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Community Ownership in Scotland 2018

Methodology



This document provides a summary of quality related information on the [Community Ownership in Scotland 2018](#) publication.

The information is based on the European Statistical System (ESS) quality framework: Relevance; Accuracy; Timeliness and Punctuality; Accessibility and Clarity; and Comparability.

The Scottish Government adheres to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and the National Statistician's guidance on quality. In addition, the Scottish Government provides its own guidance on quality, which is available to view at the Scottish Government's Statistics internet pages.

Further information on quality:

- [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#)
- [Government Statistical Service Quality Strategy](#)
- [Scottish Government's Corporate Policy Statement](#)
- [Scottish Government Guide to Basic Quality Assurance](#)
- [European Statistics Code of Practice \(including quality framework\)](#)

Introduction

There have been a number of changes to the publication and how the data on community ownership are presented since the release of the first [Estimate of Community Owned Land in Scotland 2017](#) publication in December 2017.

In the [Programme for Government \(PfG\) 2017](#), the Scottish Government asked the [Scottish Land Commission \(SLC\)](#) to review existing community right to buy (CRTB) mechanisms and recommend how best to enable community ownership in appropriate circumstances, including making CRTB processes as simple as possible.

The research examined all routes to community ownership, including direct sales done outwith legislative processes. Although this goes beyond the PfG commitment, it is helpful to consider community ownership in the round, rather than focusing on single channels. The methodology consisted primarily of interviews, including with community groups who had sought to acquire land and assets in various ways, professional advisers such as lawyers and land agents, and various stakeholders, as well as Scottish Government officials.

The SLC developed key strategic recommendations from the report and these are intended to support the development and articulation of a vision for the continued development of community ownership over the coming decades. In particular, the recommendations seek to encourage communities to proactively consider the ownership of land and assets and to streamline processes where possible.

One of these recommendations referenced the million acre target specifically:

- Recommendation 2: Development of a new suite of indicators to replace the 'million acres' target with targets and indicators that reflect the outcomes

sought from community ownership and are relevant to both rural and urban contexts.

The million acre target helped to promote community ownership and it has served to galvanise communities, stakeholders and government into action. As the SLC report notes, it was a clear statement of ambition. However, as the land reform agenda has progressed and as community ownership has evolved, it is clear that a target based on the area of land in community ownership is becoming less relevant.

With the introduction of CRTB into urban Scotland, communities are able to acquire land and assets that have a positive impact but do not necessarily cover large areas of land. Similarly, in rural parts of Scotland there is an increasing trend towards community acquisition of smaller areas of land for discrete purposes, which provide benefit to the community but do not contribute large areas of land to the national total. As such, the million acre target is increasingly irrelevant to the current reality of community ownership.

As a start to this process a new [National Performance Framework](#) National Indicator on community ownership, the number of assets in community ownership, has been developed.

The full list of SLC recommendations can be accessed here:

https://landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/5dd69d73873ae_Community-Ownership-Report-SLC-Recommendations-to-Ministers.pdf

As a consequence the name of the publication has changed from 'Estimate of Community Owned Land in Scotland' to 'Community Ownership in Scotland'. This reflects the move away from the million acre target and recognises that community ownership is about more than just the area of land owned by community groups.

Moving away from the million acre target also means that the area of land in community ownership can be reported in hectares as opposed to acres.

Definitions

The definitions of community, community groups and ownership were first established by the 1 Million Acre Short Life Working Group. The Group was established in January 2015 with a report on the findings and recommended actions being published in December 2015. The full report can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/one-million-acres-2020-strategy-report-recommendations-1-million-acre/>

The Working Group had the remit of designing a strategy to deliver the then 1 million acre target by 2020, including an agreed action plan outlining how to implement the 1 million acre strategy.

Having been established these definitions were used when data were gathered for inclusion in the [Estimate of Community Owned land in Scotland 2017](#) statistical

publication, released in December 2017. Even though the 1 million acre target is no longer in place these established definitions will continue to be used to allow consistency between the existing and new data on community ownership.

Therefore, the definitions used in compiling the [Community Ownership in Scotland 2018](#) publication were as follows:

Community

Community is defined on a geographical basis, which can be defined by postcode units and/or a prescribed area. This definition of community has been chosen to reflect the importance of place within Scottish Government policy and current legislation.

Community Group

A relevant community group is required to have a number of essential characteristics, which collectively ensure that community owned assets are used for the benefit of the wider community rather than one particular interest group.

