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Community Ownership in Scotland 2020

Methodology



This document provides a summary of quality related information on the [Community Ownership in Scotland 2020](#) 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:

- [About Scottish Government Statistics](#)
- [Producing Official Statistics](#)
- [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

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 consider proactively the ownership of land and assets and to streamline processes where possible.

One of these recommendations referenced the former 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 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 was 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, was developed during 2019 and reported on for the first time in December 2019.

The [Community Ownership and Community Right to Buy: Recommendations to Scottish Ministers](#) report can be found on the SLC website.

As a consequence, the name of this publication series was changed with the release of the 2018 publication in December 2019 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 meant that the area of land in community ownership could 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 [One million acres by 2020: strategy report and recommendations](#) report can be found on the Scottish Government website.

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 the basis of the definitions used in relation to community ownership but they have evolved over time.

This will allow there to be consistency between the existing and new data on community ownership.

The definitions used in compiling the [Community Ownership in Scotland 2020](#) 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.

Additional factors are considered to ensure that the above criteria are met. Details of these are given below.

To ensure that membership is open to everyone within a community, any membership fee should be a nominal amount only. In addition groups whose main purpose is a single activity, whilst it is recognised that they may benefit their local community, are not considered to be community groups in the context of the Community Ownership in Scotland publication series. Therefore groups such as golf clubs or tennis clubs are excluded from the community ownership database as membership is limited to individuals who have an interest in golf or tennis and are capable of participating. In addition, the membership fees for these type of groups are usually not a nominal amount. By contrast, a group owning a village hall which may be used for a wide range of activities would be included.

In addition, organisations whose primary purpose is as an employer are excluded although they may bring benefits to a community. For example, an organisation providing support services to vulnerable adults and which employs staff to provide those services.

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 was 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 with the community groups themselves. Then in the long term to work with [Registers of Scotland \(RoS\)](#) 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 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 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 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 found on the Register of Scotland website.

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 2000. It should be noted that it is likely that the extent of community ownership in 2000 will be overestimated as a result.

Through the matching process and discussions with RoS, a number of issues were identified 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 recording convention had led to a large number of assets with small areas, in many cases existing buildings, having their area either recorded as zero or not available.;
- Titles can be in draft on the Land Register. This means that the land/property has been sold, RoS have 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 mapping and registration processes within RoS. 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.

Other issues surrounding the classification of assets and how they are recorded on the Land Register were also identified:

- Where land adjacent to an existing asset is acquired, it is possible for the title number of that existing asset to be updated to include the additional land rather than recording it under a separate title number. In these cases, whilst there is only one title number, the additional land is counted as a separate asset as it was acquired through a separate transaction; and
- Where adjacent assets are acquired in separate transactions and have separate title numbers, they will be recorded as individual assets, regardless of whether the asset owner subsequently combines them, e.g. constructs a single building on the whole site. Should this building then be transferred to another community group, it would then be considered a single asset.

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 based community owned assets that the Scottish Government are made aware of will be matched and verified with the Land Register.

As the [Land Register](#) is map based, RoS were able to calculate the area of assets that had their area either recorded as zero or not available, and were on the Land Register. RoS were able to calculate the areas of these assets this using the extent of the title polygons associated with these assets. These calculated area figures were then included in the [Community Ownership in Scotland 2020](#) publication. This potentially may have resulted in an overestimate of the area for some assets. For

example, a title plan might have a right of access associated with it but this does not mean that the ownership of the area relating to the right of access belongs to that title. To avoid, where possible, an overestimate of the area in community ownership those assets with an area over 0.5 hectares were examined in more detail. Where titles were found to include areas that were not owned, the area figures were adjusted so that only the areas actually owned by community groups were included. This examination also led to the asset types of a small number of assets being updated to more accurately reflect their use.

This has led to the area of 173 assets being populated where it was previously either recorded as zero or not available. This has resulted in an additional 38.53 hectares being recorded as being community owned. The remaining 30 land based assets, where no area figures are available, are all on the paper based Sasines Register. While it has been possible to source the area of most assets on the Sasines Register from different sources, mostly the community groups themselves, it has not yet been possible to source the area for these remaining assets from another source.

In future, the area for all community owned assets on the Land Register with unknown areas due to their small size will be calculated using the extent of the associated title polygons.

Please note that the data used to produce the [Community Ownership in Scotland 2020](#) publication were prepared from March to August 2021 when, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Registers of Scotland staff were working remotely as has been the case since March 2020.

Data Providers

For the [Community Ownership in Scotland 2020](#) publication new 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 first 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](#); and
- [Community Land Scotland](#).

Updates are now 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. In addition, funding being awarded does not necessarily mean that the

community group will be able to purchase the asset. For example, the community group may not be able to agree the sale of the asset with the current owner.

