.

This meeting provides an opportunity for stakeholders to share their thinking and ideas on how forestry can do more to deliver greater community benefit and contribute to community wealth building.

1. **Questions for discussion**
2. What benefits can forestry deliver more of for our communities?
3. How can we realise the opportunities to increase community benefits from forestry and grow forestry’s contribution to community wealth-building?

**Annex 1: Community Wealth Building (CWB) (source: consultation paper)**

The Scottish Government has adopted the internationally recognised Community Wealth Building (CWB) approach to economic development as a key practical means by which progress can be made towards realising our wellbeing economy vision outlined in the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) .

CWB is an approach designed to tackle long-standing economic challenges and transform Scotland’s local and regional economies by considering the ways in which the public sector, in partnership with the private, third and community sectors, can ensure more wealth is generated, circulated and retained in communities and localities.

In short, CWB is focused on growing the influence communities have on the economy and ensuring communities receive more of the benefits from the wealth they help to generate.

CWB can produce a range of economic, social and environmental benefits. CWB can be a key tool in supporting a just transition to net zero and ensuring environmental sustainability, helping Scotland’s places and communities thrive within the planet’s sustainable limits. The approach is also recognised as a key action in our ambitions to tackle child poverty through the creation of Fair Work opportunities.

1. SLC proposed definition for community benefits: *“Community benefits are packages of intentional benefits, arising from investment in natural capital enhancement, creation, and restoration projects, provided on a negotiated basis for the long-term benefit of the geographically local community.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Adapted from a Forest Policy Group case study: <http://www.forestpolicygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Cassiltoun-FPG-case-study.pdf> and using information from: [Castlemilk Park (cassiltoun.org.uk)](https://www.cassiltoun.org.uk/castlemilk-park/); and [Castlemilk Cathkin Braes case study (forestryandland.gov.scot)](https://forestryandland.gov.scot/images/corporate/pdf/castlemilkwiatcasestudy.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Case study provided by the Community Woodland Association [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Case study provided by the Community Woodland Association [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Adapted from a Scottish Land Commission case study: [Trees for Life - Community Benefit - Good Practice - Our work - Scottish Land Commission](https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/our-work/good-practice/community-benefit/trees-for-life) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [Major peatland restoration, carbon capture & woodland creation scheme announced following acquisition of Glen Dye Moor - Aviva Investors](https://www.avivainvestors.com/en-gb/about/company-news/2021/12/ai-par-equity-scottish-woodlands-natural-capital-project/) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [The Glen Dye Moor Project - Glen Dye Moor](https://glendyemoor.com/the-project/) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Adapted from a Scottish Land Commission case study: [Sleat Community Trust - Community Benefit - Good Practice - Our work - Scottish Land Commission](https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/our-work/good-practice/community-benefit/sleat-community-trust) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)