

# The Social and Economic Impacts of Green Land Investment in Rural Scotland



**AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND MARINE**

# The Social and Economic Impacts of Green Land Investment in Rural Scotland



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## Highlights

### Why was the research needed?

This research was commissioned by the Scottish Government to understand the range of potential socio-economic impacts relating to new forms of green land investment occurring in rural Scotland. We investigated the motivations and activities of private investor-owners and asked how green land investment benefits and / or negatively impacts those living and working in rural Scotland, in particular communities of place that are located on or close to land that is used for these activities. We examined to what extent private-sector interests support and / or conflict with the needs of rural communities and their interests, and the wider and long-term implications of these changes in rural land use and ownership.

### What did we do?

We carried out a literature and evidence review to verify key concepts and definitions such as 'green land investment' and 'rewilding'. A longlist of green land investment cases was created and six case study landholdings and associated rural communities were selected for fieldwork. We carried out individual or small group interviews with community members, and investor-owners or their representatives, with 54 participants in total. In case study communities, we conducted six community-based face-to-face workshops, with 96 participants in total.

### What did we learn?

This research has illustrated a diversity of green land investor-owner activities and motivations in rural Scotland. Following an evidence review, the definition of green land investments used in this report is:

“The purchase of, or investment in (directly through shareholding or changing focus of owner investment, or indirectly through intermediary companies) land to undertake nature restoration, regenerative land management or approaches that maintain or enhance natural capital, and/or sequester carbon emissions, differentiated from traditional ownership by the green motivations as a driver rather than a secondary outcome.”

Green land investor models in the case study landholdings included individual ownership, ownership by corporations, and where corporations provided land management services to private landowners/investors. Importantly, investor-owner motivations fall along a spectrum rather than into discrete categories. In general, profit is not the over-riding stated motivation. However, community members largely perceive investor-owners' motivations as financial more than 'green' and economic power disparities are felt by the community.

Significant social and economic benefits (both realised and anticipated) identified by the research included: increased accessibility and transparency of estate activities; support for education and training, community initiatives, and housing; and increased tourism activity and employment. Negative impacts included: loss of

employment and effects on local services; a decrease in housing availability; and the potential risks of changes in land use and management (e.g. perceived increased risk of wildfire).

These impacts differ across case studies, with different investments affecting the same issues in different ways. For example, depending on the case study, recreational access is perceived to or may increase or decrease, or jobs may be gained or lost. Farmers and estate employees are the most affected by land use changes, for example regarding employment and livelihood impacts.

One key challenge remains regarding how to disentangle the potential and actual impacts of green land investment activities, from those that may arise due to other types of land use or land ownership. Many of the impacts identified in this report may be found where landownership motivations change or where there is absentee landownership/remote land management. One distinguishing feature that we identified through this exploration of green land investment was the significant economic power held by the new actors engaging in Scotland's land market. Due to this, issues relating to landownership scale and concentration may become more likely, and market forces may drive land use and land management change more quickly than can be accommodated through policy processes seeking to achieve a 'just transition'.

The case studies provide evidence of good practice in terms of community engagement, such as green land investor-owners facilitating and attending community open days and green land investment projects supporting training and education opportunities. However, a critical negative impact was the perceived lack of community involvement in land-use decision-making. All participants suggested methods for positive community engagement. Community member participants felt that if investor-owner goals are achieved, this could lead to thriving rural communities, but failure would have knock-on impacts for community sustainability and the local environment.

### **What happens now?**

Policy makers should consider greater regulation of the natural capital market, including windfarm payments; enhanced measures to support landownership and land management transparency; and to ensure adherence to the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement. Based on our research, effective engagement and communication are at the heart of relationships which work well. Green land investors/owners should include community voices and ensure transparency and accountability in land management plans and objectives. Furthermore, rural communities appear more resilient to land use changes if they can engage and work with green land investor-owners, and should be supported to do so (e.g. by organisations such as the Scottish Land Commission).

Further social research, particularly focused on tracking changes over time, may help to understand the long-term impacts of green land investment in rural Scotland.

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This report details the main findings of qualitative research commissioned by the Scottish Government to understand the range of potential social and economic impacts from green land investment in rural Scotland. The research has involved six case studies of green land investment across rural Scotland. It has sought to understand the lived experience, as well as the perceptions, hopes and fears, of those who live near to or work on land where green land investment activities are occurring. It has also gathered insights from the green land investor-owners, landowner representatives, and land managers, regarding their motivations and land use plans.

This research has sought to respond to the following questions:

1. What are the different types of “green” land investment activities and the differing motivations of landowners?
2. What are the social and economic impacts of green land investment?
3. How does green land investment affect different groups within communities, e.g. the impact on housing or access to land for housing and land prices, those in local employment, local businesses owners, those in communities and businesses reliant on tourism that could be affected by change of land use in the vicinity, those working on the land including tenanted farmers, small landholdings and rented crofts, tenants in tied housing on rural estates, owner/occupier farmers?
4. What are the potential benefits and / or negative impacts of these types of green land investment activities, for rural communities located close to land under new private ownership?
5. To what extent do private-sector interests support or conflict with the needs of rural communities and their interests, e.g. the responsibilities of rural land ownership, from land rights to agricultural tenancies?
6. What are the wider and long-term implications of changes in rural land use and ownership for rural communities, as a result of new forms of green land investment?

This research addresses the lack of evidence and understanding regarding the wider and long-term implications of green land investment on rural communities and economies in Scotland.

### **The research was undertaken in three main phases:**

- (1) A literature and evidence review to develop and verify key concepts and definitions such as ‘green land investment’ and ‘rewilding’.
- (2) The identification and selection of six case studies of landholdings where green land investment activities are occurring, and data collection through interviews and workshops with community representatives, farmers/crofters,

local business owners, green land investor-owners, landowner representatives, and land managers. Across the six case studies 54 interviews and six workshops with 96 participants were conducted.

- (3) Thematic analysis has built understanding of current and likely future social and economic impacts of green land investment.

As this research has utilised a largely qualitative approach, its focus has been on capturing people's perceptions, opinions, and experiences. This evidence provides valuable insights that help us to understand the range of perceived, potential, and actual social and economic impacts relating to green land investment.

## **Literature and Evidence Review**

There has been a recent increase in land purchases and management by companies seeking to benefit from natural capital investment. Natural capital refers to the habitats and resources that provide social, economic, and environmental benefits to people (Scottish Government, 2021b), and it is the focus of new markets, such as for carbon and biodiversity credits. This changing pattern of landownership and land management has implications for Scottish Government goals of landownership diversification, just transition, net zero, and community wealth building.

A review of academic and grey literature provides a definition of green land investments and the motivations of green land investor-owners. Investor-owner motivations fall along a spectrum rather than into discrete categories. They include: reputational impacts, financial returns, operational impacts, environmental and/or social impacts, and personal drivers. The resulting definition of green land investments used in this report is:

The purchase of, or investment in (directly through shareholding or changing focus of owner investment, or indirectly through intermediary companies) land to undertake nature restoration, regenerative land management or approaches that maintain or enhance natural capital, and/or sequester carbon emissions, differentiated from traditional ownership by the green motivations as a driver rather than a secondary outcome.

## **Research findings**

**What are the social and economic impacts of green land investment? What are the potential benefits and / or negative impacts of these types of green land investment activities, for rural communities located close to land under new private ownership?**

- Both positive and negative impacts were perceived and realised, dependent on the motivations and activities of investor-owners. This demonstrates the fine balance of potential impacts relating to green land investment activities and the relative importance of how such activities are undertaken (and the



agency of local communities), rather than who the green land owner-investor may be.

- Significant benefits included: increased accessibility, transparency, and community engagement with estate activities; investor-owner support for community initiatives and housing provision; and increased tourism activity and employment.
- Critical to the just transition was investor-owner support for education and training opportunities, for example in peatland restoration and forestry.
- Negative impacts included: loss of employment and effects on local service provision (e.g. shops, schools, secondary agricultural services, etc.); decrease of housing availability due to conversion and increased market prices; a perceived increase in risks such as fire due to land management changes; and a lack of community involvement in decision-making.

### **How does green land investment affect different groups within communities?**

- Communities of interest, including local businesses, estate employees, gamekeepers, farmers, and recreational land users are significantly impacted, both positively and negatively, by green land investor-owners.
- Green land investment activities mean that traditional rural jobs are shifting, with implications for the just transition. Across several of the case studies estate employees have been made redundant or reassigned to new roles. Agricultural production and numbers of tenants have declined. These groups expressed a need for long-term stability, for example through security of tenure or support for livelihoods.

### **Experiences of, opportunities for, and barriers to community-landowner engagement in the context of green land investment**

- The type and extent of community engagement varied across case studies, with contrasting community perceptions and landowner attitudes. Our findings demonstrate a spectrum of community-landowner engagement which ranges from perceived good practice to perceived poor practice.
- Good practice includes frequent engagement with communities by green land investor-owners, demonstrable responses to community input by landowners, and the building or existence of personal relationships with stakeholders in the community. Poor practice was generally defined by a lack of community engagement or consultation.
- Across case studies, potential improvements to existing engagement were identified by both community members and green land investor-owners and landowner representatives.
- Insufficient community engagement can reinforce power imbalances between communities and landowners, resulting in community members feeling that they lack agency.

### **To what extent do private-sector interests support or conflict with the needs of rural communities and their interests, e.g. the responsibilities of rural land ownership, from land rights to agricultural tenancies? What are the wider and**

## long-term implications of changes in rural land use and ownership for rural communities, as a result of new forms of green land investment?

- The qualitative data collected that responds to this research question is based on discussions with participants regarding their hopes and visions for the future. Due to the short-term nature of the research project, it was not possible to verify the actual wider and long-term implications of green land investment activities.
- Community members hoped that green land investment would support sustainable, thriving communities, increase biodiversity, and respond to the climate emergency. In a positive future, recreational access would be maintained and enhanced. Community engagement would increase and include working with landowners.
- Community members feared that investor-owners would not achieve their goals because of perceived financial uncertainty and lack of management experience by investor-owners and/or their representatives. The uncertainty about future management plans created social anxiety among many community members. They also feared that future employment options would be limited, and that there would be limited social benefits from investor-owners' focus on green activities where profit is a primary concern.

## Conclusions

This research illustrates that there is a diversity of green land investor-owner activities and motivations in rural Scotland, including: environmental, financial, social, reputational, operational, and personal. These fall along a spectrum and investor-owners often have multiple and inter-connected motivations. Community members and investor-owners perceived the priority of environmental and financial motivations differently, and some community members felt uninformed about landowner goals.

The social and economic benefits and negative impacts of green land investment are dependent on the case study's investor-owner. They differ across case studies and investment may impact positively or negatively on the same people, for example, recreational access (increasing or decreasing it) or employment (job provision or loss). Farmers and estate employees are the most affected, for example experiencing employment and livelihood impacts, considered positive for some, and negative for others.

In some case studies, green land investor-owners demonstrated good practice by engaging with communities and responding to their views. However, a critical negative impact across the case studies was the perceived lack of community involvement in land-use decision-making. Participants suggested methods for positive community engagement, including greater transparency of land use and land management plans, with opportunities for community feedback<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Since fieldwork was undertaken for this research, the Scottish Land Commission has published guidance on 'Delivering Community Benefits from Land', which details good practice approaches to community engagement and involving communities in decisions relating to land (Scottish Land Commission, 2023).

Community member participants indicated that there is potential for thriving rural communities if green land investor-owner goals are achieved, but failure would have knock-on impacts for community sustainability and the local environment.

### **The research findings indicated the following recommendations:**

#### **Policy makers** should:

1. Consider greater regulation of the natural capital market and to remove barriers to participation by tenant farmers and crofters.
2. Consider ensuring that a proportion of green land investment profits are shared with communities of place that are affected by investment activities, in particular, establishing minimum community benefit payments by windfarm developers.
3. Consider how best to support farming and gamekeeping communities in the just transition.

#### **Green land investors/owners** should:

1. Ensure transparency and accountability in land management plans and ownership objectives, and share these with communities.
2. Ensure that landownership, land management and land use changes consider the long-term consequences to rural community sustainability and the just transition.
3. Create opportunities to include community voices on decision-making boards or management committees, and ensure adherence to good practice community engagement<sup>2</sup>.

#### **Rural communities** should:

1. Seek opportunities and be supported to engage and work with landowners (both new green land investor-owners, and existing private and public landowners), for example, through inviting investor-owners to regular community meetings.
2. Support landowners to overcome perceived barriers regarding communication and community representation.

Further social research, particularly focused on tracking changes over time using longitudinal techniques, may help to understand the long-term impacts of green land investment in rural Scotland.

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<sup>2</sup> Noting again that these recommendations align closely with the guidance recently published by the Scottish Land Commission on 'Delivering Community Benefits from Land' (Scottish Land Commission, 2023).

# 1. Introduction

This report presents new research that aims to understand the range of social and economic impacts relating to new forms of green land investment in rural Scotland. The green land investment activities include: afforestation, peatland restoration, 'rewilding' or ecological restoration, and renewable energy.

The research was undertaken in three phases: (i) literature and evidence review to develop definitions of key concepts and a typology of green land investments; (ii) a workshop to identify a formal definition of rewilding; (iii) in-depth case studies in six locations where green land investment is occurring across rural Scotland.

This research is timely given the Scottish Government's target of becoming a net-zero society by 2045 and the goal of ensuring a 'just transition'. This research provides novel insights into the perceived and actual impacts on rural communities of land use change driven by policy and market drivers relating to net zero.

This report outlines research that aims to understand the range of socio-economic impacts relating to new forms of green land investment that are occurring in rural Scotland. The research has sought to develop a robust understanding of this specific activity on those living and working in rural Scotland, in particular communities of place that are located on or close to land that is used for green land investment activities. As detailed in this report, these activities include (but are not limited to): afforestation, peatland restoration, 'rewilding' or ecological restoration, and renewable energy. It is noted that landholdings may incorporate multiple activities as part of a diversified land management plan.

A detailed literature and evidence review aimed to develop definitions of the key concepts (e.g. 'green land investment'), as well as a typology of green land investments. An online, interactive workshop was held to identify a formal definition of 'rewilding' for use by the Scottish Government, reported separately<sup>3</sup>.

This current report details findings from the in-depth investigation of six case studies located across rural Scotland. Case studies were based on landholdings that had green land investment activities ongoing and where there was a nearby rural community (or communities). Case study selection sought to include a diversity of green land investor types and green land investment activities, as well as rural community contexts (see Table 1). Secondary data analysis has demonstrated key landholding characteristics and change over time of rural populations in the case study areas.

While this report looks at cases of private ownership/investment, the definition for 'green land investment activities' is also relevant to contexts where there are community and public sector landowners.

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<sup>3</sup> This report was published separately and is available on the Scottish Government's website: [Defining Rewilding for Scotland's Public Sector \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultations-petitions-and-statements/2022-03-16-rewilding-for-scotland-s-public-sector/)

## **The research responds to the following research questions:**

1. What are the different types of green land investment activities and the differing motivations of landowners?
2. What are the social and economic impacts of green land investment?
3. How does green land investment affect different groups within communities, e.g. the impact on housing or access to land for housing and land prices, those in local employment, local businesses owners, those in communities and businesses reliant on tourism that could be affected by change of land use in the vicinity, those working on the land including tenanted farmers, small landholdings and rented crofts, tenants in tied housing on rural estates, owner/occupier farmers?
4. What are the potential benefits and / or negative impacts of these types of green land investment activities, for rural communities located close to land under new private ownership?
5. To what extent do private-sector interests support or conflict with the needs of rural communities and their interests, e.g. the responsibilities of rural land ownership, from land rights to agricultural tenancies?
6. What are the wider and long-term implications of changes in rural land use and ownership for rural communities, as a result of new forms of green land investment?

### **1.1 Research context**

The Scottish Government has committed to becoming a net-zero society by 2045. Scottish Government has also committed to ensuring that the transition to a low carbon economy is 'just', conducted fairly and inclusively, and that it "account[s] for the current injustices associated with land use in Scotland, and the wider challenges faced by many rural communities" (Scottish Government, 2021a: 34). In other words, the changes required to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and to achieve the carbon emissions targets set out by the Scottish Government will be undertaken in a way which is socially just. Some of these actions are, at least in principle, straightforward: efforts can be made to ensure that those employed in traditionally carbon-intensive industries are re-trained and to reduce the impacts of the decline of such industries. The implications of a transition to a low carbon economy in rural Scotland, and what a 'just transition' will mean for rural communities, are less well understood.

The context for this research also includes policy changes that will impact on rural and island communities, including the development of the Rural Delivery Plan, the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill, the Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan, and the review of the National Islands Plan, amongst others. Other drivers of change in rural Scotland include population changes (e.g. including depopulation in remote rural areas, in contrast to population growth in accessible rural areas), significant concerns regarding a lack of affordable housing, pressures

on local services, as well as impacts arising from the ‘cost-of living’ crisis, including high fuel and food prices, and increasing fuel poverty (Thomson et al., 2023).

The ‘just transition’ aligns with a societal and political shift towards rebalancing the power of private landownership in Scotland so as to ensure greater public access to the benefits arising from it, and that landownership and management arrangements contribute to the public good. The Scottish Government has advocated for a greater diversity in the types of landowners, the scale of land holdings, and the range of tenures available. Consequently, several pieces of land reform legislation now exist in Scotland<sup>4</sup>, and there has been a recent consultation on ‘Land Reform in a Net Zero Nation’ (Scottish Government, 2022a). Furthermore, Scotland’s [Third Land Use Strategy](#) aims to support land use that will meet the Scottish Government’s net zero and biodiversity targets through adopting a landscape and ecosystems approach, and to provide a platform for inclusive and transparent dialogue across policy and land use sectors (Scottish Government, 2021b).

Critically, meeting the Scottish Government’s net zero target will require significant change in land use and land management practices (Shukla et al, 2019). The Scottish Government has incentivised particular land uses and land management approaches for carbon sequestration such as woodland expansion (e.g. the Forestry Grant Scheme) and the restoration of peatlands (e.g. through NatureScot’s Peatland ACTION initiative). The growth of the market for carbon sequestration and ecological restoration has implications for land value and use, and it has led to an increased demand for land ownership for these purposes (McMorran et al., 2022b; Merrell et al., 2023). There has been a notable recent rise in companies and individuals seeking to buy land in Scotland, ranging from multi-national corporations seeking to offset (or ‘inset’) the carbon emissions from their business activities to individuals and companies wishing to undertake regenerative land management, nature conservation or ‘rewilding’ (see Waylen and Marshall, 2023; Merrell et al., 2023<sup>5</sup>). Community landowners, charities, and the public sector have also acquired land for the purposes of carbon sequestration and nature protection.

It is anticipated that landownership and management for environmental goals will interact with existing and traditional land use practices, such as upland livestock grazing. The environmental impact of livestock farming is well-established. For example, a [2006 report by the Food and Agriculture organisation of the United Nations](#) stated that "*livestock production is one of the major causes of the world's most pressing environmental problems, including global warming, land degradation, air and water pollution, and loss of biodiversity.*"<sup>6</sup> In 2022, the Scottish Government published its [Vision for Agriculture](#), which outlines its commitment to developing an

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<sup>4</sup> Namely the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2005, and the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Although the latest Rural Land Market Insights report notes that whilst natural capital drivers remained a prominent Scottish land market trend, it was thought that changes to Woodland Carbon Code rules (i.e. additionality tests) had resulted in fewer institutional buyers of land for forestry in particular in 2022 (Merrell et al., 2023).

<sup>6</sup> For figures on this in a Scottish context, see Section 2.4 of this report: [Agriculture and Rural Communities \(Scotland\) Bill: supporting evidence and analysis - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

agricultural support framework ‘that delivers high quality food production, climate mitigation and adaptation, and nature restoration’.

The expansion of renewable energy generation also has implications for land use, management, and ownership in Scotland. The Scottish Government has set a goal of generating 50% of Scotland’s energy consumption from renewable sources by 2030 (Scottish Government, 2017). After a steep drop in onshore wind projects due to the closure, in 2015, of the Contract for Difference (CfD) scheme to all but offshore and less established forms of renewable energy, the UK government decided to open the auction to onshore wind from the fourth CfD round (in 2021) onwards. This shift opens up further opportunities not only for landowners to invest in windfarm projects, but also for affected local communities to negotiate shared ownership or benefit arrangements regarding any new infrastructures, helping to facilitate a more just energy transition (Just Transition Commission, 2022; Pinker 2020; Pinker 2021).

This research has engaged with understandings of power (e.g. Lukes, 2021) and empowerment. Empowerment is possible through processes of changing or sharing power, and it may be defined as a “*multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their lives*” (Page and Czuba, 1999 in Hur, 2006: 524). McKee (2015) found that historical power relations and persistent hierarchies inhibited rural community empowerment in land management decision-making in Scotland. The question arises, therefore, whether new forms of landownership with different ownership motivations could change or disrupt power relations, and what the implications would be for community empowerment and engagement in land decision-making? Community empowerment through asset acquisition processes can affect wellbeing by addressing the social, cultural, political, and economic determinants that underpin individual health and wellbeing (WHO, 2022). Wellbeing depends upon an ability to mobilise a range of material, social and psychological resources, all of which are intrinsically connected to place (Atkinson et al, 2012). It may be that green land investment and land ownership could impact community wellbeing and the ability of communities to mobilise resources, with implications for community empowerment. This project aims to understand the role of green investment and land ownership in enabling or inhibiting empowerment in rural places and the subsequent impact on the wellbeing of individuals in rural communities.

The report provides practical recommendations regarding best practice in rural community engagement in decisions relating to land, necessary for the successful implementation of a ‘just transition’ in rural Scotland. This research has been undertaken within the context of the Scottish Land Commission’s Good Practice Programme, in particular the focus on best practice community engagement. The report aims to provide current evidence and case study examples that inform the recommendations outlined in the Scottish Land Commission’s recently published guidance on ‘Delivering Community Benefits from Land’ (Scottish Land

Commission, 2023) and the implementation of the 'Interim Principles for Responsible Investment in Natural Capital' (Scottish Government, 2022c)<sup>7</sup>.

The next chapter sets out the research design and methodology, whilst Chapter 3 provides an overview of the literature and evidence review, including the definition of green land investment and typology of green land investment activities. Chapter 4 details the case study findings, including an overview of the key themes of social and economic impacts (both positive and negative) influencing communities of place and communities of interest as a result of green land activities. This chapter also describes experiences of community-landowner engagement, and opportunities for positive engagement, as well as the hopes and fears held by rural communities with regard to the long-term implications of green land investment. Chapter 5 outlines how the research responds to the research questions, whilst Chapter 6 provides recommendations arising from the research findings for rural communities, green land investor-owners, and policymakers.

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<sup>7</sup> In turn, contributing to Scottish Government's aim to "*establish a values-led, high-integrity market for responsible private investment in natural capital*" within the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (Scottish Government, 2022d:28).



## 2. Methodology

The first step of the research involved a literature and evidence review to develop and verify key concepts and definitions such as 'green land investment' and 'rewilding'.

Next steps included case study selection, stakeholder identification and participant recruitment, and fieldwork with qualitative data collection through interviews and workshops. In six case studies in different parts of Scotland, 54 interviews and six workshops with 96 participants were conducted.

