



# Community Engagement on Decisions Relating to Land

## Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn – Galson Estate Trust

### Theme: Community Land Ownership – engaging young people in strategic decision making

#### Overview

Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (Galson Estate Trust) was established in 2007 to manage the Galson Estate on the Isle of Lewis for and on behalf of the community. The estate comprises of 22 villages running from Upper Barvas to Port of Ness with a population of nearly 2,000 people. It is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. The Trust are the landlords for the 56,000-acre estate, managing all estate business in-house, while also undertaking a large range of projects on behalf of the community. Current projects range from renewables and energy efficiency projects to tourism and youth projects.

The Trust's overarching vision is to build a sustainable future for the communities of the Galson Estate by making best use of the estate assets for community benefit. The development of the Wind Turbines at Ballantrushal coupled with income from commercial developments provides the Trust with an income stream. This Community Investment Fund enables the Trust to give back to the community. They engage with the

community in as many ways as possible, most recently through their strategic plan.

#### Approach

##### A 'Community Conversation' - consultation for the Trust's [Strategic Plan 2017-2037](#)

The completion of the Wind Turbines allowed the trust to re-focus on the long-term development of the Trust through effective distribution of this sustainable income. They were very aware that there was an absence of long-term transformational proposals across the area to tackle strategic issues.





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This plan was developed through extended consultation activities, rather than relying on one-off public events and surveys. They looked at what other communities have tried, at their successes and failures and attempted to learn from these examples. Their aim was to develop a consultation process that was designed with integrity and was 'meaningful, real and fun!' They viewed this process as a re-engagement with the community they served, it was not just about the data collection but genuine relationship-building.

The consultation process involved a series of group discussions and workshops with cross-sections of the community and with a range of interest groups. The emerging priorities from these events were developed into a household survey which was made available to all homes on the Estate available both online and in hard copy. In addition, a sample of households across the Estate, covering a mix of ages and location, were interviewed in person to gain a more detailed insight into their survey responses.

## Youth Engagement



The Trust were mindful from the beginning of the consultation process of the demographics of the estate and the fact that responses from the younger generation could be obscured in the analysis as the data is predominately provided by older households. They actively sought to balance this by designing a targeted young people's online survey and running a creative 'future visioning' workshop for the local primary school. Assisted by the local authority Community Learning and

Development Officer this workshop was designed around creative methods of engagement aimed specifically at children of primary school age.

## Achievements and Benefits

As one of the pioneers of community ownership, the Galson Estate Trust continue to make sure that the community of the estate benefit greatly from community ownership. **As community landowners, it is fundamental that the community is engaged in the Trust's decision-making process** through on-going consultations and communication. The Trust describe their Strategic Plan for 2017-2037 as a 'flexible planning document.' This plan gives them **the confidence that they are responding authentically** to their community's aspirations, needs and vision for the future. It will be reviewed regularly, and progress will be strategically measured. The engagement undertaken, and future activities identified through this process now provide a **sound foundation for shared decision-making, shared action and support for community-led projects.**

## Addressing rural depopulation – balancing the needs of the present with the needs of the future.

Similar to many rural areas, the demographics on the Isle of Lewis continue to be challenging with an increasingly aging population over the longer-term. The Trust understands the importance of young people in the community and strives to involve and support those living on the estate. They also understand the imperative of maintaining an understanding and support of community land ownership in terms of succession planning for the Trust, and to nurture a continued connection to the land. They have actively addressed this by specifically targeting



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young people in their consultation, and they are also aware going forward that:

*'A balance will need to be struck in the development of future resources to ensure that the needs and expectations of young families and young people are met as far as possible to encourage them to remain in the same area.'*

## Learning

### **Willingness to access and learn from wider community development resources, skills and expertise**

The Trust works in partnership with many organisations and this approach saw them seek out external community engagement resources and advice when designing their 'community conversation.' They followed to [The National Standards for Community Engagement](#) throughout the strategic planning process, which was underpinned by the key principles of fairness and equality, and a commitment to learning and continuous improvement. [Foundation Scotland](#) and the [Development Trust Association](#) helped them to review other examples of community consultations so that they could learn from the wider experience of others. They are also fortunate to have access to [Highland and Island Enterprise's Community Account Management \(CAM\) 'Growth at the Edge' Programme](#). Support from the local CAM Development Officer includes project management, community consultation and business management.

### **Community engagement part of the day to day business– making it 'meaningful, real and fun!'**

The completion of consultation activities and the launch of the Strategic Plan did not mark the end of community engagement for the Trust. It

was not a box to be ticked but rather the beginning of shared decision-making, shared action and support for community-led action. They acknowledge that there is a challenge of community consultation fatigue and also still a lack of understanding in parts of the community about what the Galson Estate Trust is and what it does. They continue to work to build ongoing relationships and involve the wider community through various activities and events, for example, the annual 'Dùthchas' festival, weekly community health walks, exhibitions and open afternoons and various volunteering opportunities.

The Trust regularly meet with school / youth groups, either through visits to the office or turbine site, or by going out to the schools themselves, to involve and inform young people about their work within the community. They have run family outdoor sessions and a series of free to attend land-based skills workshops for residents aged under 26. The Trust is also about to embark on partnership project with John Muir Trust to further embed their commitment to listen to and support young people in their community.

### **Embracing changing communication needs**

Through trying various methods of communication, understanding what was most effective and asking the community directly what their preferences were, the Trust are proactive in changing the way they communicate their business and activities to meet changing needs.



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*'Communication methods are becoming more diverse and residents are seeking individualised responses through their preferred channel. Traditional mass events, such as public meetings are becoming of less interest and demand is increasing for easily accessible information from home, similar to trends in entertainment. The most popular options appears to social media, newsletter and potentially email. This would indicate a desire for more regular electronic updates rather than using public events to discuss business.'*

Realising the importance of wider communication for their members and wider interest, they run an active professional website and social media accounts and a quarterly newsletter.

[www.galsontrust.com/](http://www.galsontrust.com/)

### What's Next?

The Trust's 'Strategic Plan' is a living, flexible planning document. The process of engaging the community gives the Trust the confidence that they are working towards the needs and aspirations the community have identified. They now hold a joint vision as a community and the Trust have a measurable plan of how to work to deliver that vision.



*'A thriving and well-connected community with excellent local services and amenities, harnessing its natural assets to sustain a unique culture and social environment.'*

### Find Out More

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### Further information

Further information about community engagement in decisions relating to land can be found at the following links:

[www.landcommission.gov.scot/lrrs](http://www.landcommission.gov.scot/lrrs)

[www.gov.scot/policies/land-reform](http://www.gov.scot/policies/land-reform)

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