The community group should:

- Have a clear definition of the geographical community to which the group relates;
- A membership which is open to any member of that community;
- Be locally-led and controlled;
- Have as its main purpose the furthering of sustainable development in the local area;
- Be non-profit distributing; and
- Have evidence to demonstrate a sufficient level of support/community buy-in.

Ownership

Ownership is defined in the legal sense: A legal title coupled with exclusive legal right to possession. While it is acknowledged that communities can and do lease (e.g. from Forestry and Land Scotland or a local authority), manage and jointly own (i.e. equity stake) assets, it was agreed by the Working Group that for the purposes of measuring community ownership that the definition should be restricted to outright ownership.

Asset

This term is used to describe areas of land, buildings and anything else of substantial value a community group may own. This is to reflect that it is not just areas of land that can bring benefits to a community and reflects the diverse nature of community ownership.

An asset is counted where it is the subject of a single transaction. Where assets are acquired in a series of transactions, e.g. adjacent areas of land acquired over time, the assets in each transaction will be counted separately.

Transfer Date

This is the date at which a community group took ownership of an asset, either by purchase or as a gift, legacy or other non-monetary transaction.

Data Background

There is currently no definitive register of community groups who could potentially own assets. As a result the data included in the initial estimates of community ownership published in [Estimate of Community Owned Land in Scotland 2017](#) were based on combining administrative datasets from four organisations involved in community ownership. They were: [Highlands and Islands Enterprise](#), who have responsibilities to support community ownership in their area; [National Lottery Community Fund](#), who administer the Scottish Land Fund for Scottish Government; the [Development Trusts Association Scotland](#); and [Community Land Scotland](#). These organisations' databases were identified by a secondee from [Scotland's Rural College](#) into the Scottish Government; who had been tasked with identifying as many community groups as possible that own assets.

The work undertaken showed that the most feasible way to collect data was from these overarching organisations initially, and then to try and verify the data held in with the community groups themselves. Then in the long term to work with Registers of Scotland to verify the assets, where applicable, on the Land Register.

Therefore, the Scottish Government carried out a survey from November 2017 to February 2018 of the community groups then believed to own assets. The community groups that were surveyed were included in the database used to produce the [Estimate of Community Owned Land in Scotland 2017](#) publication. Groups were asked to confirm their ownership of assets and also the following information, where available: land area, purchase price, market value, previous owner and the ways the asset was used. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary and the response rate was 45%, although not necessarily all of the requested information was provided by all respondents. In addition, 14 community groups that were not on the original database also responded to the survey.

Data Matching with the Land Register

Having established a database on community ownership in Scotland and then having tried to verify the information held with the community groups themselves it was decided to verify it with the Land Register in conjunction with [Registers of Scotland \(RoS\)](#). This would not only allow the data held to be verified but also missing data such as land area and transfer data to be populated.

The [Land Register](#) was introduced in 1981 and is based on the [Ordnance Survey](#) map. It provides property owners with a state-backed guarantee of title. The Land Register is a replacement for the paper based [General Register of Sasines](#). The Sasines Register will close by 2024.

Transactions were added to the Land Register as opposed to the Sasines Register at different points of time based on where the transaction took place in Scotland.

Counties moved to the Land Register from 1981 until 2014. Further information on Land Register counties and operational dates can be accessed here:

https://www.ros.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/96823/land-register-counties.pdf

The main issues with the database on community ownership surrounded missing or unverified data on:

- The area of assets;
- The location of assets; and
- The date of purchase or transfer of assets.

For those assets on the Land Register, RoS were able to populate the missing variables or verify the information already held. For those assets that remain on the Sasines Register it was not possible to populate the missing variables or verify the information already held. For these assets the transfer date is defaulted to 1990. It should be noted that it is likely that the extent of community ownership in 1990 will be overestimated as a result.

Through the matching process and discussion with RoS a number of issues came to light that affected the level of data verification that could be undertaken:

Sasines Register:

- The Sasines Register is not a map based system;
- If an asset is in the Sasines Register, it is likely to have last changed hands prior to the relevant county transferring to the Land Register; and
- Prior to 8 December 2014 and the enactment of the [Land Registration etc. \(Scotland\) Act 2012](#), it was possible to continue to register any transaction that constituted a gift, or any transfer that was for no cost or for a non-monetary value in the Sasine Register.