Thematic analysis built understanding of current and likely future social and economic impacts of green land investment.

This research has utilised a largely qualitative approach. This means that the focus of data collection was to capture people's perceptions, opinions, and experiences. As described in this chapter, those who participated in the research were identified and invited to participate to gather the potential diversity of views, and therefore this research does not claim to be representative of the entire population of the case studies, or beyond, that of all of rural Scotland. Nonetheless, across the qualitative dataset collated, common themes can be identified, and experiences reported by the participants provide valuable insights that help us to understand the range of perceived, potential, and actual social and economic impacts relating to green land investment activities. This chapter outlines the qualitative approach (i.e. data collection and analysis) and use of secondary data analysis to characterise the case studies, as well as the limitations in this research that influence how we can draw conclusions from the data (for example, disentangling causes and effects). The findings reported (Chapter 4) are based on the qualitative data analysis. Fieldwork was undertaken between May and September 2023.

This research has involved three key stages:

- i. an evidence and literature review, to develop and verify key concepts and definitions, including 'rewilding';
- ii. capturing current, historic, and diverse rural lived experiences through interviews and community workshops;
- iii. building understanding of likely future impacts (over different timescales) and the opportunities to maximise the benefits to rural communities from green land investments, and minimise negative impacts (informed by interview and workshop findings).

This section provides more detail of the data collection and analysis undertaken.

## 2.1 Developing a definition of green land investment for a Scottish context

A review of academic and grey literature was undertaken to develop a definition and outline a typology of green land investments, and to build an understanding of existing definitions of 'rewilding'. A rapid evidence review was undertaken, based on a protocol comprising the questions, scope, and methods including search strategy and inclusion/exclusion criteria.

In addition, conventional and non-conventional searching techniques (e.g. keyword searches, targeted requests, etc.) were employed. A narrative synthesis of results describing the different motivations behind land acquisition and investment is presented in Chapter 3.

A decision was made to exclude literature solely on green land investments in the Global South, where large-scale land acquisitions are commonly associated with human rights abuses, lack of transparency and consent of users, and dispossession (McMorran et al., 2022a). For this rapid evidence review, 32 articles, 69 news and magazine articles, and 23 additional sources (discussion/position papers, blog posts, reports, and web pages) were found to be relevant. However, the academic literature contained very few relevant studies on Global North cases, and only three focused on Scotland.

Verification and adaptation of the typology, as well as further developing understanding of landowner and investor motivations, was informed by discussions with the Research Advisory Group for this project, as well as members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group for the Scotland's Land Reform Futures project<sup>8</sup>, part of the Scottish Government's Strategic Research Programme 2022-27. This was also the focus of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with landowners, representatives of landowning organisations, and managing agents/land managers. These interviewees were identified according to their role with the case study landholding (see Section 3.3.2). These interviews sought to understand landowner and investor motivations, private sector interests and awareness of perceived/actual impacts on local communities of place and communities of interest due to green land investment, as well as existing practices around community engagement.

The interview guide, participant information sheet and consent form are presented in Annexes 2, 4, and 6.

## 2.2 Creating a formal definition of 'rewilding' for use by the public sector in Scotland

In addition to an extensive literature review, an online interactive workshop was designed and facilitated to identify a formal definition of 'rewilding', for use by the public sector in Scotland. Workshop participants included predominantly representatives from the public sector, in particular agencies and departments

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<sup>8</sup> See: [Scotland's Land Reform Futures | The James Hutton Institute](#)

whose work relates to nature management. Other participants included representatives from academia, environmental non-governmental organisations, and other UK public sector administrations. Prior to the workshop, each participant received a summary version of the literature review to inform discussions. The literature review and workshop findings are described in full in the separate report: '[Defining Rewilding for Scotland's Public Sector](#)' by Kerry Waylen and Acacia Marshall (published July 2023).

## 2.3 Identifying the socio-economic impacts of green land investments in rural Scotland

### 2.3.1 Case study selection

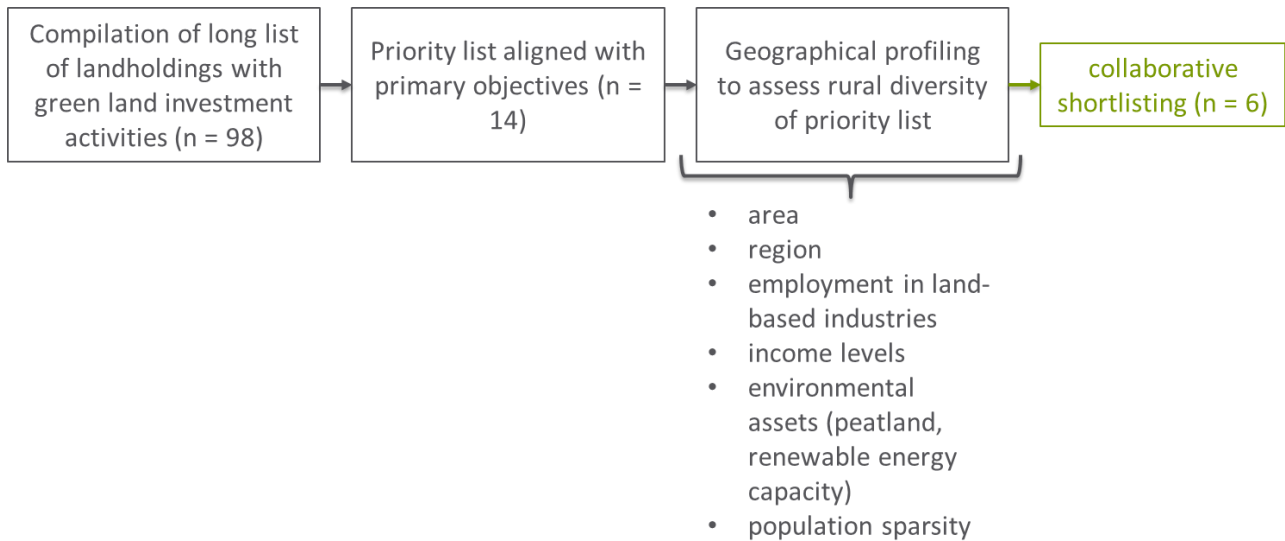
A purposive sampling technique was used to **identify six critical<sup>9</sup> case study landholdings and associated rural communities**. Initially a long list of projects was collated that aligned with the definition of green land investment outlined in Section 3.2. This list was derived from web searches, literature reviews, exploration of the Woodland Carbon and Peatland Carbon Codes, researcher knowledge, and in discussion with members of the project's Research Advisory Group (comprising members of different Scottish Government policy teams, independent land consultants, and senior land use academics).

As described in more detail in Section 3.2, four primary motivations for green land investment were targeted in case study selection: (i) financial returns; (ii) environmental/social impacts; (iii) operational impacts (e.g. in/offsetting); and (iv) reputational impacts. Many investor-owners had several, or all of these motivations for their projects. Across all the landholdings, it was recognised that there was a range of diverse environmental activities ongoing, including rewilding, renewable energy development, afforestation, and peatland restoration, and case study selection sought to include this diversity (i.e. drawing examples of each 'primary objective'/motivation, as identified from web and literature searches regarding the landholding). Duration of landownership was also a key criterion, with case studies representing changes in landownership over different timescales. Case study selection also sought to include a diversity of rural community contexts, for example through analysis of socio-economic indicators. From this long list, considering these criteria, and in discussion with the Research Advisory Group (and members of the Scotland's Land Reform Futures project Stakeholder Advisory Group), six final case studies were identified that represented the diversity of green land investment motivations, activities, and rural contexts in Scotland. A summary table outlining the characteristics of the six anonymous case studies is presented in Table 1 (see below). Figure 1 describes the case study selection process.

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<sup>9</sup> A 'critical' case study is defined by Flyvbjerg as "*having strategic importance in relation to the general problem*" (2006: 229).

**Figure 1: Description of case study selection process**



To support anonymisation of the inputs from research participants described in this report, the demographic, economic and geographical diversity of the case studies are illustrated using outline summaries of the group, which were produced from detailed quantitative and spatial analysis of secondary datasets (Table 1).

Green land investor models included individual ownership, ownership by corporations, and where corporations provided land management services to private landowners/investors. Ownership duration ranged from multi-generational ownership, ownership within the past two decades, within the past three years, and within the past year. Activities likewise varied, but included afforestation, rewilding, peatland restoration, and renewable energy. Table 1 illustrates key characteristics and changes evident in secondary data related to the six case study locations.

**Table 1. Environmental, demographic, and economic summary characteristics for the six case studies.**

Figures marked (\*) were calculated for the estate area, plus the estimated area within 15 minutes' drive-time of the landholding's boundaries.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Narrative description of six case studies</b>
Area (ha)	The case studies covered a diversity of areas: the largest was more than 30 times the size of the smallest.
Woodland area (change in ha, 2011-20)	Four of the six case studies observed some woodland expansion from 2011 to 2020.
Population* (2021)	The estate (and nearby communities) which had the largest population in 2021 had a total population which was more than ten times larger than that of the least populated case study.
Population change* (% , 2001-21)	Four of the six case studies and nearby communities saw an increase in total population from 2001 to 2021.
Gross Value Added (GVA)* (£m, current prices, 2020)	The value of economic output was over 20 times greater in the case study (including nearby communities) with the largest GVA, compared with the smallest.
Employment in land-based sector and tourist sector* (% of residents, 2011)	In three case studies, more than one in ten employed residents (of the case study area, and accessible communities) were employed in tourism (i.e. 'Accommodation and food service'). In one case study, more than 10% of residents were employed in the land-based industries.

*Note that comparisons of case studies given are deliberately 'fuzzy' and were rounded down to the nearest ten 'times' to maintain case study anonymity. 'Gross Value Added' is the net value of goods and services produced in the area.<sup>10</sup>*

<sup>10</sup> Data used in analysis, supporting the descriptions in the table above: a) Who Owns Scotland (May 2023). Andy Wightman; b) National Forest Inventory Woodland Scotland 2020. Forestry Commission. Contains, or is based on, information supplied by the Forestry Commission. © Crown copyright and database right 2021 Ordnance Survey [100021242]; c) National Forest Inventory Scotland 2011. Forestry Commission. © Crown copyright and database right 2021 Ordnance Survey [100021242]; d) Transport network analysis: datasets for transport network and limitations of analysis described in [Hopkins and Piras \(2020\)](#); e) 2023-1 Scottish Postcode Directory Files: Postcode Index. National Records of Scotland. Contains NRS data © Crown copyright and database right [2023]; f) Population of data zones by council area: mid-2001 to mid-2021. National Records of Scotland. © Crown Copyright 2022. Data supplied by National Records of Scotland; g) Estimated population by sex, single year of age, 2011 Data Zone area, and council area. National Records of Scotland. © Crown Copyright. Data supplied by National Records of Scotland; h) Experimental gross value added (GVA) estimates for lower super output areas, data zones and super output areas and geography reference tables. Office for National Statistics. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0; i) Census 2011 Table QS605SC. National Records of Scotland. (© Crown copyright. Data supplied by National Records of Scotland). Included in analysis, but not shown: j) Renewable Energy Planning Database (REPD): July 2023. Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0

### 2.3.2 Qualitative data collection

For each case study, **stakeholder analysis** was undertaken, to identify the diversity of lived experience, anticipate likely discussion points during fieldwork, and to develop a shortlist of potential interviewees. The stakeholder analysis sought to identify a range of rural stakeholders, including both representatives from communities of place that were located on or adjacent to the case study landholdings, as well as communities of interest, including owner-occupier farmers, tenant farmers and crofters, those employed on rural estates (or who are recent ex-employees), rural business owners, and others who were identified as likely to be/have been impacted by green land investment activities or land use change. Potential interviewees were initially identified through web searches, contacting community organisations (e.g. community councils, development trusts, etc.) and membership organisations (e.g. Scottish Tenant Farmers Association, National Farmers Union Scotland, etc.), and through researcher networks. Individual gatekeeper bias was avoided as far as possible through contacting multiple local gatekeepers.

**In-depth, semi-structured individual or small group interviews** (2-3 people) were undertaken with representatives of both communities of place (i.e. community councillors) and communities of interest (e.g. local business owners, farmers/crofters, etc.) associated with the case studies. The purpose of these interviews was to develop an understanding of the impacts of green land investment on people and communities. At least eight people were interviewed in each case study and recruited according to a purposive sampling technique based on the stakeholder analysis. The interviewees included a mix of ages and genders, as well as hard-to-reach groups (e.g. ex-employees of the case study landholdings, those on low incomes or with other protected characteristics). Interviews were digitally recorded (with informed consent from the interviewees) and transcribed. The participant information sheet, consent form, and interview guide are presented in Annexes 1, 3, and 5. Table 2 (below) outlines the number and type of interviewees. Across all participants (interviewees and workshop participants), 60% were male and 40% were female, and ages ranged from people in their twenties to seventies<sup>11</sup>.

Finally, **community-based workshops** (at least one per case study) aimed to interrogate the historic, current and potential short-term and longer-term implications of changes in rural land use and ownership in the locality. In particular, workshop design encouraged participants to consider the changes that they had observed locally over living memory, and to share their ideal future visions (after Duckett et al., 2017) to elicit local community perspectives on the impact of green land investment in their local area. The workshop discussions also considered experiences of landowner-community engagement and the available options for partnership working, collaboration, and effective engagement between the rural community and local green landowners and investors. The workshop facilitation guide is presented in Annex 9.

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<sup>11</sup> Please note that gender and age data was not requested during the interviews or workshops, and therefore this information is based on researcher observation or as noted in interview transcripts.

The workshops were open to all members of the local community, and advertised openly through local channels (e.g. community noticeboards, mailing lists, Facebook groups). Invitations to participate in the workshops were circulated to local community groups and individuals identified in the stakeholder analysis. The workshops were held locally in accessible community-based venues (e.g. village halls, church halls, and community centres), with refreshments provided for participants. Travel expenses and childcare costs were reimbursed to participants where requested, and this was advertised to ensure that cost was not a barrier to participation.

Focus group discussions were carefully facilitated to ensure all participants were able to contribute and no single voice or group dominated. Participants were asked to follow the Chatham House rule<sup>12</sup>. Focus group discussions were digitally recorded (with informed consent from participants) and transcribed. The participant information sheet and consent form for the community workshops are presented in Annexes 7 and 8.

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<sup>12</sup> See: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule>

**Table 2. Number and type of case study interviewees and workshop participants**

<b>Case study</b>	<b>Case Study 1</b>	<b>Case Study 2</b>	<b>Case Study 3</b>	<b>Case Study 4</b>	<b>Case Study 5</b>	<b>Case Study 6</b>
Number of interviewees	8	8	8	11	11	8
Interviewee types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local business owner</li> <li>• Community councillor</li> <li>• Landowner representatives (x2)</li> <li>• Community representatives (x 2)</li> <li>• Estate employees (x 2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighbouring landowner</li> <li>• Intermediary company representative</li> <li>• Community representatives (x 3)</li> <li>• Land managers (x 2)</li> <li>• Tenant farmer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landowner representatives (x 2)</li> <li>• Community representatives (x 3)</li> <li>• Crofters (x 2)</li> <li>• Neighbouring land manager (x 1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenant farmers (x 5)</li> <li>• Community representatives (x 2)</li> <li>• Local business owner</li> <li>• Estate employee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landowning company representative</li> <li>• Land manager</li> <li>• Local business owner</li> <li>• Local tenant farmer</li> <li>• Owner-occupier farmer</li> <li>• Community representatives (x 3)</li> <li>• Former estate employees (x 2)</li> <li>• Estate residential tenant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landowning company representative</li> <li>• Land manager</li> <li>• Neighbouring land managers (x 2)</li> <li>• Neighbouring tenant farmer</li> <li>• Community representatives (x 2)</li> <li>• Local business manager</li> </ul>
Number of workshop participants	17	13	[No participants; researchers participated in alternative online community event]	53	10	3
Total participants	25	21	8	64	21	11



### 2.3.3 Qualitative data analysis

Anonymity and confidentiality were primary considerations in this research. All interview and workshop transcripts were anonymised prior to analysis. This involved the careful removal of all identifiers of individuals, places, organisations, or community groups. Data was stored securely in password-protected files on James Hutton Institute servers.

All qualitative data collected from interviews and workshops underwent thematic analysis (Clarke and Braun, 2017) using the NVivo tool to determine the core and sub-themes, commonalities, and divergences of narratives across interviewee types. Co-analysis across the research team and the use of a shared analytical framework supported rigorous and reflective analysis. The key themes emerging are the focus of Chapter 4.

### 2.4 Project limitations

This research is timely and has largely been met positively by those approached to participate as interviewees and workshop participants. However, limitations arose with regard to landowner non-response (and on one occasion declining to participate), which has limited our understanding regarding green land investor-owner motivations across all case studies. Non-response and declining to participate (either as interviewees or workshop participants) was also a feature of approaching members of communities of place and interest (e.g. estate employees). In some contexts, estate employees were unable to participate due to having signed confidentiality agreements with their employer. Others, such as commercial tenants, expressed their wish not to discuss business arrangements. There were also indications that media enquiries to potential participants had previously taken their time, which meant they were less willing to participate in the research. Participants also highlighted the challenges and limitations of case study/interviewee anonymity in small communities, and this was likely a reason for some choosing not to participate in community workshops. In one case, participants raised concerns regarding possible implications from participating in terms of their relationships with the landowner. In at least two case studies, community members expressed their perceived vulnerability in sharing their views openly, and farming tenants believed that their livelihoods could be threatened if they spoke negatively about the green land investor-owners' land management practices.

Another key limitation was the limited timescale for this research, which impacted on the research team's ability to build the types of relationships necessary to undertake sensitive research. This limitation was mitigated to some extent through working closely with multiple gatekeepers, seeking to be aware of and respond to local concerns, and maintaining ongoing contact. Follow-up presentations and discussions will be arranged with case study community groups and green land investor-owners regarding the key findings from this research. The variation in numbers participating in the workshops (see Table 2) may be related to a combination of how well details of the workshop were communicated with communities of place, the perceived value and potential impact of the research, and

the timeliness of this issue in the local area (i.e. whether community members had recently experienced landownership and land use change or not). In one case study, despite widespread promotion of the community workshop, no participants attended. Two people who had indicated their intention to attend were later interviewed. In order to gather wide community views in this case study, the research team attended an online event organised by a local community group, introduced the project and gathered feedback. This feedback has informed the analysis, but direct quotes were not captured during this event.

Finally, there remain challenges in disentangling processes of change affecting rural communities (for example, changes to land-based industries and associated employment) from those that are driven more directly by landownership and land use change associated with green land investment. Limitations in secondary data availability (for example, small area-level data from the 2022 Census have not been published, as of September 2023) have restricted how well local changes can be observed that align with transitions in landownership and land use. Similarly, in order to support case study and participant anonymity, only generalised descriptions of the final six case studies (featuring broad descriptions of the case studies as a group, and rounded comparisons of magnitude) have been published in this report. Additionally, it was not always clear what was the influence of 'green land investment' rather than traditional private ownership in driving social and economic impacts (for example, relating to issues of scale and concentration; community involvement in land use decision-making). This point is considered further in the Conclusions (Chapter 5).

### 3. Literature and Evidence Review

There has been a recent increase in land purchases and management in rural Scotland by companies seeking to benefit from natural capital investment. This has implications for Scottish Government goals of landownership diversification, just transition, net zero, and community wealth building.

This research addresses the lack of evidence and understanding regarding the wider and long-term implications of green land investment on rural communities and economies in Scotland.

A review of academic and grey literature provides a definition of green land investments and the motivations of green land investor-owners, including: reputational impacts, financial returns, operational impacts, environmental and/or social impacts, and personal drivers.

#### 3.1 Scotland and the Natural Capital Market

Natural capital is defined as the “*habitats and resources of the natural world that combine to provide social, economic, and environmental benefits to people...[including] the water, air, soil, plants and wildlife on which we depend*” (Scottish Government, 2021b: 10). Professor Dieter Helm describes natural capital as the “*assets that nature provides us for free*” (2022: 2), and highlights that systems (such as land) can contain multiple natural capitals that interact (e.g. carbon, air quality, and biodiversity), reinforcing the need for holistic approaches to land and land management (Helm, 2022).

At present, conversations about natural capital are often equated with investments in carbon, because carbon credits are the only internationally – or even nationally – recognised markets at scale. Furthermore, the increase of existing voluntary domestic carbon markets, and the development and anticipation of new markets (e.g. biodiversity credits) are supporting the viability of large-scale land use transitions, including rewilding and afforestation (McMorran et al., 2022a). It is clear that there is an increase in land purchases and land management by companies seeking to ‘inset’ their own carbon emissions, or profit from others’ needs to offset their emissions (Scottish Land Commission, 2022). However, other financial mechanisms for facilitating the delivery of other environmental benefits are possible – as witnessed by the proliferation of examples collected by the Green Finance Institute<sup>13</sup> and new transactions being set up, for example through the ‘Revere’ Initiative<sup>14</sup> between the UK National Parks and Palladium International. A key example in Scotland is the Memorandum of Understanding signed by NatureScot and three financial institutions to support a pilot project that aims to mobilise private investment in landscape-scale restoration (NatureScot, 2023).

<sup>13</sup> A repository of information on green finance is available at: [GFI Hive \(greenfinanceinstitute.com\)](https://greenfinanceinstitute.com)

<sup>14</sup> More information about the ‘Revere’ initiative is available at: <https://revere.eco/>

This drive for new land uses, land management approaches, and new actors shaping landscapes is arguably in tension with Scottish Government policy regarding the diversification of landownership, as new entrant farmers and community organisations are priced out of land access and forestry ownership becomes more concentrated (see: Daniels-Creasey and McKee, 2022; Wightman and Hollingdale, 2023; Merrell et al., 2023)<sup>15</sup>, as well as commitments to community empowerment and participation in land use decision-making. The land market and land management implications from investment in natural capital in Scotland is likely to “reinforce existing structural inequalities in relation to concentration of landownership and decision-making power, and related outcomes for communities” (McMorran et al., 2022a). Research by the James Hutton Institute has demonstrated that such natural capital investments, in particular by large-scale and concentrated landowners, are already impinging on sustainable rural development (Daniels-Creasey and McKee, 2022). These potential concerns are reflected in the Scottish Government’s consultation ‘Land Reform in a Net Zero Nation’, which proposes (amongst other measures) to ensure that large-scale land acquisitions are in the public interest (with obligations both for buyers and sellers), and that large-scale landowners comply with the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement (Scottish Government, 2022b). This proposed intervention in the land market is complex and controversial (for example, see Scottish Land & Estates, 2022). The Scottish Government has also been proactive in publishing ‘Interim Principles for Responsible Investment in Natural Capital’, that seek to support the development of a:

“values-led, high integrity market for responsible investment in natural capital, that helps deliver policy goals for economic transformation, climate change and biodiversity, and that provides community benefits and support a Just Transition” (Scottish Government, 2022c)

Despite the focus of numerous media reports in high-profile international publications (e.g. MacDonald, 2021; Macfarlane, 2021; BBC News, 2022; Mann and Matijevic, 2022; Marshall, 2022; O’Grady, 2022; Armstrong, 2022, amongst others), there is little academic research that defines the range of green land investment types and investor motivations, or that provides evidence regarding the likely impact of land reform proposals on mitigating negative and maximising positive effects of the natural capital market in Scottish land.