Related Organisations

In addition to the above funding bodies the [Community Woodlands Association \(CWA\)](#) is consulted both as a source of information about assets in community ownership which are not currently included in the database on community ownership and to verify the status of and information about known assets. Any new assets obtained from CWA are matched against the Land Register by RoS.

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.

This data collection exercise has not been repeated since then. A data collection exercise requesting limited information about asset transfers during the 2019/20 financial year was carried out by the Scottish Government Community Empowerment Team. This information on asset transfers was then cross checked against the existing community ownership database to identify any potential new assets for inclusion in the database. This exercise was repeated again by the Community Empowerment Team for the 2020/21 financial year. Asset transfers completed as of December 2020, which were made known to the Scottish Government by July 2021 and fully registered on the Land Register have been included in the [Community Ownership in Scotland 2020](#) publication.

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.

Community Controlled Housing Associations

In March 2020, Development Trust Association Scotland provided data about assets owned by community controlled housing associations in Glasgow, other than their tenanted housing stock. It was then investigated whether the housing associations met the set out definition of being a community group. It was found that some of

these assets were already included in the database on community ownership. From looking further into the housing associations, some assets were added to the community ownership database and some previously included assets were excluded, where it was found the definition of community group had not been met. As with the assets from other sources, these additional assets were matched against the Land Register by RoS.

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](#) was developed during 2019 and is now included in the [National Performance Framework](#). The National Indicator measures 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: CommunityOwnershipStatistics@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 Autumn 2022.

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 continues 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 actually satisfy the definitions used to define community ownership. 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.

There can be discrepancies between the area of assets defined on the Land Register compared to the area community groups themselves quote on assets they own. There are several factors which can lead to uncertainty about the area of some assets, particularly those with a very large area:

- Discrepancies over how much of the coastline is included between what is included on the Land Register and what community groups consider they own. For example, whether the boundary is taken to the high or low water mark and whether inlets are included;
- Whether or not small islands and/or rocks are included in the title;
- Whether or not water features, such as rivers and lochs, are included in the title; and
- Uncertainty in measuring area across terrain that is not uniformly flat.

The asset areas used in the [Community Ownership in Scotland](#) publication series use the area recorded on the Land Register, where available.

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 previously published figures on community ownership and this publication. This is due to corrections and updates that have been made to the community ownership database as a result of the continued work with RoS as well as direct contact with community groups.

While the level of revisions were higher in the initial years of the Community in Scotland publication series, it is expected there will be a smaller level of revisions in future years, due to all the improvement work that has already been carried out on the community ownership database. Future 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 actually 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 were 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 was due to the matching process that took place with RoS. The matching took place between January and October 2019. As all assets that were then believed to be community owned, as well as assets that came into community ownership during 2018, had to be matched. This process took much longer than it does now when only assets from one year 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 year as opposed to a calendar year basis. To reduce respondent burden the data on asset transfers are gathered after the end of the financial year in March of each year.

The data on community ownership as at December 2020 was published in September 2021. The matching of new assets believed to have transferred to community ownership in 2020 took place between May and August 2021. This included checking the status of known assets where their registration on the Land Register had not been completed when the matching for the data included in the [Community Ownership in Scotland 2019](#) publication was completed during 2020.

As the number of new assets to be matched each year is lower than the initial matching exercise the time lag before each new edition of the [Community Ownership in Scotland](#) publication is released has decreased. Future editions of the [Community Ownership in Scotland](#) publication series will be released in the Autumn of the year after the year the publication covers.

Accessibility and Clarity

These statistics are made available online at the Scottish Government's statistics website as part of the [Community Ownership in Scotland Statistics](#) collection page in accessible formats (HTML and PDF versions are available). Tables and charts are made available in Excel and PDF format to allow users to carry out further analysis. Maps are made available in PDF format. 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 2020. 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 [Our assets, our future: the economics, outcomes and sustainability of assets in community ownership](#) can be found on the Power to Change website.

Other

Purchase prices have been adjusted to 2020 prices using the Gross fixed capital formation deflator series produced by the Office for National Statistics.

Further information on the [Gross fixed capital formation deflator](#) series can be found on the Office for National Statistics website.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/timeseries/ybfu/>

Further information on the [Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification 2016](#) can be found on the Scottish Government website.

Further information on the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020](#) can be found on the Scottish Government website.

Land area figures for Scotland have been taken from the Office for National Statistics' Standard Area Measurements (2020) for Administrative Areas in the United Kingdom.

Further information on the [Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas in the United Kingdom](#) can be found on the Office for National Statistics' Open Geography portal.

When converting area figures from acres to hectares the conversion factor of 1 acre to 0.404686 hectares is used. The figures and percentages figures given in the [Community Ownership in Scotland 2020](#) 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 2020](#) publication: - = nil

Related publications

Previous editions of the [Community Ownership in Scotland](#) publications can be found on the Scottish Government website. [here](#).

Links to Scottish Government [Rural](#) and [Environment](#) statistical publications can be found on the Scottish Government website.