Land Register:

- For transactions that were for Certain Good and Onerous Causes and registered on or after 2012 the Land Register contains the market value of the property at the time of registration;
- For transactions prior to 8 December 2014, when the [Land Registration etc. \(Scotland\) Act 2012](#) was enacted, for any title greater than 2 hectares, the area of the asset would be included. After this date the area of any property greater than 0.5 hectares is given. This is the reason why there are a high number of asset that are just buildings that have unknown area figure;
- Titles can be in draft on the Land Register. This means that the land/property has been sold, RoS have a received a transaction for that land/property, RoS have created a title, and it is in the process of being registered. This could take two days or two years depending on the complexity of the application; and
- In certain cases one asset may be split into multiple titles on the Land Register. This is due to the current digital mapping system used by RoS, which is due to be replaced shortly. The splitting can be as a result of the size

of the land/property and/or the shape of the land/property. For any asset where this has happened the asset is classed as a single entry on the community ownership database as it was purchased at one time.

While there is no identifier on the Land Register to indicate that an asset is community owned, a small number of additional entries were found where the name of the owner suggested it was a community group. These groups and assets then underwent further investigation to establish if they did indeed meet the criteria to be included in the database on community ownership.

Going forward all new land and/or buildings in community ownership that the Scottish Government are made aware of will be matched and verified with the Land Register.

Data Providers

For the [Community Ownership in Scotland 2018](#) publication data has been obtained from a combination of sources, which have been developed over time and will continue to be refined. For all sources, the data initially received was quality assured and any resulting queries raised with the organisation which had provided the data where applicable.

Funding Bodies

Funding bodies and related organisations were asked to provide information on community groups that had been awarded funding to purchase assets during 2018. The organisations that were asked to provide information were the following:

- [Highland and Islands Enterprise](#);
- [National Lottery Community Fund](#);
- [Development Trusts Association Scotland](#);
- [Community Land Scotland](#); and
- the [LEADER](#) programme.

Going forward updates will be requested from these organisations each year. It should be noted that the date funding is agreed and the date of transfer of an asset may not be in the same year. The published statistics on community ownership use the date of transfer.

Transfers of Publicly Owned Assets

Information about formerly publicly owned assets transferred to community ownership was obtained from public sector organisations which were believed to be subject to applications for asset transfer under the [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#). This covered transfers up to 31 December 2018. Please note that whilst the 2015 Act requires organisations to report information about asset transfers on a financial year basis, usually on the relevant section of their website, there is no requirement to submit the information to the Scottish Government.

Community Owned Shops and Pubs

Data on community owned shops and pubs were sourced from two additional sources. Information on community owned shops and pubs was sourced from the [Plunkett Foundation](#). The Plunkett Foundation provides practical advice, support and training to help communities establish and run successful community businesses. Information on community pubs was also sourced from the [Campaign for Real Ale \(CAMRA\)](#).

The information obtained from these data providers and other sources was then checked against the Land Register by RoS as detailed previously.

Relevance

The data were initially collected to measure progress against the target of having 1 million acres of land in community ownership by 2020. Following the recommendations of the SLC to move away from the million acre target a new National Indicator measuring community ownership has been developed and is now included in the [National Performance Framework](#). The National Indicator will measure the number of assets in community ownership.

Since there is no definitive source of community groups which may potentially own assets, it is not possible to determine the coverage of the statistics. However as data collection is further refined the resulting figures will more accurately represent the true extent of community ownership across Scotland.

User Feedback

The Scottish Government is always interested to hear from users about what is most relevant to them and welcomes feedback from users of these statistics.

Due to the nature of community ownership and the fact that some assets are still on the Sasines Register, some information used to produce this publication is incomplete and could potentially be out of date. If you are aware of such information, or can provide any missing information, please get in contact using the details below:

Email: communitylandstatistics@gov.scot

Telephone: 0300 244 0445

If possible please provide evidence of the correct information, for example a copy of relevant legal documentation or official correspondence. Any evidence received will be reviewed and, where it can be verified, will be used to update the statistics when they are next published. This is expected to be in Summer/Autumn 2020.

Accuracy

The initial database on community ownership used to produce the [Estimate of Community Owned Land in Scotland 2017](#) publication had a number of issues relating to the quality and availability of data. It was compiled by collecting data from a wide range of organisations involved in community ownership but the data

collected had not been verified with the community groups themselves or independently. This approach was taken as it was not possible to identify community groups that own assets from existing registers.

The Scottish Government worked to address these issues by surveying the community groups themselves and matching the data with the Land Register. Despite this there remains some missing data. The Scottish Government will continue to work to populate the missing data.

Through the work in improving the data on community ownership the Scottish Government has become aware of assets which were initially included in the database but do not meet the definition of community ownership set out by the 1 Million Acre Short Life Working Group. This could be where the community group is no longer in existence or has otherwise disposed of the asset. Through the matching work with RoS, assets were also removed from the database if they were found to be rented by community groups as opposed to being owned.