### 3.2 Defining Green Land Investments

An initial review of the available literature on green land investments along with media articles on the phenomenon of large-scale land purchases for green activities or purposes in Scotland resulted in an initial definition of green land investments as follows:

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<sup>15</sup> The Scottish Land Commission’s latest Rural Land Market Insights report states that: “the prices achieved in the market [in 2022] meant that there were fewer opportunities for communities, young farmers or less affluent individuals that could further diversify the ownership of Scottish land” (Merrell et al., 2023: 32).

“The purchase of, or investment in (directly through shareholding or indirectly through intermediary companies) land to undertake nature restoration, regenerative land management or approaches that maintain or enhance natural capital, and/or sequester carbon emissions.”

Subsequently, a review of academic and grey literature was completed to refine the definition and create a typology of green land investments (see Section 3.1 for literature review methodology).

While none of the literature offered an encompassing definition of green land investment, elements of the mechanisms and activities that were in the project’s initial definition were verified. Three articles described land purchase (van der Ploeg et al., 2015; McMorran et al., 2022; Salter, 2022), one mentioned investment in land (Sharma et al., 2023), and one article mentioned both purchase and investment in land (Ross, 2021). The purposes they ascribe to these land acquisitions or investments include: carbon sequestration (van der Ploeg et al., 2015; McMorran et al., 2022), carbon offsetting (Ross, 2021; McMorran et al., 2022), and carbon trading (Ross, 2021; Sharma et al., 2023); forest conservation (van der Ploeg, Franco and Borrás, 2015; McMorran et al., 2022); investment in natural capital (McMorran et al., 2022); the use of financial instruments such as sustainability funds and climate bonds (Sharma et al., 2023); and to “*decarbonise business emissions, offset future tax liability, cash in on public subsidy, benefit from land speculation, or all the above*” (Davidson, 2022). These articles focused largely on the financial aspects of land ownership and investment activities. Box 1 provides an overview of the models of green land investment currently operating in Scotland, based on ongoing landownership research (Wightman, 2023).

**Box 1: Models of green land investment operating in Scotland (after Wightman, 2023):**

1. Bespoke investment funds typically structured as Limited Liability Partnerships whereby the investors are partners.
2. Existing financial institutions operating through subsidiary companies or partnerships.
3. Commercial companies established for the explicit purpose of restoring nature.
4. Wealthy individuals operating through a variety of structures (companies, trusts etc.).
5. Existing landowners engaging the services of an intermediary company who attracts investors and enters into a lease or other legal arrangement.

In our definition, we have described activities undertaken by green land investor-owners but not their motivations. A list of motivations was produced from the literature review and supplemented by a review of websites created by some of the Scottish ‘green land investors’ that outlined their activities and their purposes.

Green land investment motivations are differentiated from land ownership for other purposes, in that the green motivations are a primary driver for purchase/investment rather than a side effect. It was found that the primary motivation of green land investor-owners varies according to what extent they are seeking a return on their investment (and seek to engage with natural capital markets) or are compelled by environmental and social obligations (with implications for social justice). The investor-owner motivations fall along a spectrum rather than into discrete categories (Figure 2). Many also have multiple motivations and activities, and therefore distinguishing the priority of each motivation from the outside (i.e., based only on website content or media reports) can be difficult. These literature-derived motivations have been further refined through discussions with the Research Advisory Group and interviews with green land investor-owners and landowner representatives (see Section 4.1).

In the resulting typology, the primary motivations of green land investors are:

- Reputational impacts
- Financial returns
- Operational impacts
- Environmental and/or social impacts
- Personal drivers

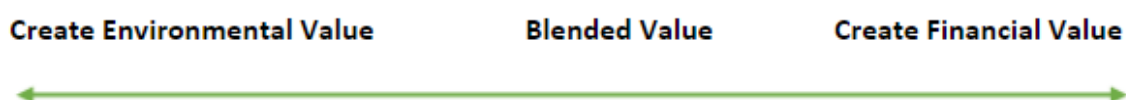
These motivations and related examples are detailed in Table 3 (see below).

The literature findings have been checked and enhanced through field research (see Section 4.1). The resulting definition of green land investments used in this report is:

The purchase of, or investment in (directly through shareholding or changing focus of owner investment, or indirectly through intermediary companies) land to undertake nature restoration, regenerative land management or approaches that maintain or enhance natural capital, and/or sequester carbon emissions, differentiated from traditional ownership by the green motivations as a driver rather than a secondary outcome.

While this report looks at cases of private ownership/investment the definition could also apply to community owners and public sector owners.

**Figure 2: Spectrum of green land investor motivations** (adapted from Sullivan, 2018)



**Table 3. Description of motivations for green land investment**

Motivation	Examples
<b>Reputational Impacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure social licence<sup>16</sup></li> <li>• Environmental, Social and Governance/Corporate Social Responsibility goals</li> <li>• Respond to community resistance/environmentalist pressures</li> <li>• Prestige*</li> <li>• Green credentials/legitimacy/branding</li> </ul> <p>(Le Billon, 2021; Koronka et al., 2022; McMorran et al., 2022a; Reed et al., 2022; Scottish Land Commission, 2022)</p>
<b>Financial Returns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion into new markets, diversification*</li> <li>• Additional land-based income</li> <li>• Government (green) grants (including stacking private/public funding)</li> <li>• Price premiums for eco-products</li> <li>• Expectation of payments from future markets/public finance</li> <li>• Capture subsidies</li> <li>• Differentiate portfolio (e.g. additionality of other social/environmental impacts to carbon credits)</li> <li>• Tax exemptions/relief*</li> <li>• Option value</li> <li>• Speculation*</li> <li>• Inflation hedging*</li> <li>• Land value returns*</li> <li>• Rental returns**</li> </ul> <p>(van der Ploeg, Franco and Borrás, 2015; Meissner and Grote, 2017; Wynne-Jones et al., 2020; Koronka et al., 2022; McMorran et al., 2022a; Reed et al., 2022; Scottish Land Commission, 2022; Sharma et al., 2023; Thompson, 2023)</p>
<b>Operational Impacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ameliorate risk (e.g. climate change, reputational, to assets/supply chain)</li> <li>• Reduce impacts from other parts of operation</li> <li>• Insetting</li> <li>• Offsetting</li> </ul> <p>(Le Billon, 2021; MacDonald, 2021; Brice et al., 2022; Koronka et al., 2022; McMorran et al., 2022a; Reed et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2023)</p>
<b>Environmental and/or Social Impacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community wealth building*</li> <li>• Rural employment*</li> <li>• Biodiversity</li> <li>• Afforestation</li> <li>• Peatland restoration</li> <li>• Nature restoration or ‘rewilding’</li> </ul>

<sup>16</sup> Social license may be defined as "the perceptions of local stakeholders that a project, a company, or an industry that operates in a given area or region is socially acceptable or legitimate" (Raufflet et al., 2013, p. 2223)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carbon sequestration</li> </ul> <p>(Wynne-Jones et al., 2020; Koronka et al., 2022; Reed et al., 2022)</p>
<b>Personal Drivers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fulfilling moral obligation, altruism</li> <li>• Personal interests*</li> <li>• Lifestyle factors*</li> <li>• Power*</li> </ul> <p>(Holmes, 2012; Geisler, 2015; Meissner and Grote, 2017; Dempsey and Bigger, 2019; MacDonald, 2021; Koronka, Ovando and Vergunst, 2022; McMorran et al., 2022a; Salter, 2022; Sharma et al., 2023)</p>

\*These motivations may also apply to non- green land investor-owners but are evident with green land investor-owners as well.

### 3.3 The socio-economic impacts of green land investment in rural Scotland: existing evidence

As described, natural capital investment is growing rapidly in the UK, driving significant changes in the land use sector (Hollingdale, 2022). Many landowners and managers are interested in new market-based opportunities (Waylen and Martin-Ortega, 2018), so further change seems likely. The pace and scale of land use change due to the natural capital and carbon markets is both a potential opportunity for achieving net zero, meeting the finance gap in nature-based solutions, and supporting community wealth building, and a key challenge – particularly in terms of achieving a ‘just transition’ in rural Scotland. The Scottish Land Commission is clear, however, that: *“we can’t allow the drive to net zero to pitch community and private interests against each other. Our approach must benefit everyone”* (Glenn, 2021).

The challenges are both national – in terms of policy alignment and meeting the public interest in our land resource – and local, impacting in particular on rural communities and the people and households who live and work there. The opportunities and challenges of landownership and land use change in light of the climate emergency will have implications for rural livelihoods (e.g. farming, forestry, gamekeeping), as well as the wider rural economy (e.g. the impact on rural services, hospitality businesses, tradespeople).

A recent evidence review has found that large scale private acquisitions of land in Scotland for natural capital may bring real risks. These include concentrating the distribution of benefits associated with natural capital, and conflicting with wider policy ambitions around diversifying landownership and increasing opportunities for communities to influence decisions around land use (McMorran et al., 2022b; Atkinson and Ovando, 2021). The rapidly emerging risks in Scotland’s land market have clear parallels to international contexts of land financialisation – whereby land becomes traded as a financial investment instrument rather than a productive good



(Fairbairn, 2020) and arguably ‘land-grabbing’ (van der Ploeg et al., 2015)<sup>17</sup>. However, it is noted that relatively little land is transacted in Scotland on an annual basis (Merrell et al., 2023).

There is evidence of significant impacts on the land market in Scotland, with poor livestock grazing land rising in price by 60% during 2021 (McMorran et al., 2022b)<sup>18</sup>, reportedly pricing out individual farming businesses from expansion, reducing new entrant farming land access, and restricting opportunities for community organisations to utilise right-to-buy mechanisms (Daniels-Creasey and McKee, 2022). Where green land investment results in increasing landownership concentration, there may be implications for sustainable rural development (e.g. land availability for affordable housing or economic development; see Glenn et al., 2019).

Indeed, the 2022 Rural Land Markets Insights report highlighted the “*potential for social and cultural impacts due to the potential for relatively rapid and large-scale land use transitions*” (McMorran et al., 2022b: 43). Such impacts include the decline in rural community populations where members are employed in traditional land-based activities, including sporting land management and hill sheep farming, which are no longer primary land use objectives (e.g. due to afforestation and renewable energy development). Rural depopulation (as a result of changing or declining employment) has serious consequences for key service provision, including healthcare and education. Changing rural employment may have implications for local wage levels, the market for other service industries (e.g. mechanics, tradespeople, etc.), and the demographic composition of rural communities (e.g. the outmigration of working-age populations, increase in second home ownership, etc). There remains limited evidence and understanding regarding the wider and long-term implications of the natural capital market in land on rural communities and economies (Scotland’s Moorland Forum, 2022; McMorran et al., 2022a).

The community impacts of estate acquisitions by corporate owners are also uncertain. On one hand there is a risk to communities due to such owners seeking primarily to achieve investment returns, but there is also the opportunity for corporate owners (or other types of green land investors) to provide “*new approaches and resources to community development due to their need to ensure social acceptability*” (McMorran et al., 2022b: 43). Indeed, incoming green land investors may be keen to support community initiatives, through providing funding, entrepreneurial, or business knowledge. A recent report for the Scottish Government has demonstrated the local economic impacts of natural capital investment, in particular highlighting the anticipated positive impact on the wider local economy as a result of investment in woodland creation, and positive employment across different scenarios (i.e. woodland creation, peatland restoration, regenerative agriculture, and coastal restoration) (WSP, 2022).

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<sup>17</sup> Where land grabbing is understood to be the process of large-scale, transnational commercial land transactions (Borras Jr, et al., 2015).

<sup>18</sup> It is noted that the latest Rural Land Market Insights Report explains that whilst increasing land prices continued at the beginning of 2022, farmland prices plateaued near the end of 2022 (Merrell et al., 2023). Nonetheless, the Scottish Land Commission also report a trend of increasing farmland values with growth each year between 2020 – 2022 (Scottish Land Commission, 2023b).

However, recent research by the James Hutton Institute indicates that community engagement does not tend to be prioritised by new landowners or those embarking on significant land use change (Daniels-Creasey and McKee, 2022; Fischer and McKee 2017; Pinker 2018; Pinker 2021). Our research shows the key role played by individual and personal relationships (McKee, 2015; Glass et al., 2021). Some new landowners (or generations of family ownership) appear to prioritise commercial interests and estate financial viability, rather than maintaining relationships with local community members, which can undermine community engagement processes (Fischer and McKee 2017; Pinker 2018; Pinker 2021). It may be anticipated that a rise in absentee (i.e. non-resident), corporate landownership may have implications for landownership transparency and accountability (cf. McKee, 2015), and the implementation of the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement (a key measure proposed within the Scottish Government's consultation 'Land Reform in a Net Zero Nation').

Research by the James Hutton Institute also illustrates the perceived negative environmental and landscape impacts of green land investment ownership and land use change (Daniels-Creasey and McKee, 2022)<sup>19</sup>. In one study, interviewees from rural communities in the South of Scotland described a lack of landscape diversity, in particular with large areas of afforestation, which was perceived as environmentally detrimental, with few benefits for biodiversity. Interviewees feared that landscape diversity – an asset they consider crucial to attracting tourists – would continue to disappear, again with implications for rural employment and the wider economy (Daniels-Creasey and McKee, 2022).

Critically, the shift in types of landowners and their motivations for ownership is likely to change social relationships in rural communities that remain entwined with local landholdings, with implications for community empowerment and the 'just transition'. There is a significant knowledge gap around these changing relationships and their implications for rural community sustainability and empowerment, which offers a clear rationale for this research. Indeed, as the research presented here demonstrates, different communities of place (and different people within those communities) are impacted by green land investment activities in diverse ways, both positively and negatively. Recognising this diversity is both a challenge and key to the just transition.

This research seeks to build understanding about the needs and aspirations of rural communities regarding training, skills, and employment in the light of just transition planning (building on the recommendation in WSP, 2022), providing valuable evidence to the Scottish Government in terms of its goals to support generational change in agriculture, rural repopulation, and the shift to the wellbeing economy. Through gathering the lived experience of rural communities impacted by landownership and land use change, this research aims to support policy development that seeks to maximise the potential from the natural capital market,

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<sup>19</sup> It is noted that other studies show enhanced landscape qualities and amenities associated with land use change for renewable energy (see, for example: [Renewable Energy and Landscape Quality, European Cooperation in Science and Technology \(COST\)](#)).

ensure policy alignment and clarity of the 'public interest', and minimise negative impacts on individuals and rural communities, in the short and long term.

## 4. Findings

This chapter outlines the findings from six green land investment case studies in rural Scotland. The main findings are:

- Community members and investor-owners perceived the priority of environmental and financial motivations differently, and some community members felt uninformed about landowner goals.
- Many socio-economic changes were beneficial in some cases and detrimental in others as they increased or decreased depending on investor-owners' actions (for example access, community involvement, housing, and employment) evidencing the power of investor-owners to impact communities. Certain communities of interest were significantly affected, particularly by changes in land-based workers' employment levels and activities.
- Community engagement is important for positive relationships. Positive and negative examples given by participants resulted in/led to suggestions for improvement, including better communication and involving an external party to facilitate.
- Community participants had hopes for sustainable rural communities but also fears of limited benefits and lack of community involvement in plans, as well as the potential failure of investor-owners to reach specified goals (with social and environmental implications). Nonetheless, investor-owners described their plans and actions to support positive social and environmental outcomes (e.g. supporting training and education opportunities).

### Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings from six case studies of landholdings where 'green land investment' is evident, located across rural Scotland, and with associated communities of place and of interest. The findings are discussed in the following sections:

- 4.1 Understanding motivations for green land investment
- 4.2 Understanding social and economic impacts of green land investment in rural Scotland, including the following sub-sections:
  - 4.2.1 Potential, actual, and perceived benefits and/or negative impacts of green land investment
  - 4.2.2 Understanding the influence of green land investment activities on different communities of interest in rural areas
    - Experiences of, opportunities, and barriers to community-landowner engagement in the context of green-land investment
    - Hopes and fears for the future of rural Scotland: rural communities and green land investment landowners

## 4.1 Understanding motivations for green land investment

This section describes the range of motivations described by the green land investor-owners interviewed, including:

- Profit, but the owner-investors emphasised that green land investment did not necessarily seek to maximising profit (which was often lower than other investment activities), instead providing a showpiece or blueprint.
- Stable and long-term investment.
- Insetting through afforestation or renewable energy, for example, on their own land resulting in direct emission reductions.
- Additionality, such as income from both timber and carbon credits and also speculation purchases anticipating further land value increases.
- Positive environmental and/or social outcomes.

Community members believed that profit was the most important motive. Community cynicism regarding landowner stated motivations led to some accusations of hypocrisy on the part of green land investor-owners.

Two-way communication between community and landowners was important to understanding and accepting green land investor-owner motivations.

The case study research provided an opportunity to explore the motivations of green land investor-owners, encompassed by the five categories outlined in the typology: financial returns, environmental/social impacts, operational impacts, reputational impacts, and personal motivations (see Section 3.2). However, the importance of each of these motivations to each case and the activities on the landholding differs among case studies and was not agreed upon by all participants. Motivations expressed by green land investor-owners and/or their representatives often differed from community members' perceptions of motivations. This could be attributed to a lack of knowledge on the part of community members, whether because of lack of communication or understanding, receiving information from disparate or unreliable sources, or in some cases, scepticism about the expressed motivations.

Profit is a critical motivation that investor-owners identified for green land investment activity. Investor-focused landowner representatives mentioned the importance of financial returns, but differentiated the profits their investment will make from other types of investment, characterising them as 'lower' and directed to impacts that are not only financial.

Such impact investors therefore aim to "*put that money to good use*" [Landowner representative]. Because of this focus on environmental and, less-frequently, social impacts, many of the green land investor-owners and representatives that were interviewed described aspirations for their land to become a "showpiece" and

perhaps pioneer a new type of investment opportunity and management model. As described:

“We want people to come and say, ‘Oh, right, okay. This is a great rural sustainable business model’ – because it gets the carbon credits, it gets the biodiversity, it gets the people on there, it creates the jobs. [...] What we’re trying to achieve is like a blueprint which could be used by any landowner, any investor, governments.” [Landowner representative]

Land is seen as an attractive asset for green land investor-owners. The asset is perceived as stable and long-term (especially if it has timber or it is considered ‘plantable’ land). In several cases, insetting – a company investing in carbon reduction or removal projects in its own supply chain – was a major operational motivation for the landowner. Purchasing land and insetting – through afforestation or renewable energy, for example – results in direct emission reductions. One landowner representative said, *“technically we could accumulate significant carbon credits and sell them on the open market, but would we be right to do that, when we know the carbon footprint of our biggest polluting activities, those being farming, commercial property and peatland?”*. Some investor-owners and representatives spoke about the appeal of additionality, such as income from both timber and carbon credits. An intermediary company representative mentioned well-resourced buyers making speculative land purchases of arable land anticipating financial additionality. For all these reasons, land in Scotland was believed to be particularly appealing because of its lower cost and availability compared to further south<sup>20</sup>.

Community members perceived profit and attracting investment capital as the primary motivation for green land investor-owners. They suggested landowners seek profits from land use such as timber harvesting, carbon credits, government grants or subsidies, and tax benefits. They acknowledged the expressed green motivations of landowners but many stated that financial considerations are most important; for example:

“First and foremost, that is an investment company that owns it now so their rationale is to make money through whatever mechanisms they can.”  
[Community member]

Community participants also highlighted the attractiveness of Scottish land compared to other countries that have land taxes or land ownership caps.

Some green land investor-owners claimed that their primary motivation is more personal, to do good by ensuring positive environmental and/or social outcomes, and that this is reflected in their primary land management goals and large-scale, long-term approach. One landowner was said to have:

“a passion for nature, nature conservation and ecological restoration [...] a deep conviction that nature was on the slide and needed to be protected and

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<sup>20</sup> This perception is verified by research evidence regarding agricultural land prices where “average per acre values remain lower in Scotland relative to other UK regions” (McMorran et al., 2022b: 21).

[they] had a passion and the wherewithal to do that” [Landowner representative]

Other landowner representatives described their approach to optimising land use to fulfil different landholding objectives, in particular regarding net zero and ESG (environmental, social and governance), which led them to consider natural capital projects such as native woodland afforestation and peatland restoration. One intermediary company representative framed it positively, referencing examples of their customers’ voluntary corporate social responsibility.

Regarding the green activities undertaken, one community member commented on investor-owners’ personal motivations, noting that: “*Their heart is definitely in the right place*”. However, these apparently environmentally and socially-focussed objectives were received with cynicism by community members in at least two case studies. The motivation was recast as “*really a commodification of the land around here for tourist purposes*” [Community member] but other participants also expressed scepticism regarding the stated goals of green land investor-owners. For example:

“They’re looking for that financial return to be maximised rather than achieving any social gain. My perception is it’s all about that business, and if there’s a social gain or not is almost immaterial. I’m sure they probably wouldn’t agree with that, but that’s how it looks from the outside.” [Community representative]

Community members sometimes questioned whether a landowner or investor’s expressed motivations were reflected in their actions. In two cases, this cynicism led to accusations of hypocrisy; that the green activities were “*a decoy*” to offset a landowner’s carbon footprint to “*help [landowner] sleep better at night*” [Community representative]. Providing the example of a landowner representative burning toxic rubbish, and contrasting this with the tree planting activities on the estate, one former estate employee said: “*you think...you are saving the planet, what? They contradict themselves all the time, like I say, when it suits them, they’ll do it but when it doesn’t you get told off for it*” [Community representative].

In contrast, in one case study, people perceived the landowner’s motivations more positively; this may have been due to significant community engagement that had occurred around the green land investment activities on the landholding. One estate employee who initially saw the landowner’s motivations simply as tree planting and carbon sequestration now perceives it as:

“a business that could look at the natural capital in its broadest sense, in other words; wildlife, woodland, water, recreation, community and recognise that each one of those things, depended upon the other [...] you suddenly felt there was an investment organisation here, that were here for the long-term and that gave more of a safeguard to what was happening on the estate, to build a better programme of work and could actually demonstrate positive elements to the local community as well” [Estate employee]

Significantly, in some case studies, community members felt uninformed about the motivations and goals of the green land investor-owners. Speculation ranged from a desire to farm, to rewild, to protect wildlife, to receive tax benefits, to an idiosyncratic personal motivation. Participants commented: *“I don’t know exactly what their intentions are”*, *“I can only go by what I’ve heard”* and *“that’s pure speculation on my part”* [Tenant farmers] and *“I don’t actually know what they are doing at the moment [...] I don’t know what their long-term plans are”* [Local business owner]. This theme is discussed further in the following sections.

In summary, investor-owners prioritised financial and environmental motivations for their investment and management activities, differentiating them from more conventional investments. Community members believed financial motivations were paramount and would be prioritised above other motivations in decision-making. Some community members were cynical about expressed investor-owner motivations, and others felt they lacked knowledge about intentions; two-way communication seems to have resolved this several case studies.

## 4.2 Understanding social and economic impacts of green land investment in rural Scotland

### 4.2.1 Potential, actual, and perceived benefits and/or negative impacts of green land investment

Both positive and negative impacts were perceived and realised, dependent on the motivations and activities of investor-owners.

Significant benefits included: increased accessibility, transparency, and community engagement with estate activities; investor-owner support for education and training, community initiatives, and housing; and increased tourism activity and employment.

Negative impacts included: loss of employment and effects on services; decrease of housing availability due to conversion and increased market prices; increase in risks such as fire due to land management changes; and a lack of community involvement in decision-making.

### Benefits

The interviewees described their understanding and perceptions of a range of benefits arising from green land investments on the case study landholdings. This section summarises the key themes relating to benefits that were detailed by representatives of communities of place and of interest, land managers, and landowners (and landowner representatives). This section seeks to respond to research question 2: ‘what are the social and economic impacts of “green” land investment?’; and research question 4: ‘what are the potential benefits and / or negative impacts of these types of “green” land investment activities, for rural communities within lands under new private ownership?’



## **Increasing accessibility, transparency, and community involvement**

One theme that emerged from the interviews in at least three case studies was the belief that the case study landholdings had become more accessible and open to locals and visitors that was not the case under previous ownership/management. Interviewees described their experiences of facilitating and attending community open days, which included estate tours and displays of the projects underway on the landholding. In one example, estate employees outlined their intention that the landholding was an accessible, warm, friendly, and safe environment for people, as described:

“I want people to know that, if I’m here in the office from Monday to Friday, if you fancy coming to see us and have a wee look and a wee listen to what we’re doing here, we’re more than happy, [...] and it’s in your best interests to do that, especially if you are local, because it’s probably somewhere that you’ve enjoyed and want to continue to enjoy for a very long time. Any new visitors, I want them to feel like when they leave that it’s a place that they will go and tell people about, they will tell their friends, they will want to come back.” [Estate employee]

A related benefit for the local community was the shared perception that the landholding (and landowner) was now *‘more open to people coming and questioning things’*, and in turn, becoming more informed about the environmental outcomes of the green land investment projects. Estate management reported observing greater usage of footpaths on the landholding, as well as access by specialist groups such as ecologists and local environmental interest groups. Involving community members in tree-planting and other activities was proposed as another route to increase community involvement.

A key benefit mentioned by community interviewees was ongoing and improved recreational access to the landholding, for example by walkers and mountain-bikers. To some, plans for woodland expansion was viewed positively as this would increase the amenity value and they appreciated the opportunity to view wildlife on the landholding. One land manager explained that they were developing woodland planting plans to benefit both recreational access takers and ensuring natural assets were preserved (e.g. protecting ground-nesting birds). Land managers also described plans to enhance the ‘social element’ of the landholding, through enhancing car parking provision, maintaining bothies, and supporting access by outdoor access groups (e.g. Duke of Edinburgh Award groups). Whilst game shooting is no longer a feature of most of the case study landholdings studied, there was ongoing support for the sport shooting community, for example through hosting a long-range rifle range and gun dog field trials.

## **Training and education**

A key objective of land managers and landowner representatives interviewed for this project was that the green land investment projects also supported training and education opportunities. One interviewee described their development of a strategy

for encouraging local employment, training, and apprenticeships. Others explained that they were providing (or planning to provide) financial and practical support to relevant training programmes, for example relating to forestry and peatland restoration, driven by a need for more trained staff and an awareness of the opportunities involved in 'rewilding, timber-focussed, natural capital projects'. As explained:

“...there’s a labour problem in the UK, in Scotland - and there’s a skills shortage... I think we can probably help. At least give people the toolbox... I think [this] shows people that we are actually responsible investors because we understand that we’re changing something in the countryside which means we need to enable the change and - dare I use the phrase - the just transition. I think that skills training programme is a really good way of addressing that justness. Saying, ‘Look, you’re changing something, but what are you doing to actually enable the rural community to get back into these new projects and actually back onto the land?’ Just with a different land management focus.” [Landowner representative]

On a different case study landholding, employment opportunities targeted at young people had enabled them to stay in the local area, as opposed to moving elsewhere to find a job.

### **Support for tourism enterprises and increasing tourism**

Interviewees reported a positive change to tourism associated with the green land investment landownership and management. Land manager and landowner representative interviewees described new, reinvigorated, and planned tourism enterprises on the landholdings (for example, self-catering accommodation). One landowner was praised for the ‘massive’ investment made into refurbishing a local hotel, which it is anticipated will increase employment. Community interviewees agreed that new tourism enterprises will bring people and income to the wider rural area (e.g. use of local community facilities by visitors), although some concerns were raised as to whether self-catering accommodation on the estate may compete with existing accommodation options owned by local people and businesses. Nonetheless, interviewees believed that new tourism enterprises led to local employment opportunities, both through housing renovation and construction projects, as well as their ongoing maintenance and management. Interviewees recognised however that housing shortages across rural Scotland is a challenge in the expansion of tourism opportunities, as it may restrict staff recruitment. It was also highlighted that tourism may be the main (and perhaps only) source of new employment associated with green land investment landownership and management. In one case study, tourism-related employment had replaced other land-based jobs, which did not bring as many re-skilling or professional training opportunities, or necessarily year-round employment.

Further insights into the impact of green land investment on local businesses are presented in Section 4.2.2.

## **Supporting local housing need**

Interviewees describe examples of housing that has been provided for long-term lease since land ownership transfer and the initiation of green land investment projects. Rented properties have been refurbished (in some places to a high standard), tied housing arrangements have been maintained, and plans for new housing are underway, in conjunction with community organisations. Landowners have also bought housing on the open market as staff housing, the occupants of which will live and work locally, utilising local shops and services. In one example, a new housing development planned by the green land investment-landowner will include houses designed for community use, as described:

“We have one small project where we’ll deliver a grouping of houses...we are looking into a range of partnerships with the local community where they can buy the houses off us at a good rate and then they can have those houses to then rent out to the local community.” [Landowner representative]

In another example, landowner representatives explain that they are in discussion with local community organisations regarding community housing opportunities on the landholding:

“If there’s a way of helping on that front, then that could be great. So, that’s potentially slicing a bit of the land, handing that over, selling that on for community housing. So, those very open space sort of ideas as well.” [Landowner representative]

These examples demonstrate the awareness of the green land investment-owners of the ‘economic requirements’ of local communities, and how these landowners can contribute to these, as well as investing in natural capital outcomes.

## **Support for community initiatives**

Interviewees described many examples of green land investor-owner support for community initiatives, both financial and in-kind support. Direct grants, sponsorship and loans have been provided (often at short notice) to cover unexpected energy costs, the development of community enterprises and arts organisations, local charitable events, costs associated with the preservation of historic buildings, as well as the provision and development of key social services in local communities, and the provision of land for community events. Community representatives in one case-study explained that whether or not people agreed with the landownership model/approach, the green land investor-owner had provided significant financial support for the local community at times of need:

“I’m afraid to say it’s a fact, whether you like it or not, it’s a fact that [they have] has saved the day on more than one occasion, and at the end of it [they are] going to get no thanks for it anyway.” [Community representative]

Concerns were shared by community interviewees and workshop participants that funding support was primarily for ‘public relations’ purposes. However, it was clear

that investment in local community initiatives was well received by the communities of place involved in this project. One further example was windfarm benefit payments (i.e. commitments to provide a donation to a community organisation associated with income earned from a windfarm development) made to communities, which had continued despite landownership changes. Landowner representatives, however, noted their concerns that providing financial contributions to local communities as a result of natural capital projects may be unrealistic and policy discourse was raising expectations amongst rural communities.

### **Influence of financial vehicle on wider community benefits**

The landownership model and financial vehicle can influence the type and scale of community benefits arising from green land investment projects. A key theme was that new landownership provided necessary investment into landholdings that had been sold because the former owner either '*didn't have the financial resources or didn't want to spend money*' on the landholding, resulting in its decline. Any investment was therefore considered likely to provide '*trickle down*' benefit to the local community. As explained by one land manager, community benefit is related to the design of the financial vehicle involved:

"I think our return expectations are modest and lower than a typical commercial vehicle would be. And that's to give us the latitude and flexibility to consider the wider aspects of managing a large asset like [case study landholding] and to make decisions which aren't solely financially driven."  
[Landowner representative]

Whilst some green land investor-ownership was associated with wealthy individuals, families, or established investment companies, other landholdings were associated with newer companies based on venture capital funding or smaller scale investment (see Box 1). This limited the type and scale of community benefit that could be provided, and it was recognised that there was a need for more external investment to meet potential and fulfil anticipated community benefits (e.g. increased employment) from the green land investment model: '*we're not there yet, but that's definitely an opportunity for us*'. As described:

"I think the more we do with it, the more we can realise that opportunity and find external investment to do more with it, then hopefully that only benefits the community. I mean, it was previously a private estate which was a private farm and having local benefits in that respect, but if we get it to where we want it to get to, I think we can probably actually have a greater set of local benefits than its previous iteration." [Landowner representative]

Other landowner representatives described how they have been able to '*ramp up the community aspects*' with investment. They also believe that the environmental outcomes from the green land-investment approach will have social benefits through the provision of ecosystem services (for example, improved air quality, flood mitigation, etc.). Community members in one case-study explained that whilst they do not support the scale of landownership by one green land investor-owner,

they do recognise the contribution made by this landowner to Scottish Government policy objectives, for example contributing to Scotland's green economy. Other landowner representatives described their investors as having 'strong ideals' regarding community engagement, socio-economic development, and the delivery of green jobs. Community members reiterated that the impact of green land investor-ownership is dependent on individual owners' (or investors') interests and 'moral values'.

## Negative impacts

The interviews and workshop discussions highlighted a range of negative social and economic impacts of green land investment and landownership. These are summarised below.

### Land management change

Community participants raised potential negative impacts in relation to specific types of land use and management. For example, they described their perceptions and understanding regarding the impact of nature restoration or 'rewilding' approaches to land management or greater afforestation, associated with green land investment. Concerns were raised regarding an increased wildfire risk, in particular where grazing by sheep and deer had been dramatically reduced, where landholdings had increased in scale (in other words, where a new land use or land management approach extended across a larger area), and where there were fewer land-based workers monitoring sites on a regular basis. Land managers also recognised that wildfire may be the main concern held by neighbouring landowners with regard to changing land use. Related to this risk is a perceived increase in fly-tipping, again due to the reduced presence of land-based workers.

Increased deer fencing was mentioned as having a direct impact on people, for example, the fencing of common land. Deer displacement and high deer numbers are also impacting on other land-based businesses, including farming (this is also discussed in Section 4.2.2).

Increased forestry plantations are considered as negatively impacting on the enjoyment of hill walking (see Section 4.2.2). Forestry activities are also associated with increased heavy traffic on small rural roads, which was a primary concern to community members in one case study in particular. Community workshop participants believed that there is no social or economic benefit from landownership that is focussed on forestry, and there is little interaction between landowner and community:

“It has no crossover, cross-fertilisation, if you like, with communities that live there, helping them and supporting them” [Community workshop participant].

Others expressed their concerns regarding the cumulative impact of windfarm developments on landscape aesthetics, with resulting negative impacts on tourism.

Community participants living in the vicinity of windfarms installed on land owned by green landowner-investors reported satisfaction that some financial benefits have accrued to the locality as a result of community benefit payments. However, they expressed some frustrations around how funds were being distributed to local projects (e.g. creating additional burdens and the risk of conflict between community groups), as well as cumulative landscape impacts. Some research participants also suggested that the community benefit funds from windfarms constituted a very small proportion of windfarm profits. This may point to a need for a set minimum of community benefit payments to localities to become a legal requirement (currently, the Scottish Energy Strategy recommends that community benefit packages for onshore windfarm developments should have a value equivalent to £5000 per installed megawatt per year). Section 4.2.2 provides further detail regarding perceptions and understanding of the impact of land use change on local employment.

### **Impacts on local service provision**

One key concern expressed was the loss of local employment, and the impact on those people who have lost their jobs and livelihoods due to landownership and land use change, including the loss of tied housing where there may not be other affordable housing options locally. In one example, at least four former estate employees and their families had left the area following landownership change. A common perception shared by interviewees and workshop participants across multiple case studies was that if people are moved out of land-based employment, this can impact negatively on local population numbers and service provision:

“The more that you push away people like shepherds, people like gamekeepers, people like farmers, because they are the people that would have sent their kids to the local school... but it has a knock-on effect for everything. People like gamekeeper’s wives might have worked in industries like being healthcare support workers, things like that...” [Community representative]

Others described examples where houses on landholdings had remained empty after landownership or land use change, which did not allow for new residents to utilise and help to maintain local services including schools and shops.

### **Impacts on housing provision**

Participants described the demand for accommodation and the importance of providing housing options to retain employees and young people<sup>21</sup>. Decisions regarding the conversion of housing into holiday accommodation by green land investor-owners were believed to impact negatively on the local community, as described:

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<sup>21</sup> It is noted that younger participants in at least three case studies (i.e. those aged in their twenties and thirties) frequently mentioned a lack of affordability and availability of housing for young families or people starting on the wage ladder as a key challenge in their local areas.

“There’s nothing for locals, people who want to live here and work here and make their life here. They’re all holiday homes. So, for an estate to come in like that and turn them all into holiday homes to make commercial, I think it would have been more diplomatic for the estate to have put at least some of them into long-term lets.” [Community workshop participant]

Increasing holiday accommodation was also described as providing a ‘temporary population’, but interviewees in one case study perceived a decline in the permanent local population due to changing estate employment, and that there had been a loss of ‘community feeling’.

A further key impact was the influence of green land investor-owner property purchases on the local housing market and availability of rental accommodation. It was found that green land investor-owners could have both a positive (as previously outlined) and a negative impact on housing availability, in different ways. For example, landowner representatives in one case study were aware that locally these purchases had not been well received; as explained:

“So, when properties come on the market, we have bought some of them, and that causes angst within the community because the perception is that we’re well-funded, we’re buying up housing at levels that local people can’t afford. [...] it’s not our fault that local people can’t afford them, but it is a fact. And to support our business we need to buy this stock, we need to compete in the market. We try hard not to inflate the market and I don’t believe that we have done. And on the positive side, we’re buying these houses to house people who are going to be living and working and employed in the area, recycling their income into local services and the local communities. So, it’s not a net negative, it’s probably a positive but nevertheless it’s an issue, it’s a serious issue.” [Landowner representative]

### **The impact of economic power disparities**

The relative power and influence of (wealthy) green land investor-owners is expressed as a key concern that may be considered a negative impact on rural communities. Examples were shared where landowners were able to influence the location of key local services, through being willing to provide additional funding support. Similar ‘micro examples’ of landowner influence on local service provision have resulted in business owners not being able to make long term plans and only being given short term leases whilst the landowner decides how they wish to use the workspace. Concerns were also raised regarding the level of influence of green land investor-owners in wider landscape decision-making groups, in contrast to other landowner types who were excluded from discussions. Furthermore, increasing landownership concentration and acquisition of key community assets and services (e.g. local shops and petrol stations) by landowners increases reliance on green land investor-owners by communities of place.

## **Lack of community involvement in land use decision-making**

Lack of community involvement in land use decision-making is considered a negative impact of green land investment landownership, especially in comparison to community landownership where there is a '*high degree of consultation*' about land use and management, and on an ongoing basis. Green land investor-owners were compared to other 'absentee' landowners, and community members in at least one case-study side stated that they had observed landholdings becoming less actively managed after '*initial activity*'. Remote land management is believed to disadvantage local communities, in particular where such land managers are considered "*not really interested in the people here and they are only interested in a job for themselves in managing the asset*" [Owner-occupier farmer].

Community members also described the persistence of an unequal social hierarchy, despite recent landownership and land use change, for example, "*They are still up here, and we are down here, and we're at their mercy*" [Community workshop participant]. Local people are described as seeking to avoid 'rocking the boat' or disagreeing with new landowners.

Critically, there is a perceived lack of awareness by green land investor-owners of local culture and valuing of local knowledge. There is a concern that land management approaches to natural capital do not show an "*understanding of the area*" and are "*lacking in cultural understanding historically*" [Neighbouring land manager]. As further described:

"You said it's just money. That feeling comes from there being no interest in what was here before. Just nothing. The people, the place. There's no interest in the people that are here doing it. And it feels...It's that same feeling of...that sort of slightly colonial 'We've got the vision. We're the modern...and the people here don't know anything.'" [Community workshop participant]

Similarly, community members report a sense of being excluded from the land, both socially and culturally (for example, through the apparent lack of awareness or attention paid to Gaelic cultural heritage by new landowners). Interviewees also believed that local people would want to have greater involvement in land use decision-making if it was clear what the long-term goals are for land management. Others, however, believed that property owners are entitled to buy land and to use it as they wish, without interference.

The options and experiences of landowner-community engagement are described in detail in Section 4.2.3.

## **Impacts of land management for carbon sequestration**

Questions arose regarding the use of land for carbon sequestration and 'off-setting'. In particular, there was a concern that the natural assets of land local to rural communities was being obtained by external interests; as described:



“Our carbon credits and our peatland restoration benefits, and our woodland management public benefits, if you like, are being captured by big money from away” [Community representative].

Relatedly, there was a concern that in future, local people will need to demonstrate carbon sequestration, and they will not be able to access carbon credits associated with local landholdings, because they have already been sold by green land investor-owners. Finally, community members described their scepticism regarding the actual environmental impact of carbon offsetting, for example:

“I’m a bit sceptical about the whole thing, to be honest. The carbon credit thing, as farmers, I just find it absolutely disgusting that companies can carry on polluting and buy carbon credits to offset it.” [Tenant farmer]

Others described their concerns regarding their lack of ability to verify the success of green land investor-owner land management plans in the long term (e.g. understanding whether new woodland did sequester the carbon that was planned).

#### **4.2.2 Understanding the influence of green land investment activities on different communities of interest in rural areas**

Communities of interest, including local businesses, estate employees, gamekeepers, farmers, and recreational land users are significantly impacted by green land investor-owners. The impacts are both positive and negative.

There were examples of new green landowner-investors making considerable investments into landholdings, with resulting benefits for the local economy, such as employment in construction projects benefiting local builders merchants and contractors, as well as benefits to other local suppliers, such as food producers and local tradespeople.

Green land investment activities mean that traditional rural jobs are shifting. Estate employees have been made redundant or reassigned to new roles. There were examples of traditional roles being altered on account of green land investment activities, with gamekeepers becoming ‘rangers’ and ‘wildlife managers’ in some cases.

Agricultural production and numbers of tenants have declined. Many concerns were expressed around the effects of a reduction in farming activity on community sustainability, with decreases in the numbers of land-based jobs, such as gamekeeping and farming, having knock-on impacts on local businesses, due to depopulation.

#### **Local businesses and employment**

Across several case studies, it was clear that new green investor-owners had made changes that have actively benefitted particular local businesses and tradespeople. In one case study landholding, it was pointed out that hospitality-orientated businesses had thrived more since the estate had changed hands. Estate

managers in at least two case studies noted that the green land investor-owners had put money into the local economy through using local builders merchants and local contractors for building work, as well as other local suppliers such as food producers. In one case study, almost all the research participants noted the considerable investment put into the landholding by the new green landowner-investors, and along with it the amount of employment that has been made available to local tradespeople. Some expressed 'admiration' for the landowner's commitment to working with local workers and businesses; it was suggested that the landowner hadn't employed large contractors from outside the locality except where necessary. Participants pointed in particular to the refurbishment of the local hotel, which has provided employment for local workmen, joiners, and gardeners, whilst helping to bring in further business and maintain jobs. The renovation of multiple landholding cottages has also created a great deal of extra work for local tradespeople. In another case study, the green landowner-investor noted that jobs had been created in tourism-orientated roles through the expansion of the landholding's hospitality businesses, as well as in deer management and ecological consultancy.

In one case study, the landowner had offered to support small businesses by providing feedback on proposed business plans and, on some occasions, start-up funding. It was reported that many young people had received this type of business financial support. There were also opportunities for local people to use the landowner's facilities, such as offices and the visitor centre, for hot-desking purposes, which supported broadband access, co-working, and helped to prevent isolation.

One landowning company was working to create other economic investment opportunities, which they hoped would create more employment throughout the local area, by – for example – supporting enterprises and services that supplied or supported landowner-owned hospitality businesses.

On the other hand, it was reported that the decreases in numbers of land-based jobs, such as gamekeeping and farming, have had knock-on impacts on local businesses, due to depopulation. It was pointed out that certain estate businesses had been taken into private ownership with landownership transfers. In one case, a hotel had been converted into a private residence; with it, multiple local jobs as cleaners, cooks, and waiting staff had disappeared.

There were also reports of struggles over access rights: one participant referred to a dispute with the case study landowner around permitting access to enable people to access the building from which they run their business.

There was a perception among some participants that green land investment was not fulfilling its claims of contributing to the local economy, due to practices, in some cases, of bringing in materials and contractors from outwith the local area. In at least one case study, community members were unclear that any new employment might be created through land use change instigated by a green land investor-owner. In one case study, community interviewees and workshop participants explained that they knew how many jobs had been lost on transfer of

ownership, but they did not know how many were likely to be created with afforestation, and they were sceptical that these jobs would be available to local people. In this case study, only one local employment opportunity had been observed by community members since the new landowner's arrival, although land managers reported positive employment benefits.

Some uncertainty was expressed regarding which land use model or landownership type supported the largest number of rural jobs. Several participants believed that sporting estates or those predominantly focussed on agriculture would employ more people than those with a focus on forestry. Furthermore, participants were unsure as to whether forestry jobs would predominantly be 'local jobs'; there were concerns that modern forestry does not lead to significant local employment, and in particular that harvesting 'goes out to tender', machine harvesting only requires two forestry employees and may be undertaken by individuals/businesses from far afield, who do not stay long in the local community. Participants suggested that there might be some forestry-related employment opportunities, but that these would be limited to inspecting and repairing fences, planting and maintaining trees, replacing failed trees, and clearing bracken and heather. Others mentioned that peatland restoration would also require plant operators/excavators. However, many felt that this was all that would be involved, with minimal employment for the next 20-30 years. After trees are established, some noted, there would be little need for further attention, leading to fewer people supporting local services and businesses. Whilst the land manager on one landholding felt that they had been 'conservative' in their estimation of the number of jobs that would be created through afforestation, a local business owner expressed doubts that the economic impact of the landholding's green land investments would extend beyond the financial benefits of carbon offsetting that would accrue to the landowners.

In another case, participants were concerned that the local landholding had not become a 'centre for local employment' despite the 'grand plans' shared by the landowning company, which included converting space on the estate for retail and community gardening. Participants raised concerns that people local to the area had left jobs on the estate: *"I'm disturbed by the fact that people are coming in from the outside and local people who have worked there have left"* [Community workshop participant], which they believed must have been because these individuals did not feel comfortable working there. In another case, local employment generated since the new green land investor-owner had owned the land was perceived to have included fencing and erecting a noticeboard – 'and that's it'. In this case, jobs in forestry were in fact created; however, it is important to note the lack of local awareness around this. Servicing jobs required for windfarms were perceived as not 'directly local employment', and not available to local young people.

One landowning company representative noted the importance of using local contractors, and that sometimes bringing in people from outside the local area to undertake work that could have been carried out by community members may be seen as 'insulting'. However, they observed that there may be valid reasons for this decision (for example, time and skills availability), and that there was no intention to 'step on toes'.