If any assets could not be identified on the Land Register or in the Sasine Register and the community group were unable to be contacted or did not respond to contact via letter and/or email these assets have also been removed from the database.

It is expected that the matching work that has been carried out in conjunction with RoS will reduce the extent of assets being included in the community ownership database when they did not meet the criteria for being classes as community owned.

In general, until it has been established that a particular community group meets the definition of a community group any assets associated with the group will be excluded from the published data. Assets whose ownership cannot be verified will be similarly excluded.

Additionally, it is believed that these statistics will be an underestimate of the true extent of community ownership in Scotland. Whilst several different sources have been used to populate the community ownership database, covering most of the possible routes to community ownership, it should be noted that none of these sources place an obligation on community groups to report any information about themselves or the assets they own to the Scottish Government.

It is also acknowledged that community owned assets are less likely to be known to the Scottish Government where:

- the organisation of the community group is informal, with little or no online presence, especially for smaller assets; and
- there was no public funding used to enable the purchase of the asset, e.g. the asset was gifted or bequeathed as a legacy.

Therefore, these assets will not be included in the community ownership database. This will result in an unquantifiable underestimate in the extent of community ownership in Scotland.

Revisions

There are differences between the figures published in the [Estimate of Community Owned Land in Scotland 2017](#) publication, the [Revised Tables for 2017](#) and this publication due to the corrections and updates that have made to the community ownership database due to the survey of community groups and the matching work with RoS.

It is expected there will be a smaller level of revisions in subsequent years but that these revisions will be mostly confined to the most recent data or where previously missing data has been populated. For the recent data this will be particularly true for assets that have taken a long time for registration on the Land Register to be completed. Once the registration process has been completed these assets will be added to the community ownership database and will be included in the figures for the relevant years when the community group took ownership of the assets.

If community ownership can also be verified for any assets where it had previously not been possible these assets will be added back into the database on community ownership.

Timeliness and Punctuality

The data on community ownership as at December of 2018 have been published almost 12 months after the end of 2018. The length of time taken to publish the 2018 data following the end of the year has been due to the matching process that took place with RoS. The matching took place between January and October 2019. As all existing community owned assets, as well as assets that came into community ownership during 2018, had to be matched. This process took much longer than it will in future years when only assets from one year will have to be matched.

In addition, public sector organisations which are subject to asset transfer requests are required to publish information on any assets transferred on a financial as opposed to a calendar year basis. To reduce respondent burden the data on asset transfers were gathered after the end of the financial year in March 2019. This will be the case in future years.

The intention is to produce the next publication on community ownership as at December 2019 in Summer/Autumn 2020.

Accessibility and Clarity

These statistics are made available online at the Scottish Government's statistics website in accessible formats (HTML and PDF versions are available). Data tables are made available in Excel and PDF format to allow users to carry out further analysis. It is anticipated that an appropriately anonymised dataset containing information for individual assets will be made available in the future.

Comparability

While the data on community ownership are presented over time, users should be aware that the data presented are as at December 2018. For example, if a community group took possession of an asset in 2000 but sold the asset in 2010 this asset would not be included in the data presented in this publication. Similarly, if a community group disposes of an asset in the future, and this is reported and/or made known to the Scottish Government, the asset will be removed from the database and will no longer be included in the published data.

The other UK nations do not produce an exact equivalent publication on community ownership. The [Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government](#) along with the independent charitable trust [Power to Change](#) commissioned research into the economics, outcomes and sustainability of assets in community ownership in mid-2018. The scope of the project was to create a national picture in England of community asset ownership, to assess their financial health and economic impact. The final report published in July 2019 shows a community ownership sector that is growing fast and making an increasingly important contribution to the UK economy. The full report can be accessed here:

<https://www.powertochange.org.uk/research/assets-future-economics-outcomes-sustainability-assets-community-ownership/>

Other

Land area figures for Scotland have been taken from the Office for National Statistics' Standard Area Measurements (2018) for Administrative Areas in the United Kingdom:

<http://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/d6cc711f662940c59f1c7284448b52f6>

When converting area figures from acres to hectares the conversion factor of 1 acre to 0.404686 hectares was used. The figures and percentages figures given in the [Community Ownership in Scotland 2018](#) publication tables have been independently rounded, so they may not always sum to the relevant totals.

The following symbol is used throughout the tables in the [Community Ownership in Scotland 2018](#) publication: - = nil

Related publications

Previous publications on community ownership can be accessed [here](#).

Please see links to Scottish Government [Rural](#) and [Environment](#) statistical publications.