In large part due to the impacts of job losses, including the loss of tied housing, families no longer attending local schools, and partners no longer working locally, many participants considered land use change due to green land-investor ownership a threat to community:

“You’d basically lose the community, there wouldn’t be the same number of people because what else are they going to do? When the trees are all there, up and running, there’s not going to be the same number of staff. Because you are losing shepherds, you are losing gamekeepers” [Neighbouring land manager].

Some participants suggested that these types of impacts were not being adequately discussed.

### **Estate employees (and wider community)**

Our research suggests that those directly employed on the case study landholdings tend to be significantly affected (both positively and negatively) by what happens on the landholdings, in comparison to other local groups.

On the one hand, certain estate employees seemed to have benefitted from changes brought by green land investor-owners to a large degree. One participant reported that their role had expanded with the change of landownership. They felt that they were now meeting the needs not only of a larger organisation, but also of the local community, because the new landowner wanted to ‘*involve them within the natural capital of the estate*’ [Estate employee]. In this case, jobs had been maintained despite the change of landownership; the new owners had ‘kept people on’, and apparently given them more responsibility. As noted in the section on local businesses, handymen, local joiners, and tradesmen have been employed in large numbers on some of the case study landholdings. Some gamekeeping jobs have disappeared, but other forms of employment have been created instead.

Across all the case studies, community members were preoccupied with the need to create and maintain local employment, regardless of who takes up the jobs. For example, some participants expressed a relative lack of concern about whether jobs were taken up by those who were already locally based, suggesting, for example, that making a job available on a landholding was positive simply because it meant having an economically-active person living and working in the area. Some community interviewees noted that they were not concerned about landowner-led development, because it generated local employment. In one case study, it was pointed out that whether or not you liked the landowner, it was undeniable that they had spent money locally, by employing local contractors, particularly to renovate estate cottages (as previously described). However, questions were raised regarding how long-term any such employment could be, since building work would only be short-term.

One interviewee described the ‘modern-day landowner’ as someone who supported local businesses, allowed access to the estate, and employed local people. In similar terms, one landowner noted that they believed there were no negative local

impacts of changes to land ownership and use, that instead as the estate was 'regenerated', more local opportunities and jobs would be created. These would help to replace jobs no longer available in less financially viable industries such as upland sheep farming due to subsidy changes: *"So, I guess it's a potential sort of replacement of one land use for another, but also replacement of jobs and opportunities in the future as well"* [Landowner representative].

One land manager explained that undertaking work on a green land investment project instigated by a case study landholding led to the expansion of their business locally, enabling them to recruit new staff, including graduates, forest managers and senior managers. They claimed that there would also be employment available in forest maintenance and management, as well as in surveying and maintenance work undertaken on bothies. Other employment has included joiners and civil plant operatives.

In some cases, it was noted that estate employment had been maintained, but that not all the individuals were based locally. Some jobs that were previously undertaken locally on the landholdings are now being undertaken by contracted workers from further afield. For example, in one case study site, it was reported that ghillieing work that used to be undertaken by a local angling club on behalf of the landholding was now not done locally. However, in another case, it was suggested that the landowner had not employed local tradespeople for renovation work because there was a lack of joinery and stonemasonry skills in the area, forcing the landowner to go further afield to contract them.

A number of research participants noted the instability of employment and employment conditions during periods of transition between landowners. One estate employee told us that all the landholding 'managers' had lost their jobs during one such transition, leaving the employee to manage a markedly increased workload. Elsewhere, staff on one newly purchased estate were concerned that some jobs would shortly be taken over by staff from the neighbouring estate that had been in the landowner's possession for a longer period, if the landowner chose to consolidate staff across the two landholdings. One estate employee noted that a fellow staff member who had worked on the estate for many years and had accrued a lot of in-depth knowledge of its operations had been replaced by someone better known to the landowner.

Some also reported being pressured by new green land investor-owners to increase productivity on estate farms in unrealistic ways. One participant expressed concerns that livestock on the landholding on which they worked was kept only to receive subsidy payments, leading to a transactional and disconnected approach to farm management. There was a linked concern that senior estate managers did not necessarily have sufficient direct experience of farming, forestry, and land management: *'you can make all the wrong decisions' if you 'haven't got your feet dirty on the ground out here'* [Community workshop participant]. One estate manager noted that former estate employees had left farming jobs since the green land investor-owner had purchased the landholding due to health and safety

requirements, a lack of suitable tools, and a lack of positive outlook for the farming enterprise on the landholding.

In short, whilst some estate jobs – particularly gamekeeping roles (see below for further discussion of this group) – have disappeared since transfer of ownership, other forms of employment, particularly in construction and hospitality, have expanded. However, there are concerns that some newly-created jobs (particularly in construction) may be short-lived, or are being undertaken by contractors from outwith the locality. Meanwhile, some who have maintained their jobs have experienced changes in their roles, which has brought more responsibility and pressure.

## Gamekeepers

On several of the landholdings studied, there has been a shift away from traditional activities including game shooting and field-sports. Consequently, there appears to have been a reduction in the employment of gamekeepers and stalkers on most of the landholdings studied. Some community interviewees and tenant farmers reported that their numbers had significantly declined over the past decade. Participants described a clear shift in land management away from game-rearing, shooting, and stalking to ecological activities.

In some case studies, this has led to gamekeepers being dismissed and replaced with ecologists, guides, or land-workers of different kinds. One interviewee noted that their local area had lost four gamekeepers and one shepherd after land was sold (it is presumed that they were made redundant by the outgoing landowner). Some gamekeepers were also leaving roles before any dismissal because they anticipated what the land use changes might mean for their livelihoods:

“Actually, a friend of mine, he became the low ground keeper and he’s been there a long time, but I only found out recently that he’s left. Now, whether it’s because he’s gotten wind of all this and thought, ‘right, I’m getting out’...and he’s got young family so I think he may be decided, ‘right, I’m leaving, I’m not waiting to see what happens”. [Neighbouring land manager]

In other case studies, however, gamekeepers’ roles were being maintained, whilst being actively reconfigured, particularly towards deer management and ecological concerns. One gamekeeper’s role, which had previously been tied up with managing a shooting estate, including rearing pheasants and taking clients out for sport shooting, now involved ‘*managing the surplus on the estate, so with deer management and control...making sure that breeding birds survive*’ [Estate employee]. This participant said it was an industry that was seen in a different light than it was twenty years ago: now, the gamekeeper was ‘*essentially more like a wildlife manager now than a gamekeeper*’ [Local business owner]. Gamekeepers are now considered to be:

“managing for ecological diversity and climate change outcomes. That’s their job, they are stewards, and their work is focussed on those important outputs

rather than trophy stags in the larder at the end of the day. It's a similar job carried out with different objectives" [Landowner representative].

In one landholding studied, this change had been made explicit through the re-titling of the two gamekeepers as 'rangers'. In another case, whilst one gamekeeper has been made redundant, others have been employed to work as handymen. Some interviewees also referred to changes where gamekeepers and other employees were having to do work that had never been part of their role before, such as litter-picking. There was no discussion about this change; *'they just had to turn up and do it'* [Community representative]. Such changes have opened up other avenues for those gamekeepers that are kept on in these changing roles, but there was concern, as well as some acceptance, about the changes still to come. One participant noted that the gamekeeper is *'probably at the forefront of that change, so he's feeling the sting of it all, but he recognises that in ten, twenty years' time, that is the way things will go anyway'* [Estate employee].

Our research suggests that there are limited opportunities for gamekeeping or deer management employment where green land investor-owner concentration is increasing. Moreover, there were concerns regarding the loss of long-term, land-based knowledge as gamekeepers are increasingly 'pushed out of the door' and made 'obsolete'. *"They are hiring ecologists and not hiring keepers"*, one interviewee noted, continuing:

"there's a land-skills issue and an experience issue which I think is always good to bear in mind when you have someone who has worked a piece of ground for that many years. Yes, maybe some are set in their ways and not that...helpful for the future, but there are others where it's a vast wealth of experience and knowledge." [Neighbouring land manager]

Interviewees noted specifically the loss of knowledge of birds, animals, wildlife, land use, heather burning and how to stop and prevent wildfires: *"They've got the practical knowledge and it's being discounted completely"* [Community representative and Business manager].

In two cases, it was noted that gamekeepers feared speaking openly about the landowners in case this threatened their jobs.

In at least one case, deer management practices associated with green land investments have impacted sport shooting on neighbouring estates, which has in turn led to the loss of gamekeeping jobs:

"So [Landowner Company]'s policies have pushed a lot of deer, they've moved the populations around. So, we've had a big cost in terms of needing to be much more aggressive with deer management, as have all of our neighbours. That's okay, we managed that. But [Nearby Estate] is a sporting estate, they make money off that and they supported a head stalker and three keepers and they had to let a keeper go. So that's somebody's livelihood and home, those jobs almost always come with tied housing" [Neighbouring land manager].

## Farming

Across most of the case studies, participants had observed several key changes to farming activity on landholdings, in particular shifts towards contract farming on land transfer, and away from livestock grazing. Some described radical decreases in the number of livestock on estate farmland, changing the nature of the farming role. There was significant concern regarding grazing land being converted to tree-planting, since the system of hill-livestock farming was considered to employ more people and maintained grazing pressure (e.g. from sheep and deer) that avoided 'rank' vegetation (e.g. old age heather, bracken, and gorse).

On one landholding, it was noted that five hill farms had formed part of an estate bought by the landowning company, and that almost all had ceased production. One such farm continues to have stock, but there is no access to hill grazing because of rewilding activities, including converting land back to bog, which is not suitable for livestock. This was reported as a change that has happened over the past ten years and it was noted that the removal of the hill farms had led to the outmigration of the farmer and loss of employment for farm workers. Other landholdings owned by the same green land investment company had also experienced reductions in agricultural activity, because such activity was not part of the company's long-term plan. Interviewees felt this constituted an "*important loss of land, working land, and the employment and skills that go with it*" [Neighbouring landowner],

There were concerns around the effects of a reduction in farming activity on community sustainability, through impacts on employment and infrastructure related to secondary services such as vets and livestock marts. Some community members noted that the increasing scale of ownership by green land investor-owners is leading to reduced employment on farms and estates. In one case, a shepherd described how they would have employed others locally to help with tasks such as shearing and lambing, but now found it difficult to recruit such on-farm help. The shepherd also described a loss of friends and social/support network in the local area due to the land use/ownership changes and the knock-on effects on their work. This research participant had lost his share of contract work on the landholding but had instead managed to rent low ground and establish an agricultural tenancy. Another interviewee described the cumulative impact of declining agriculture, in particular that those engaged in contracting work may not have the critical mass to maintain their businesses. Decreases in livestock numbers, as a local tenant farmer commented in one site, meant: "*another farm out of supplying livestock to our local auction mart. It actually runs a poorer chance of surviving if they haven't got the throughput.*"

Some participants expressed concerns about the impact of land use changes on deer management. The focus on wildlife on some landholdings, with the accompanying end to sport shooting and the lack of gamekeepers, has led to high deer numbers and deer entry on to farming land in some cases. In one site, culling has pushed deer onto neighbouring farmland, requiring crofters to "*pay someone to cull our deer. So, it's had a knock-on effect, right the way across*" [Local crofter].



Across several case studies, tree planting on arable and upland livestock farmland had raised local concerns regarding the impact of land use change on farming livelihoods. One interviewee explained that because of tree planting there are no longer seasonal grazing opportunities locally.

“It used to be a seasonal let but now, no, he’s taken it back and he’s planted it. And you thought, ‘well that’s good arable land.’ I don’t mind them planting land that’s nae arable and canna be used, but to take away arable land, I’m nae in with that at all. Because it’s our livelihoods and we’re producing food for people to eat. All that is going to be taken away.” [Tenant farmer]

Those who have seasonal grazing arrangements have been told that this land will not be available for lease next year, and they will have had to find land elsewhere or otherwise reduce their farming business. This has been received negatively and will have a significant impact on some livestock farmers. Those affected expected the land to be ‘rewilded’ (though this is not confirmed) and pointed out that it would be difficult to return land to agriculture after it had been planted with trees. Interviewees in this area had not observed any land management changes, other than tree planting on previously seasonal grazing land.

One estate manager was very aware of the negativity within the farming community regarding the possibility that good grazing land may be planted with trees. The manager noted that this was not necessarily the case and has revised the woodland creation scheme to ensure that high quality grazing land is not planted. However, the manager also considered these community perceptions somewhat unjustified because the land concerned had not been grazed for several decades.

Landowners also recognised that agricultural opportunities may be removed if landholdings are afforested, in particular preventing young people from starting to farm. However, some also noted that there could be opportunities for integrated forestry and farming, or for agricultural production on remaining land. In one case, the example was given of removing in-hand sheep flocks. It was noted that this did not mean there would be no future farming practices on the landholding, but rather that the estate management was exploring different ways of managing the upland woodlands alongside grazing. They anticipated a role for a farmer in the future, or input from neighbouring estates (e.g. shared grazing), with whom there were ongoing discussions on the issue. The new landowners noted that they wanted to improve biodiversity and avoid sheep monocultures; but they also emphasised that they were addressing farming prospects positively, recognising the political discussion regarding afforestation on farmland.

Generally, there was a strong shared understanding that tenant farming on landholdings had significantly declined. Many reported that tenancies that had come to an end (e.g. due to retirement) had not been re-let, and in at least one case study, participants repeatedly expressed concerns that the green land investor-owner would like to remove tenant farmers and bring all land ‘in-hand’. A number of tenant farmers expressed concerns that the right-to-buy legislation<sup>22</sup>, which is triggered only when there’s a change of land ownership, could be and has

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<sup>22</sup> Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Act 2003

been bypassed through '*wrap[ping] land up in a company*', so that if the company is sold, the estate has not changed hands in legal terms. A number of participants stated that since the right-to-buy legislation was so easy to circumvent, it simply wasn't '*doing its job*' [Community workshop participant].

One interviewee explained that the removal of the opportunity to buy their tenanted farm had implications for their child, because they would no longer inherit their parents' farm:

"It's such a shame because a lot of [their] pals are saying the same thing; they are so interested in farming, but they can't get a start." [Tenant farmer]

Several tenant farmers on the same estate similarly pointed out that young people wanting to get into farming would not have a chance now: '*There's nae chance of a young lad getting a...200-acre part of land*' [Community workshop participant]. In general, there was a perception that new land management approaches (e.g. that prioritised green land investment activities) were reducing options for young people who wished to access farm tenancies (although it was acknowledged in the workshop carried out in the locality that this decrease in opportunities was also heavily contingent on other factors, including government regulation, or the lack thereof). In at least two case studies, many of the tenant farmers interviewed and those who participated in workshops anticipated that in the future the green land investor-owner would remove all tenant farmers from the landholding. They expressed concerns that the presence of tenant farmers would cause landowners to feel that they had less control over the land. However, one landowner representative said that it was '*categorically not the case*' that landowners were seeking to reduce land under agricultural tenancies in order to pursue natural capital projects, but that instead they were focussed on in-hand farmland in order to better understand the opportunities and respond to the complexities associated with undertaking such initiatives on tenanted land. As explained:

"I think all the evidence shows there's been less land coming onto the market to rent. On every attempt that the government has made to reform the landlord tenant sector, it has complicated it, and less land has come out of it, as a consequence...And it's not that suddenly that slow-down has occurred because landlords are saying, 'oh gosh, here's a great opportunity in natural capital, we won't let land', I don't think that's the case at all." [Landowner representative]

A number of participants framed these kinds of changes in terms of long-established power dynamics between landowners and local people. Private landowners, they said:

"have the power to decide if the folk that live and work in the area benefit; we were lucky we benefitted, but maybe there's other folk that would have a different story." [Community workshop participant]

In at least two case studies, it was noted that a working farm had been removed from agricultural production, and that there had been no means of preventing the

change. In another case, farms were being broken up by land speculators, with a lack of consultation with the community. This was seen as a contravention of the [Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement](#). There were multiple access issues associated with these changes.

Farming was repeatedly seen as being pushed aside by green land investment policies: *“we’ve still to feed people and they are trying to push us out with greening”* [Community workshop participant]. Others said that:

“Companies buying up the land for their own profit, irrespective of food security and the rest of it. This bit, as a farmer, I’d be really scared about” [Community workshop participant].

There was some confusion and uncertainty about what rewilding might mean locally (although it was not clear if this is the new landowners’ intention or not). Interviewees raised questions, for example, regarding the potential for species reintroductions that may have a positive impact on deer management, but would likely impact negatively on sheep production: *“It would more or less put an end to sheep-farming in the hills, if there was quite a lot of wolves on the go”* [Tenant farmer].

Community workshop participants in one case study explained that they are unsure of the plans of new green landowners; despite owning their land for several years, they have not yet shared land management plans. This has had a negative impact particularly on tenant farmers, who feel unable to make their own plans for the future: *“Should we invest, should we not invest – everything, from: are my kids going to be in that school to sit their exams or, are we going to have to move? It turns people’s lives upside down.”* [Community workshop participant]

### Local walkers/Recreational land users

The potential impact of land management activities on local walkers and others engaged in recreational land uses was noted across different case studies. One interviewee expressed uncertainty regarding whether forestry activities might disrupt access by users such as Duke of Edinburgh Award groups (although they reported that such groups tended to be positively received by the new green land investor-owner concerned). Some pointed to the impacts of green land investments on the aesthetic and experiential dimensions of landscape, noting that hill walkers do not want to walk through plantation forestry; they tend to prefer to see an open view. Another pointed out that a lot of people used local paths, noting that if *“they were changed or they were affected...that would cause more of a stushie”* [Community representative]. On the other hand, there were also concerns about steps taken to increase access to land. Thus, in one case, new signage for pathways proposed by a new green land investor-owner was not entirely welcomed by community members, on the grounds that it interrupted sense of wildness. There were also concerns about indirect impacts on drainage due to necessary increases in car parking space.

A number of community interviewees acknowledged that the right to responsible access made management more complex for landowners. However, in one case a

landowner had restricted access to a track, which has been contentious due to a long tradition of local use. Another interviewee noted that mountain biking on one landholding was discouraged, although others pointed out that improved hill tracks associated with commercial forestry and windfarm developments had enhanced mountain biking opportunities. In more than one case, community interviewees reported that public access rights were challenged by green land investor interests (e.g. by asking people to move from particular areas due to the presence of high-end tourists).

#### **4.2.3 Experiences of, opportunities, and barriers to community-landowner engagement in the context of green land investment**

The type and extent of community engagement varied across case studies, with contrasting community perceptions and landowner attitudes. Our findings demonstrate a spectrum of community-landowner engagement which ranges from perceived good practice to perceived poor practice.

Good practice includes frequent engagement with communities by green land investor-owners, demonstrable responses to community input by landowners, and the building or existence of personal relationships with stakeholders in the community. Poor practice was generally defined by a lack of community engagement or consultation.

Insufficient community engagement can reinforce power imbalances between the community and landowner, resulting in community members feeling that they lack agency.

Across case studies, potential improvements to existing engagement were identified by both community members and green land investor-owners and landowner representatives.

### **The importance of engagement**

Ensuring that information regarding land use change, future land management plans, and the potential impacts on communities, is openly shared with communities of place and communities of interest during the process of (and after) land acquisition, is key to creating positive perceptions among community members. Landowner transparency was identified by community members as fostering positive community-landowner relationships. Notably, landowners also expressed the benefit that they gain from community engagement:

“having that visibility and then building up a bit of trust for why we’re doing it and why the investors...I think, just communicating that has been useful for the community but also useful for us. Because we get good feedback when we do that.” [Landowner representative]

One green land investor-owner described how community engagement is an important stage in gaining approval for forestry plantations. They explained that allowing the community to voice their opinions allows better insight into any issues that may arise - such as access to water sources - and they believed that it would then be more likely that Scottish Forestry would approve landowner plans. Engaging with communities early in this process means they are less likely to encounter surprise opposition at a later stage. In one case study, the green land investor-owner was keen that best practice guidelines were produced that encourage community input while avoiding excessive 'red tape' for landowners and investors during acquisition and planning processes.

Several community participants stated that they felt it was the communities' right to have a say on landowners' plans and land use changes, and should be incorporated into all instances of green land investment. As described:

“people in position of, a very powerful position in Scotland, that they are owning large parts of Scotland, that they should be declaring what their plans are and that people should have a say in what happens to that land... I think there should be a means of, not controlling, but of making decisions sensitively.” [Tenant Farmer]

### Positive examples of engagement

In several case studies, landowners and/or estate employees lived within or had existing relationships with community members. This was perceived as facilitating community-landowner communication, providing members of the community with an approachable figure with whom they could raise questions or concerns. Green land investor-owner representatives who are integrated into communities builds trust around new land acquisitions and green land investment activities, and supports communication. As described:

“I mean, we've done quite a few...I think I've been in the last twelve months to three community council meetings with various updates and it's an interesting experience when you don't have to introduce yourself because you know everybody in the room.” [Land manager]

In at least one case study, the estate employees were eager to remain accessible to the community and continue engaging with both community members and visitors with a welcoming and proactive 'open door policy'. Through this approach to community engagement, they sought to “*change the role of the community in relation to participation in a far greater level than provided in the past*” [Estate employee].

In this case study, estate employees expressed a wish to improve their use of social media in a way that would increase engagement with the local community. There was an evident desire amongst several of the green land investor-owners and their representatives to improve and strengthen their communication with local communities, as described:

“We try to do the right thing, but I think sometimes there’ll be different views from outside in terms of what we’re doing, how we’re doing things and why we’re doing things. Communication – how we’re communicating back is really important.” [Landowner representative]

In at least three case study locations, green land investor-owners had held community forums where they presented their plans and members of the community were able to share their views. It was considered highly important that community members felt able to speak, were listened to, and taken seriously. These events were particularly well received by communities where the green land investor-owner was able to take visible and clear actions directly based on the feedback they had received. For example, in one case study, a community representative commended the landowner for limiting the amount of Sitka spruce that they were planting based on feedback from community consultation.

Estate employees and green land investor-owners (and representatives) described how schools and local people had been involved with tree planting on the landholding, and that these woodlands will be there in perpetuity (not for commercial harvesting), providing a ‘sense of ownership’ and involvement with the landholding.

Community engagement in one case study aimed to give the community consistent access to the land management team and the opportunity to be actively involved in land management events. Landowner representatives on a different case study reiterated that estate staff have been long-term residents of the local communities on the landholding, and actively participate in community life. Having the opportunity to build individual relationships with the community, alongside larger community consultations on land use change, resulted in positive community perceptions.

### Negative Examples of Engagement

Across several case studies, community participants worried that the commercial nature of many green land investor-owners reduced community engagement processes to nothing more than a ‘*marketing exercise*’ or ‘*going through the motions*’ [Community Workshop]. It was highlighted that, despite engagement prior to land purchase, the community did not actually have ‘*the option to refuse the purchase*’ [Community Workshop] of land by the green land investor-owner, and therefore the process was inconsequential. Relationships worsened considerably in cases where there was insufficient response to community input and where engagement was lacking; for example:

“So he did have a bit of community engagement when he first arrived, then it was like, I almost felt like – ‘I don’t need to justify myself to them’, was his attitude.” [Former estate employee]

This research illustrates that **insufficient community engagement can reinforce power imbalances between the community and landowner, resulting in community members feeling that they lack agency**. In one case, despite the community having the opportunity to express their opinions and ask questions, they had not observed any changes following this consultation, and therefore did not feel listened to. In another case study where there had been apparently no community engagement, tenant farmers (in particular) reported feeling unable to reach out to the new green land investor-owner about issues that they were facing, worried about the first impression this would give of them:

“Ken, you feel with the new landowner, you dinna want to be bombarding him wi hundreds of questions, ken, we haven’t even met the man!” [Tenant farmer]

Across multiple case studies, negative examples were characterised by a perceived disregard for or disconnect from community voices.

### **Barriers to engagement**

Communication issues emerged as one of the most significant barriers to successful community engagement. In one case study, community members explained that the ‘*open door*’ approach was not sufficient if it had not been clearly communicated to the community.

Where engagement events were viewed as unsuccessful, it was often related to a perceived lack of publicity regarding the event. This was often because the landowner had not engaged with active channels of communication within communities. One green land investor-owner highlighted that “*Identifying who the community are is sometimes quite difficult*” [Landowner representative]. Other green land investor-owners also perceived that there was “*little opportunity to get involved*” and a lack of scope for “*really working with the community*” [Landowner representative].

The timing and accessibility of events was considered central to successfully engaging with a range of people in a community of place; advertising events solely by social media was not always sufficient. It was identified that people with young children struggled to attend events when childcare options were not available, and the farming community highlighted that their work often impacted their ability to attend events. Where little effort was made by the landowner to address these barriers, it was speculated that they did not have a desire to actually engage with local people.

Another significant barrier were instances of community members feeling vulnerable in sharing their views openly. Some tenants felt that their livelihood could be threatened if they spoke negatively about the green land investor-owner’s practices. For example:

“And I think that’s maybe wrong in these other cases that tenants or people that are on that land, don’t have a shout or can’t shout because they’d be threatened with eviction or... it’s not a simple matter.” [Neighbouring land manager]

### Suggestions for more positive engagement

While discussing the challenges of engagement, both community members and green land investor-owners (and representatives) shared their suggestions and hopes regarding the ways that engagement processes could be improved.

Community members identified improving publicity around engagement events as one way to ensure high levels of representation. The barrier for landowners often appeared to be a lack of knowledge about or access to local communication platforms. It was suggested that a process of communications planning (in conjunction with community representatives), and stakeholder mapping (e.g. creating a list of community groups within a locality) could help green land investor-owners (and their representatives) to identify ways of publicising and targeting engagement opportunities; as described:

“They communicate online now and sometimes they’re in private groups and so, trying to solve that would be helpful. And then some sort of central repository for lists of environmental groups. So, the [organisation name] on one of our sites in [place name] - we didn’t know they existed.” [Landowner representative]

With regard to poor engagement processes (or a lack of engagement), community members suggested that there should be a ‘*higher body*’ than the green land investor-owner, that community members can appeal to in the case of bad practice<sup>23</sup>. It was suggested that this body could hold green land investor-owners accountable to their community engagement plans. Where community members express their helplessness in the face of an inaccessible landowner, it was felt that an external body should ensure that best practice guidelines are followed. Interestingly, it was not just the community that felt this, and as expressed below, some green land investor-owners also recognised the value that an external facilitator could have:

“And I think there’s an element of when things get difficult or when there’s tensions, we probably would benefit from some more third party – whether it be arbitration or facilitation - and I think somebody that can help both parties.” [Land manager]

In many case studies, engagement processes were still in their early stages. In areas where community engagement had been frequent and responsive, community members stated that they hoped that green land investor-owners would continue to consult the community consistently throughout land use change processes and the duration of their landownership. There was some scepticism,

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<sup>23</sup> It is recognised that this function is served by the Scottish Land Commission.



however, regarding green land investor-owners fulfilling their commitments to the community (discussed further in Section 4.2.4).

#### **4.2.4 Hopes and fears for the future of rural Scotland: rural communities and green land investment landowners**

Community members hoped that green land investment would support sustainable, thriving communities, increase biodiversity, and respond to the climate emergency. In a positive future, recreational access to the landholdings would be maintained and enhanced. Community engagement would increase and include working with landowners.

Community members feared that investor-owners would not achieve their goals because of perceived financial uncertainty and lack of management experience by investor-owners and/or their representatives. The uncertainty about future management plans created social anxiety among many community members. They also feared that future employment options would be limited, and that there would be limited social benefits from investor-owners' focus on green activities where profit is a primary concern.

Participants representing the different rural communities involved in this research described their hopes, fears and visions for the future given the current green land investor-ownership and associated land management activities. Due to the short-term nature of the research project, it was not possible to verify the actual wider and long-term implications of the green land investment activities in the case studies.

#### **Hopes for the future given current landownership and management**

##### **Support for sustainable communities**

Community members in at least three case studies expressed their hope that the green land investor-owners will fulfil the promises they have made to the community, such as reusing empty buildings for community services (e.g. shops or community hubs) or providing community housing. Community members explained that they do not want to live in a '*model village in a museum*', but instead they want thriving communities with more children in the schools, housing, and employment for local people. One community member described this in the context of their hope that if their grandchildren wanted to return to the area there would be something to offer them '*job-wise, house-wise*'. Community members hoped that the green land investor-owner's landholding can become a successful business and that this can be done in conjunction with local people.

In at least two case studies, estate employees' future visions included a thriving eco-tourism business on the landholding, that contributed to the local economy and provided employment opportunities. Some community members suggested that the green land investor-owner could act to support new businesses, for example

providing land for horticulture which could in turn support a local food economy (and reduce carbon emissions associated with food). It is believed that whilst some rural community residents may be concerned about the confluence of ‘*big money*’ and ‘*rewilding*’, or are uncertain and anxious about change and its implications, others will see the:

“huge potential to refocus the economy in a way that encourages and promotes localisation of the economy and better integration between the upland land use and the community...And also, the opportunity for a more self-reliant, resilient community.” [Community representative]

### **Increasing biodiversity and enhanced ecosystem services**

Community members described their hopes that the green land investment activity would result in increases in biodiversity in their locality and would respond to the climate emergency. They perceive this as complementary (and potentially encouraging) to local people’s existing pro-environmental behaviours. Community members also recognise the future benefits of reduced deer numbers, including greater opportunity for natural regeneration of woodland, as well as enhanced ecosystem services such as natural flood protection.

### **Recreational access**

Community members stated that they would like to ensure that the green land investor-owners did not reduce recreational access, for example for walkers or mountain bikers, especially where people may be unfamiliar with the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#). Their future vision was that there was no conflict between these groups and land managers, and community members and visitors would be able to continue to enjoy the landholding.

### **Increased community engagement**

As outlined above, there was significant support for enhancing landowner-community engagement processes. Estate employees described their hope to increase opportunities for the local community to use estate resources (e.g. for artistic activities) and involving people actively in land management. Community members and neighbouring landowners described a perception that the Scottish Government does not sufficiently meet the needs of rural communities, which is critical to a successful ‘just transition’. It was suggested that green land investor-owners and communities could ‘work together’ to influence Scottish Government rural and land policies, for example, to manage the unintended consequences of land use change that is considered by some participants to be accelerating rural decline.

### **Fears given current landownership and management**

#### **Green land investment will not achieve its goals**

Community members in at least one case study described their sense of hope at the outset of the new green land investor-ownership in their locality, because the

landholding was in decline. They were hopeful that new people owning the land with new ideas and green intentions would be exciting and positive.

However, community members described their concerns that the new green land investor-owners were not achieving their goals. Community members feared that the new green land investor did not have the financial resources to fulfil their land management plans, with negative implications. As described:

“I think my biggest fear is they can’t afford to carry out their plans, that would be my biggest fear. Because I don’t want to see the estate deteriorating anymore. I want them to carry out, I’d love to see it flourishing again.”  
[Community representative/Residential tenant]

This fear is mirrored by others involved in estate management:

“I suspect that, in the custodianship of [green land investor company], it won’t happen, and the very best thing that we could do is to navigate our way around the investment and the investors and see about putting a covenant on the woodland creation and selling the built environment...I believe that under private ownership, under sole ownership, the new owner would be able to achieve more of an environmental impact, more impact in the community, than we are currently...the trajectory that we are currently on doesn’t bode well...” [Land manager]

Others are uncertain as to what would happen if the green land investor ‘*runs out of money*’ (as has happened under previous private ownership models), and what that would mean for rented housing (and tenants), farming, and the future of the community.

Related to this fear regarding economic uncertainty was a perception that the green land investor-owners did not all have sufficient land management experience, which could have detrimental impacts on the landholding (e.g. ‘*out of control*’ rewilding [Community workshop participant]). Community members in at least one case study described their increasing mistrust of the new green land investor-owners due to a sense of lack of experience and ignorance. This loss of trust had occurred as community members had observed landowners and managers make mistakes (e.g. with regard to ecology), undertake ‘*questionable environmental actions*’, and appear to have a lack of interest in engaging with relevant community activities. Community members also feared being unable to verify whether green land activities had been successful (e.g. peatland restoration) due to their own lack of knowledge and resources.

### **Uncertainty about future land management plans**

A common refrain throughout this research has been rural communities’ concerns regarding their lack of awareness and ability to influence land use decision-making that has an impact on their community (as described in Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2). A

sense of persistent feudalism<sup>24</sup>, that the community is being '*taken over*', and a '*control ideology*' are associated with some case studies. Critically, a lack of knowledge amongst the community regarding the long-term land management plan was considered a cause of '*social anxiety*' for local people. As explained:

"This is a period of change for everyone, and the lack of knowledge about what the long-term plan is, is really creating social anxiety amongst the community. It's pitting people against each other, with regards to who they are working, who they are not working for. It's just not a very pleasant situation and it is creating tension... this could be an amazing opportunity or it could be absolutely awful, we don't know. And it's that unknown that I think is affecting everyone. So yes, I think that's what it is, there's a real social anxiety about what the next ten years looks like, what the next twenty years looks like." [Community workshop participant]

Community members described their future vision as including '*more integration*' between landowner and community (e.g. the landowner living locally).

### **Future employment options may be limited**

Community members feared that employment on green land investment-owned estates may decline due to landownership and land use change. They acknowledged that there are anticipated to be 'different jobs', but it was also asserted that rural jobs and skills are important to pass to younger generations. Without this knowledge transfer, traditions and a way of life may be lost, and outmigration will continue for those seeking employment.

Community members feared that future employment options in tourism-focused land-based businesses will be predominantly service jobs and will not require higher education. They are also concerned that after initial building and renovation work instigated by the new green land investor-owners, there will not be as many employment opportunities, and that '*tradesmen will not be needed in five years' time*'. As described in Section 4.2.2, people were fearful regarding the loss of agricultural land, as this may impact homes and livelihoods, as well as wider concerns regarding food security. As mentioned in the previous section, it was believed that this fear may be overcome through building relationships with the green land investor-owner and land managers, and through understanding of landowner objectives.

Further, community members described their uncertainty regarding how the 'green economy' is going to relate to rural communities and a need to understand what constitutes a 'green job'. As explained:

"I hear these things about 'green jobs', but what are they? ... nobody comes here and stays here for a seasonal job. We need concrete jobs, that people

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<sup>24</sup> Scotland's historic system of land tenure whereby land was held by vassals on perpetual tenure from their superior and where they were restricted to some degree in what they could do with their land by feudal burdens enforceable by superiors. The system was abolished in 2004 by the Abolition of Feudal tenure etc. (Scotland) Act 2000.

can get a mortgage for, can build a life around. That's really what we're looking for here." [Community representative]

### **Limited social benefits from natural capital market focus**

A key community fear is that green land investor-owners are largely driven by shareholder value, and in particular anticipated future value to be gained from carbon and potentially also biodiversity credits. It is believed that this will influence green land investor-owner decision-making regarding future income generating opportunities, such as windfarm developments. However, there is no 'social credit', according to community members:

"My concern is that the community and the social value is nice, but there's no social credit, and when it comes to the crunch [laughs], when they have to make decisions, they're going to have to go with the commercial decision...as a tenant, if we asked for something to help reduce our heating bills, for instance, they're making the decision, 'Do we do that for our tenant or do we invest in something that's going to produce more shareholder value?' They don't get any social credit for being nice to their tenants." [Local business owner]

Large and growing businesses are perceived as '*losing sight of small things such as communities*', and that there was anticipated to be little cross-over in future visions between green land investor-owners and rural communities, as described:

"They are much more commercial, and that is obviously the overriding aim. I think, if there's a question between some of their commercial aims and what they're doing to achieve that and something the community would prefer done a different way, then I suspect that there won't be a good overlap there." [Local business owner]

It must be noted however that most of the green land investor-owners studied described their approach to partnership with local communities as building '*community wealth*', as well as shareholder value:

"we're working with mechanisms to see how [community wealth building] might best be achieved in everybody's interest, without killing the golden goose, if you like, and creating more value in these units in the market. Because they contain biodiversity, employment, community wealth building and all the rest of it. So, I think a buyer of such units that felt that they were contributing to all of that, that was feeding back on a broad scale of benefits would probably see these units of being more valuable." [Landowner representative]

Nonetheless, there remains a community concern regarding access to and benefit from carbon credits derived from local landholdings, and in particular that the opportunity to gain such credits should be available to crofters and farming tenants, and not only landowners (as these interviewees perceived). There were concerns that if tenant farmers or crofters were unable to access carbon credit schemes there may be implications on the emission reduction options required to receive agricultural subsidies.

## Implications of large-scale landownership by green land investor-owners

Community participants from at least three case studies described their concerns regarding increasing concentration of and large-scale landownership by green land investor-owners. This was attributed primarily to a lack of regulation within Scotland that restricts who can buy land (e.g. those from outwith the UK) and the amount of land that any one entity can acquire. Several described their unease with regard to individuals and companies owning significant landholdings, considering unequal power relations and fairness (i.e. in terms of access to land). The participants feared that land reform objectives such as reducing private landownership concentration was not proving successful because the Scottish Government also wanted to encourage inward private investment to support nature restoration, and to meet net zero goals. Increasing concentration of ownership by green land investor-owners was seen as increasing the influence of an individual landowning entity on the economic, social, and environmental outcomes of an area – whether for good or bad; for example:

“It just seems totally wrong that one business can monopolise so much land. It might be for the good or if it’s for the bad, well then, they’ve got an awful lot of land.” [Local crofter]

Participants suggested that a ‘monopolies and mergers commission’ for land was considered; this aligns with the proposed public interest test outlined in the consultation paper [‘Land Reform in a Net Zero Nation’](#).

Some participants also believed that without further land reform measures, the trend for large-scale landownership associated with green land investment will continue, with associated impacts on rural communities as outlined in this report. The challenge of limiting landownership scale and concentration was perceived as relating to a lack of experience of small-scale landowner cooperation in Scotland, as described:

“I don’t know what you can do about that, other than land reform. Put limits on the amount of land that new investment companies in London or wherever can take on board. But we do need to do things at scale and we’re in a trap because we’re too far down the road to climate change. So, without big money coming in, we’re not going to achieve it because there isn’t the capacity there in terms of small communities, individual landowners to do it at that scale. And we don’t have that history, that culture of co-operation that allows small landowners to get together and do things collectively. If we were in Europe, there would be a lot more scope for that collective co-operation to achieve the end result that we need but we’re not, so...The history of...well, feudalism in Scotland has still got a lot to answer for.” [Community representative]

Others however were less certain that redistributive land reform was the right approach: *“I don’t know what the answer to that is. I mean you can’t take everyone’s estate off them. That wouldn’t work”* [Community representative]. Nonetheless, a frequent refrain by community participants was the impact of significant landed power on estate tenants (e.g. crofters and farmers), local businesses, and residents, as well as the associated power of significant economic wealth. Some community participants requested that measures proposed in the

forthcoming Land Reform Bill are retained (e.g. the pre-notification of land sales, which would raise local awareness of landownership changes), and go further. In particular, community participants suggested that land reform legislation seeks to limit the amount of land that can be owned by one entity, in order to reduce the risks associated with increasing scale and concentration of ownership.

Further recommendations for policy makers arising from these hopes and fears are presented in Section 6.

## 5. Conclusions

This research has examined the socio-economic impacts of new forms of green land investment in rural Scotland. The main conclusions are that:

- There is a diversity of green land investor-owner activities and motivations. Motivations expressed by green land investor-owners and/or their representatives differ from community members' perceptions of motivations.
- The social and economic benefits and negative impacts of green land investment are dependent on the case study's investor-owner. These impacts differ across case studies, with different investments affecting the same issues in different ways. For example, depending on the case study, recreational access is perceived to or may increase or decrease, or jobs may be gained or lost. Farmers and estate employees are the most affected by land use changes, for example regarding employment and livelihood impacts.
- Whilst some of the case studies provided evidence of good practice in terms of increased accessibility, transparency, and community engagement, a critical negative impact was the perceived lack of community involvement in land-use decision-making. Participants suggested methods for positive community engagement. A lack of engagement reinforced negative impacts of economic power disparities between the green land investor-owner and the rural community, and a sense of community powerlessness.
- Thriving rural communities are seen as a potential future if green land investor-owner goals are achieved but failure would have knock-on impacts for community sustainability and the local environment.

This research has sought to build an understanding of the social and economic impacts of new forms of green land investment that are occurring in rural Scotland. Through literature reviews and extensive case study fieldwork, this research provides evidence of these impacts (both perceived and actual) and responds to the research questions posed in Chapter 1. These findings are summarised here.

### **What are the different types of green land investment activities and the differing motivations of land owners?**

Our research has illustrated the diversity of green land investment activities and the motivations of green land investor-owners who are carrying out these activities in Scotland's rural land. Through a literature review and interviews, we have developed a typology of green land investor motivations (see Table 3) and define green land investment as follows:

“The purchase of, or investment in (directly through shareholding or changing focus of owner investment, or indirectly through intermediary companies) land to undertake nature restoration, regenerative land management or



approaches that maintain or enhance natural capital, and/or sequester carbon emissions, differentiated from traditional ownership by the green motivations as a driver rather than a secondary outcome.”

Interviews with rural community representatives have illustrated a common perception that the primary motivation for green land investment is financial. Whilst most of the green land investor-owners involved in the case studies would not undertake the green land activities if they made a loss, at least two indicated that they would accept lower profits and at least one appeared not to be seeking any profit. Across the case studies, the green land investor-owners described their goals for investment as providing environmental and social benefits.

### **What are the social and economic impacts of green land investment?**

This research has illustrated a range of potential benefits and negative impacts that green land investment activities may have on rural communities who live and/or work near to the landholdings. Benefits identified by participants across the case studies include:

- Increased accessibility to the landholding
- Increased transparency regarding land management plans
- Willingness of the new green land investor-owner to increase community involvement in land management
- Provision of training and education programmes to support skills development such as forestry and peatland restoration
- Support for local businesses and tradespeople due to landholding developments (e.g. building renovations)
- Support for tourism enterprises (and associated employment) and an increase in tourism
- Housing provision for the community or plans to do so
- Financial and in-kind support for local community initiatives

It was noted however that these wider social and economic benefits were dependent on the financial vehicle, economic power, and flexibility of the green land investor-owner; some were more limited in how they could contribute than others.

Negative impacts identified by participants included:

- The social impacts of land use changes, such as the perceived increased risk of wildfire (which is also an environmental risk), where upland management has shifted from a focus on fieldsports (i.e. leading to the cessation of muirburn practices<sup>25</sup>), and fly-tipping (i.e. perceived as increasing due to fewer land-based workers preventing such activities).
- Threats to recreational access and the aesthetic impact of activities such as afforestation and wind farm developments on landscapes (the latter bringing connected challenges regarding receipt of community benefit funding).

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<sup>25</sup> The practice of muirburn is burning old vegetation which reduces the fuel load and allows new growth which feeds insects, young birds, and mammals (Scottish Government, 2023).

- Changing employment and its potential impacts on local service provision, for example the decline in school rolls with outmigration of former estate workers.
- Negative impacts on local housing provision, primarily through the conversion of housing to holiday accommodation.
- Contributing to local house price inflation and a lack of affordable housing for locals where investor-owners have purchased housing on the open market.

A critical negative impact of some of the green land investment case studies involved in this research was the perceived lack of community involvement in land-use decision-making. This was believed to be due in part to remote management, persistent social hierarchies, and a lack of awareness or appreciation of local knowledge of the land. This disconnect and lack of engagement reinforced negative impacts of economic power disparities between the green land investor-owner and the rural community, and a sense of community powerlessness.

### **How does green land investment affect different groups within communities?**

This research aimed to consider the views of different groups within rural communities. Interviews with a diversity of community representatives, as well as local business owners, tenant and owner-occupier farmers, and crofters, have illustrated how green land investment is affecting these groups, both positively and negatively.

Local businesses had benefited from investment (e.g. renovation, start-up grants, etc.) and employment opportunities (e.g. contractors and tradespeople), with the employment of local people and use of local services apparently a key priority of many of the green land investor-owners studied. This was not always possible, and landowner representatives noted skills shortages and availability as key barriers. Forestry services had benefitted and increased local employment in their offices. Local businesses had also been negatively impacted by the outmigration of former estate employees where this had occurred, and some jobs had been lost when former businesses were taken over by new green land investor-owners. Community members were not clear where and how many new employment opportunities had been realised.

Some existing estate employees' roles had been changed to reflect environmental priorities, including gamekeepers, deer stalkers and ghillies; for example gamekeepers had become rangers and wildlife managers. In other areas, some had been made redundant when landownership changed, whilst others had chosen to leave due to the anticipated changes to their role given the new green land investor-owners' plans. In these examples, there were perceived negative impacts on the wider community and local service provision due to outmigration. There was uncertainty amongst community interviewees regarding the number and timescale of new employment, for example within forestry.

Farmers, and in particular tenant farmers, were a further key group that had been affected by the changing landownership and land management objectives within

the case study landholdings. As anticipated by many participants, while managing land for environmental purposes, certain types of agricultural production had declined across the case studies, and land use change in at least two case studies meant that former grazing land was no longer available for local farmers to use. There were concerns regarding the impact of the removal of agricultural activities on the 'critical mass' (or minimum number of agricultural businesses) necessary to maintain agricultural services. Of significant concern to some members of the farming community was the perception that tenant farming was not part of the long-term land management plans of the green land investor-owners. The farmers who participated in this research agreed with the need to reduce agricultural emissions, both individually and as a country, but they were concerned that they might lose their livelihoods because of expanding green land investment ownership and activities.

**To what extent do private-sector interests support or conflict with the needs of rural communities and their interests? What are the wider and long-term implications of changes in rural land use and ownership for rural communities, as a result of new forms of green land investment?**

These research questions were approached through conversations with representatives of communities of place and of interest, as well as the green land investor-owners (and representatives) regarding future visions, as well as 'hopes' and 'fears' for the future.

The primary vision expressed by community members was for 'thriving rural communities', which included employment and housing options for a diversity of people. Community members hoped that green land investor-ownership would support this vision, for example through housing provision and supporting employment. As mentioned, supporting training and education opportunities, in addition to community housing, was a stated aim of several of the green land investor-owners interviewed. Providing wider social benefits aligned with green land investor-owners' stated values, but some had financial limitations in achieving those goals.

Community members' visions also included an increase in biodiversity and enhanced ecosystem services (e.g. flood protection), which aligned closely with the objectives of the green land investor-owners. Community members also wished to see recreational and visitor access to the landholdings maintained and improved. This vision also appears to fit with the goals and management objectives of the green land investor-owners studied, for example where recreational access opportunities have been enhanced by the new landowner.

Community hopes also focused on increased community engagement, both directly with the landowner and having some influence in land use and long-term management plans. Our research shows mixed experiences in terms of landowner-community engagement on these landholdings, although there are opportunities to enhance positive engagement.

In terms of the wider and long-term consequences of green land investment, community participants feared that the green land investors may not achieve their goals, with knock-on impacts for community sustainability and the local environment. This concern is heightened where ownership is at a large scale. They also perceive a lack of community involvement in future land management plans, persistent power imbalances in land use decision-making and ownership, and the disempowerment of rural communities, despite relevant and traditional knowledge. Rural community participants feared that given the land management plans and business models of the green land investors, future employment options locally may be limited, with only a few jobs associated with forestry and low-level service jobs available in tourism enterprises. Community members reiterated their concerns that there are limited social benefits where green land investors are focused on the natural capital market, although this is disputed by some green land investor-owners who stated that they have plans for community wealth building and partnership-working with communities. Finally, community members highlighted that increasing scale and concentration of green land investor-landownership (providing both positive and/or negative impacts on rural communities) would continue without further land reform.

Overall, this research has highlighted that there are several areas of positive alignment between the communities of place (and the different communities of interest represented) and the green land investor-owners, which is an important finding for progressing the just transition. Community members agree with the need to prioritise land management that meets environmental goals, and support initiatives that lower carbon emissions and preserve biodiversity. Communities of interest representatives, such as local business owners, highlight the value of inward investment in rural economies provided by green land investor-owners, and support for training and education opportunities will have long-term benefits. In several case studies, it was clear that landownership and land management plans had become more transparent, providing welcome options for greater community involvement. This situation was not replicated across all case studies, and at times has led to critical uncertainties for rural community members, such as tenant farmers. The following section details recommendations arising from this research that aim to maximise the positive benefits and minimise the negative impacts arising from green land investment in rural Scotland.

As described in Section 2.4, the conclusions that can be drawn from this research may be limited due to lack of participation by different stakeholder groups (although the research design sought to minimise barriers), the secondary data available, and in particular, the short-term nature of the research project. One key challenge remains regarding how to disentangle the potential and actual impacts of green land investment activities on rural communities of place and of interest, from those that may arise due to other types of land use or land ownership. Many of the impacts identified in this report may be found where landownership motivations change (e.g. on change of ownership) or where there is absentee landownership/remote land management (e.g. challenging positive landowner-community engagement). One distinguishing feature that we identified through this exploration of green land investment was the significant economic power held by

the new actors engaging in Scotland's land market. For example, the level of funding available through some types of investment vehicles meant that issues relating to landownership scale and concentration may become more likely (and appeared to be occurring in at least two case studies), and that market forces may drive land use and land management change more quickly than can be accommodated through policy processes seeking to achieve a 'just transition'.

However, both positive and negative impacts were perceived and realised, dependent on the motivations and activities of green land investor-owners. This demonstrates the fine balance of potential impacts relating to green land investment activities and the relative importance of how such activities are undertaken (and the agency of local communities), rather than who the green land owner-investor may be. Given this finding, caution must be taken in considering what impacts relate directly to green land investment, or traditional private landownership in Scotland (in particular where this is absentee ownership). This is important in the context of new land reform legislation in Scotland.

Nonetheless, more qualitative and quantitative research is necessary to provide further evidence to support these conclusions, and in particular the generation of long-term datasets based on co-produced indicators to demonstrate social and economic impacts across a range of landownership models and land use objectives. This initiative would be supported through greater accessibility of complete landownership data, integrated with regularly updated land use information, and transparency in land management plans.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the research findings, in particular the interviews with community representatives, the following recommendations can be made:

### Recommendations for policy makers:

- Policy makers should consider community participants' calls for greater regulation of the natural capital market<sup>26</sup>, to ensure the market operates in a transparent way and that communities are able to see that it is being regulated and having a positive impact.
- Policy makers should consider the requirement that green land investors and landowners who benefit financially from natural capital markets provide a proportionate share of profits to communities of place that are affected and/or to ensure upkeep of rural roads where there is increased forestry traffic associated with afforestation. In particular, policy makers should consider the need for a set minimum of community benefit payments to localities from windfarm developments to become a legal requirement.
- Policy makers are encouraged to explore removing (actual or perceived) barriers of access to natural capital markets for tenant farmers and crofters, and to ensure that tenant farmers and crofters are able to access support schemes where there is green land investment landownership.
- Policy makers must consider how best to support farming and gamekeeping communities in the just transition, for example ensuring that the scientific evidence regarding land management and land use change is clearly communicated, and introducing support schemes for those whose agricultural businesses may become unviable to provide retraining and reskilling opportunities.

### Recommendations for green land investors/owners:

- Green land investors and landowners (both incoming and outgoing owners) must ensure that any shift in employment types (including redundancy or reassignment of roles), land use change (e.g. shifting from livestock grazing to afforestation), or plans for the conversion of housing stock considers the long-term consequences of these changes to rural community sustainability and the just transition, and seeks to mitigate negative impacts (for example, by seeking to provide alternative employment or accommodation options).
- Green land investors and landowners must ensure transparency and accountability in their land management plans and ownership objectives. This should be shared with communities of place and communities of interest who may be affected, and community feedback integrated into planning processes.

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<sup>26</sup> It may be necessary for policy makers to consider making compliance with the Interim Principles for Responsible Investment in Natural Capital (Scottish Government, 2022c) mandatory under certain conditions.

- Green land investors and landowners should ensure that community voices are represented on the decision-making boards or management committees of their companies. Further to this, community engagement at local levels should adhere to best practice guidance<sup>27</sup> (for example, communicating clearly with communities, publicising engagement events effectively, and seeking to address barriers to participation). Where necessary, third-party advisors and arbitrators should intervene to ensure that communities are fully aware of land management plans.

Practical suggestions for positive community-green land investor-owner engagement are presented in Box 2 (below)<sup>28</sup>.

### **Recommendations for rural communities of place and communities of interest:**

- Rural communities should seek opportunities and be supported to engage with landowners (for example through invitations to regular community meetings) and overcome barriers to communication and representation (e.g. lack of knowledge on the part of landowners regarding community organisations or discussion forums) to articulate shared interests and future goals.
- Farmers should seek opportunities and be supported to engage with landowners and landowner representatives to share land management goals and objectives, and overcome barriers to constructive conversations about future plans. Farming organisations should share up-to-date information with members regarding low-emission and nature-friendly farming practices, or opportunities to gain new skills that will support them in the just transition.

### **Recommendations for researchers/academics:**

- Longitudinal social research is necessary to further monitor and understand the potential and actual long-term social and economic impacts of green land investment in rural Scotland, and the implications of good practice community engagement.

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<sup>27</sup> Noting again that these recommendations align closely with the guidance recently published by the Scottish Land Commission on 'Delivering Community Benefits from Land' (Scottish Land Commission, 2023).

<sup>28</sup> Key guidance has recently been published by the Scottish Land Commission in their report 'Delivering Community Benefits from Land' (Scottish Land Commission, 2023); available online: [https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/65572c79e77be\\_Guidance%20on%20Community%20Benefits%E2%80%9316.11.23.pdf](https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/65572c79e77be_Guidance%20on%20Community%20Benefits%E2%80%9316.11.23.pdf). Other useful sources of advice regarding community engagement include 'Working Together for Sustainable Estate Communities' (Glass et al., 2012); available online: [https://issuu.com/cms\\_uhi/docs/working\\_together\\_for\\_sustainable\\_estate\\_communitie](https://issuu.com/cms_uhi/docs/working_together_for_sustainable_estate_communitie) and the Scottish Land Commission's Community Engagement Protocol (Scottish Land Commission, 2021) available online: [https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/628e17641fd5d\\_Comm%20Engagement%20Protocol%202021.pdf](https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/628e17641fd5d_Comm%20Engagement%20Protocol%202021.pdf) (see also McKee, 2015; McIntosh, 2023).

## **Box 2: Practical suggestions for positive community-landowner engagement**

The interviews with both community members and green land-investor owners, as well as the community-based workshops, identified several key practical recommendations for positive landowner-community engagement, including:

1. The importance of building long-term, trusted relationships between landowners, landowner representatives and community members (both communities of place and of interest). This is commonly facilitated by having resident landowners or landowner representatives, which allows for everyday interactions (e.g. through using local services, attending community events, etc.), albeit ensuring that social hierarchies (or perceived class differences) do not prevent positive engagement.
2. Ensuring that the landholding has an 'open door policy' i.e. a known and accessible estate office and employees, providing regular opportunities for local people and visitors to learn about land management activities (e.g. through open days, estate tours, volunteering opportunities, etc.). Identifying and participating in active local communication forums (e.g. popular social media platforms and key discussion groups) and participating in community groups (e.g. community councils and development trusts).
3. Developing a communications strategy that adopts a range of communications mechanisms to reach the widest range of people, both locally and further afield (but not only focussing on a tourist market). Ensuring that the landholding has an accessible website with up-to-date information about land management plans, recreational access, and contact information for relevant employees and the landowner.
4. Ensuring that community engagement is ongoing and communication is two-way, between landowner and community, in order to mitigate concerns that engagement or consultation processes are only for the purposes of fulfilling planning requirements or are seen as 'tick box' exercises. Building individual relationships with diverse community members and groups is considered critical to generating community support for land management and land use change.
5. Co-developing opportunities for greater community involvement in land management decision-making (e.g. through representation on landowning boards or within trustee bodies). Identifying opportunities for community members and community groups to develop enterprises in conjunction with the green land investment-owner.



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## Appendices

### Annex 1

All participants were sent Participant Information sheets prior to taking part in interviews. Separate information sheets were sent to community members and landowner representatives. In the landowner representative information sheet, participants were informed that their data could be used to inform another project. Both are included below, starting with the Community Member Participant Information Sheet.

## Project information

### Socio-economic impacts of 'green' land investment



**Timescale:** Spring – Autumn 2023

**Funding body:** Scottish Government, Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division (RESAS)

RESAS

**Version:** 4/4/2023

#### What is this project about?

This project will explore the social and economic impacts of new forms of 'green' land investment (in particular, through land acquisition) that are occurring across rural Scotland. The Scottish Government has committed to becoming a net-zero society by 2045. This has implications for land value and use, and it has led to a notable recent rise in companies and individuals seeking to buy land in Scotland to benefit from the carbon sequestration potential of the land and other potential natural capital benefits. These owners range from multi-national corporations seeking to offset (or 'inset') the carbon emissions from their business activities (or provide a return to investors), to individuals and companies wishing to undertake regenerative land management, nature conservation or 'rewilding'. This project aims to understand more about the lived experiences of the rural communities who live and/or work near to landholdings with some form of 'green' land investment, as well as the motivations and approaches of the landowners and investors involved.

The project also seeks to make practical recommendations regarding best practice approaches for 'green' land investors/landowners in engaging rural communities in decisions relating to land. This will support the Scottish Government's goal of a 'just transition' to a low carbon economy.

Further information about the background to this project can be found on the project webpage available online here: <https://www.hutton.ac.uk/research/projects/socio-economic-impacts-%E2%80%98green%E2%80%99-land-investment-rural-scotland>

#### How will information be gathered?

This research will draw on interviews and focus group discussions with rural community members. We would like to meet with rural residents (including representatives of community organisations), estate employees (or ex- employees) or people living in tied housing, local land managers (including managing agents, farmers, crofters, and gamekeepers), and other local voices, including those who may be less frequently heard.

Interviews will seek to learn about your understanding of local landownership and land management objectives, your views on the influence of landownership and land management on the local community (e.g. local residents, rural businesses, etc.), engagement by local landowners with the community, and your future visions for your community (and your farm/croft or rural business, if relevant).

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### How will the interviews take place?

The interviews will take place in-person, over the telephone or via a video-conferencing platform (e.g. WebEx), and will last up to one hour. Interviews in person can be undertaken in your home or at a convenient public location (e.g. local café). They will be audio recorded and transcribed.

### Why should I take part?

You have been invited to take part because you have been identified as someone who aligns with the groups of people outlined above. Your views and experiences would be a valuable contribution to this study. We will document the findings in a report that will be published on the Scottish Government website and will also share a summary of the key findings with you.

### Do I have to take part?

No, your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time, up until the point that we publish the research findings. We do not anticipate any risks to you from your participation. Even if you agree to take part as an interviewee, you can choose not to answer a question(s), without having to give a reason. Following the interview, you will be invited to participate in a focus group with other members of your community to consider the current and future community impacts of local 'green' land investment. Participating in the focus group is entirely optional.

### Data confidentiality

All data will be treated with full confidentiality and every effort will be made to ensure you are not directly identifiable within any publications. Please note that it is not possible to guarantee complete anonymity because of the risk that characteristics of the local community or landholding are too difficult to anonymise. Data will be stored on restricted-access, password protected secure systems through the James Hutton Institute.

### What if I want to withdraw?

If you would like to withdraw your data at any point up until the publication of the research report, please contact the lead researcher in this project (contact details below).

### Who can I contact?

If you have any questions at any time, please feel free to contact the project lead:  
**Annie McKee ([annie.mckee@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:annie.mckee@hutton.ac.uk)) – Tel. 01224 395294**

The Hutton research team also includes: Margaret Currie, Naomi Beingessner, Kerry Waylen, Annabel Pinker, Jon Hopkins, and Acacia Marshall.

## Annex 2

### Project information

#### Socio-economic impacts of 'green' land investment



**Timescale:** Spring – Autumn 2023

**Funding body:** Scottish Government, Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division (RESAS)

RESAS

**Version:** 4/4/2023

#### What is this project about?

This project will explore the social and economic impacts of the new forms of 'green' land investment (in particular, through land acquisition) that are occurring across rural Scotland. The Scottish Government has committed to becoming a net-zero society by 2045. This has implications for land value and use, and it has led to a notable recent rise in companies and individuals seeking to buy land in Scotland to benefit from the carbon sequestration potential of the land and other potential natural capital benefits. These owners range from multi-national corporations seeking to offset (or 'inset') the carbon emissions from their business activities (or provide a return to investors), to individuals and companies wishing to undertake regenerative land management, nature conservation or 'rewilding'. This project aims to understand more about the lived experiences of the rural communities who live and/or work near to landholdings with some form of 'green' land investment, as well as the motivations and approaches of the landowners and investors involved.

The project also seeks to make practical recommendations regarding best practice approaches for 'green' land investors/landowners in engaging rural communities in decisions relating to land. This will support the Scottish Government's goal of a 'just transition' to a low carbon economy.

Further information about the background to this project can be found on the project webpage available online here: <https://www.hutton.ac.uk/research/projects/socio-economic-impacts-%E2%80%98green%E2%80%99-land-investment-rural-scotland>

#### How will information be gathered?

This research will draw on interviews and focus group discussions with rural community members, as well as interviews with local landowners and representatives of landowners undertaking 'green' land investment activities.

These interviews will seek to learn about motivations for landownership and the purpose of land management activities. We are also interested in your views on the influence of landownership and management on local communities, both rural residents and other communities of interest (e.g. rural business owners, farmers, crofters, and other land-based workers). Finally, the interview will consider current community engagement practices, and your future goals and vision for your landholding/land management.

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### How will the interviews take place?

The interviews will take place in-person, over the telephone or via a video-conferencing platform (e.g. WebEx), and will last between 60 – 90 minutes. Interviews in person can be undertaken in your home, office, or at a convenient public location (e.g. local café). They will be audio recorded and transcribed.

### Why should I take part?

You have been invited to take part because you have been identified as the owner of land (or the representative of a landowner) where 'green' land investment activities are taking place. Your views and experiences would be a valuable contribution to this study. We will document the findings in a report that will be published on the Scottish Government website and will also share a summary of the key findings with you.

### Do I have to take part?

No, your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time, up until the point that we publish the research findings. We do not anticipate any risks to you from your participation. Even if you agree to take part as an interviewee, you can choose not to answer a question(s), without having to give a reason.

The Hutton research team are also conducting research that seeks to build our understanding of who is involved and how decisions about land management relating to biodiversity are made. The interview data you provide could be used to contribute to this research and save interviewee time. You will be invited to opt-in to sharing your data in the participant consent form, but there is no obligation to do so.

### Data confidentiality

All data will be treated with full confidentiality and every effort will be made to ensure you are not directly identifiable within any publications. Please note that it is not possible to guarantee complete anonymity because of the risk that characteristics of the local community or landholding are too difficult to anonymise. Data will be stored on restricted-access, password protected secure systems through the James Hutton Institute.

### What if I want to withdraw?

If you would like to withdraw your data at any point up until the publication of the research report, please contact the lead researcher in this project (contact details below).

### Who can I contact?

If you have any questions at any time, please feel free to contact the project lead:

**Annie McKee ([annie.mckee@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:annie.mckee@hutton.ac.uk)) – Tel. 01224 395294**

The Hutton research team also includes: Margaret Currie, Naomi Beingessner, Kerry Waylen, Annabel Pinker, Jon Hopkins, and Acacia Marshall

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## Annex 3

Prior to being interviewed, all participants were sent a consent form and asked to return it. In some cases, oral consent was given, in which the researcher read out the information sheet and consent forms to the participant.

This is the community interviewee consent form:

### RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

#### Participant Identification Number:

<b>Title of Project:</b>	Socio-economic impacts of green land investment
<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	Annie McKee
<b>Study Number:</b>	James Hutton Institute Project code: X003438-00

**Please Initial Box**

I confirm that I have read, or had read to me, and understand the information sheet dated 4/4/2023 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered fully and explicitly.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time, without providing any reason and without my legal rights being affected, up until the publication of any outputs. If I choose to withdraw during or after the interview / focus group and up until publication, my data will be omitted.	
I understand the study is being conducted by researchers from The James Hutton Institute, and funded by the Scottish Government, Rural and Environmental Science and Analytical Services Division (RESAS).	
Any personal data collected via this consent form as well as the interview / focus group recordings and transcripts will be kept confidential within the research team and stored securely. I understand that while all efforts will be undertaken to anonymise my testimony and I will not be directly named in any published outputs, the content of my testimony might make me identifiable (i.e. participants' roles may be mentioned in outputs).  <i>Please note that it is not possible to guarantee complete anonymity because of the risk that characteristics of the local community or landholding may be too difficult to anonymise.</i>	

I agree that a transcript of my interview can be archived in an open repository for future research purposes. I understand that all efforts will be made to remove any text that might identify me or the case study location prior to archiving.	
I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.	
I agree to being contacted at a later date in relation to this study.	
I acknowledge that I have read and understood the privacy notice.	
I agree to take part in the above study.	

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print) Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
PI/Researcher Name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### Privacy Notice

The James Hutton Institute (“Hutton”) and the Scottish Ministers (Scottish Government) (both referred to “us”, “we”, “our”) will use your personal data for the purposes of the research undertaken in the project ‘Socio-economic impacts of green land investment’ (see: <https://www.hutton.ac.uk/research/projects/socio-economic-impacts-%E2%80%98green%E2%80%99-land-investment-rural-scotland>). We are acting as joint data controllers in this project and have put in place a joint controllership agreement outlining our roles and responsibilities in relation to personal data.

Our lawful basis under the UK GDPR for processing your personal data is that this is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest in relation to research funded by the Scottish Government. For the purposes of this project, we may process the following types of personal data about you:

- Name
- Contact details (telephone number, email address)
- Any information we collect from you or hold about you as part of this research project, i) data collected during the interviews ii) project management documentation e.g., consent forms and iii) records of communications with you e.g., email correspondence.

Your personal data will be stored securely on the computer systems of the James Hutton Institute and any access to it will be password protected and restricted only to the project team. We will store and retain any information that we collect from you as part of this research project for up to two years after the end of the project, to allow all publications based on this work to be accepted for publication.

If you have given your consent to being contacted at a later date in relation to this study, we will retain your name and contact details for five years after the end of the project. We will contact you on an annual basis to confirm this ongoing consent. We will archive metadata (e.g. thematic coding frameworks) and anonymised transcripts (removing all identifiers) in an open repository.

If you have agreed for your online interview to be recorded, personal data captured within the recording are stored within the cloud service owned by the video-conferencing company. Your personal data may be transferred outside of the EEA and the UK by the video-conferencing company. We have in place appropriate contracts with any third-party suppliers who may be accessing your data on our behalf to ensure that your data is held securely and protected adequately. This includes contracted transcribers, who will be acting as a data processor for the personal data that they will access to provide their services.

You have rights in relation to your personal data. Our main privacy notices, [www.hutton.ac.uk/terms](http://www.hutton.ac.uk/terms) (Hutton) and <https://www.gov.scot/privacy> (Scottish Government) explain in more detail how we handle your personal data as well as your rights. Any requests for accessing the personal information which we hold about you ("Subject Access Requests") can be addressed to [SAR@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:SAR@hutton.ac.uk).

If you have any questions about the research or a complaint about how we have handled your personal information, please get in touch with [annie.mckee@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:annie.mckee@hutton.ac.uk) or [Emily.Harris2@gov.scot](mailto:Emily.Harris2@gov.scot). If this does not resolve your complaint, you can contact our Data Protection Officers on [dpo@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:dpo@hutton.ac.uk) or [dataprotectionofficer@gov.scot](mailto:dataprotectionofficer@gov.scot).

The Information Commissioner is the regulator for UK GDPR. You have the right to raise concerns with the Commissioner if you are not happy with the way your information is being handled:

Customer Contact  
Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane City  
Wilmslow  
SK9 5AF

You can also report concerns online. For more information, please see the Contact Us page of their website: <https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/>

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## Annex 4

This is the landowner representative interviewee consent form:

### RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

#### Participant Identification Number:

<b>Title of Project:</b>	Socio-economic impacts of green land investment
<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	Annie McKee
<b>Study Number:</b>	James Hutton Institute Project code: X003438-00

**Please Initial Box**

I confirm that I have read, or had read to me, and understand the information sheet dated 4/4/2023 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered fully and explicitly.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time, without providing any reason and without my legal rights being affected, up until the publication of any outputs. If I choose to withdraw during or after the interview / focus group and up until publication, my data will be omitted.	
I understand the study is being conducted by researchers from The James Hutton Institute, and funded by the Scottish Government, Rural and Environmental Science and Analytical Services Division (RESAS).	
Any personal data collected via this consent form as well as the interview / focus group recordings and transcripts will be kept confidential within the research team and stored securely. I understand that while all efforts will be undertaken to anonymise my testimony and I will not be directly named in any published outputs, the content of my testimony might make me identifiable (i.e. participants' roles may be mentioned in outputs).  <i>Please note that it is not possible to guarantee complete anonymity because of the risk that characteristics of the local community or landholding may be too difficult to anonymise.</i>	
I agree that a transcript of my interview can be archived in an open repository for future research purposes. I understand that all efforts will be made to remove any text that might identify me or the case study location prior to archiving.	

I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.	
I agree to being contacted at a later date in relation to this study.	
I acknowledge that I have read and understood the privacy notice.	
I agree to take part in the above study.	

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print) Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
PI/Researcher Name (please print) Signature Date

**Consent to use this interview data in other research projects**

The Hutton research team are also conducting research that seeks to build our understanding of who is involved and how decisions about land management relating to biodiversity are made. The interview data you provide could be used to contribute to this research and save interviewee time. Please write ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in the box below in response to the following statements.

- I provide additional consent that the anonymised interview transcription may be used in the analysis phase of the Activity 2.2 in the ‘Scotland’s Land Reform Futures’ project (JHI-E3-1), part of the Scottish Government’s Strategic Research Programme, 2022-2027.
- I understand that my data will be held securely as above, my right to withdraw is the same, and I have had opportunity to ask questions about this project.

**Privacy Notice**

The James Hutton Institute (“Hutton”) and the Scottish Ministers (Scottish Government) (both referred to “us”, “we”, “our”) will use your personal data for the purposes of the research undertaken in the project ‘Socio-economic impacts of green land investment’ (see: <https://www.hutton.ac.uk/research/projects/socio-economic-impacts-%E2%80%98green%E2%80%99-land-investment-rural-scotland>). We are acting as joint data controllers in this project and have put in place a joint controllership agreement outlining our roles and responsibilities in relation to personal data.

Our lawful basis under the UK GDPR for processing your personal data is that this is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest in relation to research funded by the Scottish Government.

For the purposes of this project, we may process the following types of personal data about you:

- Name
- Contact details (telephone number, email address)
- Any information we collect from you or hold about you as part of this research project, i) data collected during the interviews ii) project management documentation e.g., consent forms and iii) records of communications with you e.g., email correspondence.

Your personal data will be stored securely on the computer systems of the James Hutton Institute and any access to it will be password protected and restricted only to the project team. We will store and retain any information that we collect from you as part of this research project for up to two years after the end of the project, to allow all publications based on this work to be accepted for publication.

If you have given your consent to being contacted at a later date in relation to this study, we will retain your name and contact details for five years after the end of the project. We will contact you on an annual basis to confirm this ongoing consent. We will archive metadata (e.g. thematic coding frameworks) and anonymised transcripts (removing all identifiers) in an open repository.

If you have agreed for your online interview to be recorded, personal data captured within the recording are stored within the cloud service owned by the video-conferencing company. Your personal data may be transferred outside of the EEA and the UK by the video-conferencing company. We have in place appropriate contracts with any third-party suppliers who may be accessing your data on our behalf to ensure that your data is held securely and protected adequately. This includes contracted transcribers, who will be acting as a data processor for the personal data that they will access to provide their services.

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Scottish Government, Saughton House  
Tel: 07741238799; Email: [Emily.harris2@gov.scot](mailto:Emily.harris2@gov.scot)

## Annex 5

Two separate interview guides were used; one was for community representatives and the other was for landowners/landowner representatives. As can be seen in these guides, certain questions were tailored to specific members of the community/landowner team. This is the interview guide that was used for all community representatives:

### **Socio-economic impacts of green land investment – draft interview guide for representatives of communities of place and communities of practice**

#### **Welcome and thanks to interviewee**

Introduction to researcher and the project, including overview of purpose of interview within wider project aims.

Reiterate key points in consent form – e.g. anonymity of interviewees (i.e. through high-level analysis) and confidentiality of data, but noting that it is not possible to guarantee complete anonymity because of the risk that characteristics of the local community or landholding are too difficult to anonymise.

The purpose of this interview is to help the research team to develop a rich understanding of the impacts on people and communities from what we have termed green land investment.

#### **Interviewee background:**

*[Take note of interviewee's age and employment status through introductory conversation.]*

Where do you live? How long have you lived here?

**For community of place representative:** What is your role in the community? (If no formal community roles) As a resident, do you feel you have any roles in the community, and what are those roles?

**For farmer/crofter:** Can you tell me about how you came to own/rent your landholding? What are the main activities on your farm/croft?

**For rural estate employee:** Can you tell me about what your role is/was on [X] Estate?

**For rural business owner:** Can you tell me a bit about your business? When was it established? Who are your customers?

#### **Understanding of local land ownership/management objectives**

**For community of place representative and rural business owner:** Can you tell me about local landownership? Are you aware of who owns the land around [community name]? How has that changed over recent years? Do you have any contact with the landowner(s)? (Do you know how to contact them?) What do you understand to be their reasons for owning the land? What do you understand are the main land management activities/goals? How has land management changed with the current landowner?

Do you feel you are well informed about land management and land use locally? Do you feel you have a right to be informed?

Do you feel strongly about what the landowner does with the land/what land management is undertaken (and therefore land use)? Does it matter to you? If so, in what ways?

**For farmer/crofter and rural estate employee:** (How) has local landownership changed since you have lived and worked here? Do you have any contact with the landowner(s)? What do you understand to be their reasons for owning the land? What do you understand are the main land management activities/goals? How has land management changed with the current landowner?

Do you feel you are well informed about land management and land use locally? Do you feel you have a right to be informed?

Do you feel strongly about what the landowner does with the land/what land management is undertaken (and therefore land use)? Does it matter to you? If so, in what ways/ under what circumstances?

### **Understanding influence of landownership/management on local communities/ other groups**

**For all interviewees:** What do you consider have been the main changes in the community over the past few years? Why do you think these changes have happened?

Have there been any benefits or disbenefits (in your opinion) to the local community of local landownership changes and/or land management activities?

Are there any groups that may have been more or less affected by the change of landownership/ land management objectives (e.g. farmers/crofters, rural estate employees, rural businesses, local residents, etc.)? How have their activities/livelihoods/experiences of living here been affected?

What do you consider may be the impacts of such land ownership/management on a larger scale? (I.e. across the region, country, globally?)

What are your hopes and fears for the future based on your experience with the current landowner and their land management activities so far?

As you know, we are planning a community focus group, where we will discuss the likely future impacts of local green land investment. What do you anticipate may be shared as current and future impacts?

Who would suggest should be invited to the focus group to ensure that all community voices are heard (in particular, lesser-heard voices)?

### **Current community engagement practices**

**For all interviewees:** Can you describe how landowners or representatives of local estates currently interact with people who live and/or work locally? (If there appears to be no interaction, are you aware of who the landowner /landowner representatives are?)

Can you describe any examples of recent community engagement activities? Did you have the chance to share your views? (Why/why not?) What do you find are the benefits or challenges of estate-community interactions or engagement processes?

What would help the community undertake positive engagement with local landowners in future?

### **Future goals and vision**

***For all interviewees:*** To conclude, please can you tell me more about your future plans for your community/farm/croft/business? What are your future goals and ideal vision?

### **Thanks and interviewee close**

Do you have any final thoughts? Is there anything that you thought we would talk about that we haven't talked about yet? What is the most important thing you have told me today?

Thank you very much for your time [describe the next steps with the project].

## Annex 6

This is the interview guide that was used for all landowners:

### **Socio-economic impacts of green land investment – draft interview guide for landowners/landowner representatives (i.e. including intermediaries)**

#### **Welcome and thanks to interviewee**

Introduction to researcher and the project, including overview of purpose of interview within wider project aims.

Reiterate key points in consent form – e.g. anonymity of interviewees (i.e. through high-level analysis) and confidentiality of data, but noting that it is not possible to guarantee complete anonymity because of the risk that characteristics of the local community or landholding are too difficult to anonymise.

The purpose of these interview is to help to verify the theoretical and literature- derived definitions, motivations and typology of green land investments, to understand private sector interests and awareness of perceived/actual impacts on local communities of place and communities of interest due to green land investment, as well as existing practices around community engagement by the landowner/landowner's representative.

#### **Interviewee background:**

*[Take note of interviewee's age and employment status through introductory conversation.]*

Please can we start with some background to your connection with [case study landholding].

**Landowner:** Can you tell me how you/your family/company came to own [case study landholding]? How long have you owned [case study landholding?]. What is your role in the running of the landholding?

**Landowner's representative:** Can you tell me how this landholding came to be owned by [landowner]? What is your role in the running of the landholding?

#### **Understanding motivations and purpose of land ownership/management objectives**

**Landowner:** How would you describe the landholding (e.g. diversified, forested, sporting, rewilding, etc.)? What type of area/landscape does it encompass? Are there sporting interests on the landholding?

What are your main motivations for owning this landholding? How would you describe the purpose of your land ownership and/or your management objectives? What are you trying to achieve? What changes have you made recently/are embarking on in terms of land management and land use? What are the current enabling factors/barriers inhibiting this change?

How does the financial vehicle/business model shape land management activities?

**Landowner's representative:** How would you describe the landholding (e.g. diversified, forested, sporting, rewilding, etc.)? What type of area does it encompass? Are there sporting interests on the landholding?



What do you understand are main motivations for [landowner] in owning this landholding? How would you describe the purpose of their land ownership and/or your management objectives? What are you trying to achieve?

What changes have been made recently/are being embarked on in terms of land management and land use? What are the current enabling factors/barriers inhibiting this change?

How does the financial vehicle/business model shape land management activities?

**Both:** What changes are you most proud of or consider to be a success? Why? Which have been more challenging and why?

Are you involved with or do you plan to join the local deer management group? Where do you turn to for land management advice?

### **Understanding influence of landownership/management on local communities/ other groups**

**Landowner:** Since owning the landholding, can you describe any changes that you have noticed in the local community? Why do you think these changes have occurred?

**Landowner's representative:** Since the current owner bought the landholding, can you describe any changes that you have noticed in the local community? Why do you think these changes have occurred?

**Both:** Have there been any benefits or disbenefits (in your opinion) to the local community given the current ownership of this landholding? How you believe the land management approach is understood/perceived by members of the local community?

Are there any groups that may have been more or less affected by the change of landownership/ land management objectives?

How does the financial vehicle or the business model influence or support the delivery of socio-economic benefits? Where do you see opportunities for socio-economic benefit for the local community (now and in the future)?

How do you think it might be different if the landholding was in community ownership (wholly or partially), or if a different model of green land investment had been used (e.g. leasehold / debt finance rather than acquisition)?

As you know, we are planning a community focus group, where we will discuss the likely future impacts of local green land investment. What do you anticipate may be shared as current and future impacts? Who should be invited to the focus group?

### **Current community engagement practices**

**Both:** Can you describe how you currently interact (or have interacted) with people who live and/or work locally (including those who live and work on the landholding) and those who visit the landholding? How do you undertake community engagement? (Can you give me any examples?) What do you find are the benefits or challenges of community interactions or undertaking engagement processes?

How does the financial vehicle or the business model influence or support community engagement?

What would help you undertake positive community engagement in future?

### **Future goals and vision**

**Both:** To conclude, please can you tell me more about the future plans for the landholding? What are your future goals and ideal vision?

### **Thanks and interviewee close**

Do you have any final thoughts? Is there anything that you thought we would talk about that we haven't talked about yet? What is the most important thing you have told me today?

Thank you very much for your time [describe the next steps with the project].

## Annex 7

Participants of the focus group were either sent a focus group information sheet prior to the event over email, or were given a sheet on arrival at the venue.

### Project information

#### Socio-economic impacts of 'green' land investment – Community focus groups



**Timescale:** Spring – Autumn 2023

**Funding body:** Scottish Government, Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division (RESAS)

RESAS

**Version:** 4/4/2023

#### What is this project about?

This project will explore the social and economic impacts of new forms of 'green' land investment (in particular, through land acquisition) that are occurring across rural Scotland. The Scottish Government has committed to becoming a net-zero society by 2045. This has implications for land value and use, and it has led to a notable recent rise in companies and seeking to buy land in Scotland to benefit from the carbon sequestration potential of the land and other potential natural capital benefits. These owners range from multi-national corporations seeking to offset (or 'inset') the carbon emissions from their business activities (or provide a return to investors), to individuals and companies wishing to undertake regenerative land management, nature conservation or 'rewilding'. This project aims to understand more about the lived experiences of the rural communities who live and/or work near to landholdings with some form of 'green' land investment, as well as the motivations and approaches of the landowners and investors involved.

The project also seeks to make practical recommendations regarding best practice approaches for 'green' land investors/landowners in engaging rural communities in decisions relating to land. This will support the Scottish Government's goal of a 'just transition' to a low carbon economy.

Further information about the background to this project can be found on the project webpage available online here: <https://www.hutton.ac.uk/research/projects/socio-economic-impacts-%E2%80%98green%E2%80%99-land-investment-rural-scotland>

#### How will information be gathered?

This research will draw on interviews and focus group discussions with rural community members. We would like to meet with rural residents (including representatives of community organisations), estate employees (or ex- employees) or people living in tied housing, local land managers (including managing agents, farmers, crofters, and gamekeepers), and other local voices, including those who may be less frequently heard.

Focus groups will involve a discussion about the story of the community and local land, to develop a community timeline. The discussion will consider the following questions: What has happened in the recent past with regard to land ownership and/or land use change? What is happening now? How does this affect the social and economic life of the community and why? What are the likely future impacts? What would be the ideal future vision for a sustainable community?

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### How will the focus groups take place?

The focus groups will be held in a local community venue accessible to all (e.g. a village hall or café). They will be advertised locally via direct invitations, posters, and on social media. Community members are invited to indicate their intention to participate in the focus group by contacting the research team (see below). This will help to gauge numbers for catering during the focus group. If childcare is required for a parent to attend the focus group, we can pay for a local registered childminder to provide childcare during the focus group. The focus groups will last around two hours. They will be audio recorded and transcribed. If you do not give your consent for the focus group to be recorded, please note that the recording will happen, but your data (i.e. the recording of you speaking) will not be transcribed.

If language may be a barrier to participating in a focus group, or you wish to participate in Gaelic, we can arrange for the focus group discussion points to be translated and for your written responses to be translated into English. We can accommodate a wide range of languages.

### Why should I take part?

We would like to hear from a diversity of rural voices in this research. It may be that you align with one of the groups of people mentioned above. Your views and experiences would be a valuable contribution to this study. We will document the findings in a report that will be published on the Scottish Government website and will also share a summary of the key findings with you.

### Do I have to take part?

No, your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time, up until the point that we publish the research findings. We do not anticipate any risks to you from your participation. Even if you agree to take part in the focus group, you can choose not to answer a question(s), without having to give a reason.

### Data confidentiality

All data will be treated with full confidentiality and every effort will be made to ensure you are not directly identifiable within any publications. Please note that it is not possible to guarantee complete anonymity because of the risk that characteristics of the local community or landholding are too difficult to anonymise. It will also be the case that the other people attending the focus group will know that you participated. We will adopt the 'Chatham House rule' for the focus groups and encourage participants not to share details of who participated, or the views shared, outwith the focus group discussion. Data will be stored on restricted-access, password protected secure systems through the James Hutton Institute.

### What if I want to withdraw?

If you would like to withdraw your data at any point up until the publication of the research report, please contact the lead researcher in this project.

### Who can I contact?

If you have any questions at any time, please feel free to contact the project lead:

**Annie McKee** ([annie.mckee@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:annie.mckee@hutton.ac.uk)) – Tel. **01224 395294**

The Hutton research team also includes: Margaret Currie, Naomi Beingessner, Kerry Waylen, Annabel Pinker, Jon Hopkins, and Acacia Marshall.

## Annex 8

Participants were asked to fill out this consent form before participating in the focus group.

### RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

#### Participant Identification Number:

<b>Title of Project:</b>	Socio-economic impacts of green land investment
<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	Annie McKee
<b>Study Number:</b>	James Hutton Institute Project code: X003438-00

**Please Initial Box**

I confirm that I have read, or had read to me, and understand the information sheet dated 4/4/2023 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered fully and explicitly.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time, without providing any reason and without my legal rights being affected, up until the publication of any outputs. If I choose to withdraw during or after the focus group and up until publication, my data will be omitted.	
I understand the study is being conducted by researchers from The James Hutton Institute, and funded by the Scottish Government, Rural and Environmental Science and Analytical Services Division (RESAS).	
Any personal data collected via this consent form as well as the focus group recordings and transcripts will be kept confidential within the research team and stored securely. I understand that while all efforts will be undertaken to anonymise my testimony and I will not be directly named in any published outputs, the content of my testimony might make me identifiable (i.e. participants' roles may be mentioned in outputs).  <i>Please note that it is not possible to guarantee complete anonymity because of the risk that characteristics of the local community or landholding may be too difficult to anonymise.</i>	
I understand that the focus group will be audio recorded and transcribed.	

I agree to being contacted at a later date in relation to this study.	
I acknowledge that I have read and understood the privacy notice.	
I agree to take part in the above study.	

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print) Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
PI/Researcher Name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### Privacy Notice

The James Hutton Institute (“Hutton”) and the Scottish Ministers (Scottish Government) (both referred to “us”, “we”, “our”) will use your personal data for the purposes of the research undertaken in the project ‘Socio-economic impacts of green land investment’ (see: <https://www.hutton.ac.uk/research/projects/socio-economic-impacts-%E2%80%98green%E2%80%99-land-investment-rural-scotland>). We are acting as joint data controllers in this project and have put in place a joint controllership agreement outlining our roles and responsibilities in relation to personal data.

Our lawful basis under the UK GDPR for processing your personal data is that this is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest in relation to research funded by the Scottish Government.

For the purposes of this project, we may process the following types of personal data about you:

- Name
- Contact details (telephone number, email address)
- Any information we collect from you or hold about you as part of this research project, i) data collected during the interviews ii) project management documentation e.g., consent forms and iii) records of communications with you e.g., email correspondence.

Your personal data will be stored securely on the computer systems of the James Hutton Institute and any access to it will be password protected and restricted only to the project team. We will store and retain any information that we collect from you as part of this research project for up to two years after the end of the project, to allow all publications based on this work to be accepted for publication.

If you have given your consent to being contacted at a later date in relation to this study, we will retain your name and contact details for five years after the end of the project. We will contact you on an annual basis to confirm this ongoing consent. We will archive metadata

(e.g. thematic coding frameworks) and anonymised transcripts (removing all identifiers) in an open repository.

We have in place appropriate contracts with any third-party suppliers who may be accessing your data on our behalf to ensure that your data is held securely and protected adequately. This includes contracted transcribers, who will be acting as a data processor for the personal data that they will access to provide their services.

You have rights in relation to your personal data. Our main privacy notices, [www.hutton.ac.uk/terms](http://www.hutton.ac.uk/terms) (Hutton) and <https://www.gov.scot/privacy> (Scottish Government) explain in more detail how we handle your personal data as well as your rights. Any requests for accessing the personal information which we hold about you ("Subject Access Requests") can be addressed to [SAR@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:SAR@hutton.ac.uk).

If you have any questions about the research or a complaint about how we have handled your personal information, please get in touch with [annie.mckee@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:annie.mckee@hutton.ac.uk) or [Emily.Harris2@gov.scot](mailto:Emily.Harris2@gov.scot). If this does not resolve your complaint, you can contact our Data Protection Officers on [dpo@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:dpo@hutton.ac.uk) or [dataprotectionofficer@gov.scot](mailto:dataprotectionofficer@gov.scot).

The Information Commissioner is the regulator for UK GDPR. You have the right to raise concerns with the Commissioner if you are not happy with the way your information is being handled:

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Wycliffe House  
Water Lane City  
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SK9 5AF

You can also report concerns online. For more information, please see the Contact Us page of their website: <https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/>

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## Annex 9

This is the workshop plan that was followed for all of the community workshops. This was used for internal planning only.

Timing (length of time for activity )	Time	Agenda item	Activity (notes)/ Suggested structure	Equipment	Role/ responsibility
		Pre-focus group preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Invitations to participants + promotion to wider local community</li> <li>- Book venue and catering [adapt to local norms – what is the usual time for this type of event/where would it usually be held, e.g. village hall?]</li> <li>- Book childminder (if requested by participants/gate keeper)</li> <li>- Collate paperwork for focus group – participant consent forms and information sheets/ focus group agenda</li> </ul>	Paperwork for focus group	RA (+ support)
		Before focus group starts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Set up venue – boardroom style (depending on likely numbers)</li> <li>- Set up catering</li> <li>- Set up recording equipment</li> <li>- Set up visual timeline + post-it notes + pens</li> <li>- Meet and greet participants; ask them to complete sign-up sheet</li> <li>- Gather participant consent forms</li> </ul>	Catering (tea towels) + hand sanitiser Paperwork for participants (consent forms; expenses claim forms?) Dictaphones Roll of long paper, white tack, post-it notes and	RA (+ support)



				handwriting pens Sign-in sheet Sticky labels for name badges Tape for securing post-it notes	
10 mins	E.g. 19:00 – 19:10	Welcome and introductions	<p>Lead researcher to welcome all participants and explain purpose of focus group (i.e. 'why are we all here'). Provide brief overview of Scottish Government's research request and approach undertaken by Hutton research team.</p> <p>Check that everyone is happy for the focus group to be audio recorded (reiterating statements in the consent form).</p> <p>Invite participants to provide short introductions (e.g. name, where from, why interested to attend focus group)</p> <p>Lead researcher to give short overview of the focus group plan – lead into first task/discussion (timeline)</p>	Focus group overview	Lead researcher + RA
40 minutes  [Can be shortened to allow more time for future impacts section]	19:10 – 19:50	Developing a community timeline – looking at what has happened in the past	<p>Lead researcher to invite participants to consider the following questions. Take notes on post it notes and add to timeline; invite participants to add post-it notes as well.</p> <p>Questions posed to participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the story of this community and local landownership/ land use?</li> <li>- What has happened in the</li> </ul>	Timeline paper on wall Post-it notes and pens (different colour post-its for topics?)	Lead researcher (facilitate and take notes on post-it notes) RA to take notes on broader discussion / help participants as required.

			<p>past? (i.e. over the last century/living memory.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is happening now? (Why?)</li> <li>- How does this affect the social and economic life of the community? (Why?)</li> <li>- What other factors are influencing this community?</li> </ul>		
15 minutes	19:50 – 20:05		Break – invite participants to review the timeline so far and add post-it notes	Catering + hand sanitiser	
20 minutes	20:05 – 20:25	Developing a community timeline – what might happen in the future?	<p>Questions posed to participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are the likely future impacts of current local landownership / land use on this community? (Why?)</li> <li>- What do you want to happen? What would be the ideal future vision for a sustainable community?</li> </ul>	<p>Timeline paper on wall Post-it notes and pens</p>	<p>Lead researcher (facilitate and take notes on post-it notes) RA to take notes on broader discussion / help participants as required.</p>
25 minutes	20:25 – 20:50	Options for future landowner-community engagement	<p>Lead researcher to invite participants to share their perspectives in final plenary discussion; core questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you describe how landowners or representatives of local estates currently interact with people who live and/or work locally?</li> </ul>	Use long sheet to take notes on wall/table.	Lead researcher to facilitate and take notes of key points shared; RA to take more detailed notes.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you describe any examples of recent community engagement activities?</li> <li>- Did you have the chance to share your views? (Why/why not?)</li> <li>- What do you find are the benefits or challenges of estate-community interactions or engagement processes?</li> <li>- What would help the community undertake positive engagement with local landowners in future?</li> </ul>		
5 mins	20:50 – 20:55	<p><b>Final thoughts and next steps</b></p> <p><b>Thanks and meeting close</b></p>	<p>Lead researcher to bring discussion to a close; invite any final thoughts or suggestions for positive community-landowner engagement.</p> <p>Next steps: a short 'options appraisal' for the community (i.e. participants and community groups) and landowner.</p> <p>Wider discussion to inform final report for the Scottish Government, to be published in December 2023.</p> <p>Lead researcher to thank all participants for their time.</p>		



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