

Community Asset Transfer Workshop

The Gateway, North Methven Street, Perth, PH1 5PP

Wednesday 24th January 2018 - 10am – 4pm

Hosted by the Community Woodlands Association

Supported by Forest Enterprise Scotland



Community Asset Transfer Workshop

Synopsis

This one-day workshop was aimed at groups developing asset transfer requests under the Forest Enterprise Scotland CATS Scheme. The target audience was groups with reasonably well developed plans, i.e. at the stage of carrying out feasibility / about to submit a request. The workshop was intended to provide an opportunity to talk through their proposals, share ideas and get feedback from both peers and advisors.

The workshop, which was organised by the Community Woodlands Association and supported by Forest Enterprise Scotland, was held at The Gateway, Perth, and attracted twenty-nine participants, including representatives from ten community groups.

Schedule

- 10.00 Arrival, registration (tea/coffee available)
- 10.30 Welcome and Introduction – Jon Hollingdale (CWA)
- 10.40 The FES Community Asset Transfer Scheme – Rebecca Carr (FES)
- 10.50 The role of the Evaluation Panel – Judith Webb
- 11.00 The Scottish Land Fund – Eilidh Todd (HIE)
- 11.10 Objectives
- 12.10 Capacity
- 1.00 Lunch
- 1.45 Community Engagement and Consultation
- 2.30 Finance and discounts
- 3.15 Discussion and round-up
- 3.30 Close

Report

Jon Hollingdale (CWA CEO <http://www.communitywoods.org>) welcomed and introduced delegates, gave a brief overview of the work of the Community Woodlands Association and outlined the schedule and objectives for the day.

The primary objective of the workshop was to provide an opportunity for group representatives to talk through their proposals, share ideas and get feedback from peers and advisors. Jon stressed that the day was not part of the formal assessment or evaluation process - the purpose was to help the participating groups develop more robust applications, rather than helping them to fill in the application forms.

The event also provided an opportunity for other community intermediaries (DTAS, CLS) to learn more about the CATS process and contribute their own experience of asset transfer in other areas, whilst other anticipated outcomes included groups gaining a better understanding of the requirements of the CATS scheme and the SLF process, and general networking between groups.

Jon then introduced three speakers who gave brief presentations.

Rebecca Carr (FES Community Asset Transfer Manager <http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/managing/get-involved/community-asset-transfer-scheme>) outlined why FES was supporting this event and gave a brief overview of CATS activity to date.

Forest Enterprise Scotland has supported the CWA to deliver the CATS Workshop with the aim of sharing knowledge and experience to help communities develop robust proposals that will benefit the communities they represent. CATS has now been running for one year, since the regulations came into force, and the workshop is also an opportunity to share the lessons learned from the 3 requests received to date and the pipeline of requests in development.

The first request approved under CATS, for the Fairy Pools Car Park on Skye, is an exemplar of a strong request: a high level of financial benefit, delivering significant benefits for a relatively low value asset, with very clear and realistic objectives; and a high degree of certainty over delivery (permissions already in place, evidence based identification of outcomes, support from key public and private sector stakeholders, and a track record of delivery). The request was approved, as well as the significant discount requested by the community.

The CATS evaluation process has also resulted in a request being refused, subject to review. A third request is going through the evaluation process; this benefitted from early feedback from the CATS Evaluation Panel on a draft, which was constructive in helping address some practical concerns about the proposal. In making a request, the starting point for the community should not be the requirements of CATS, but a focus on the reasons for taking on an asset and the practicalities of managing and delivering its proposals. This in turn will result in stronger requests to CATS.

Judith Webb (Chair of the CATS Evaluation Panel) gave an overview of the role of Panel, outlined the evaluation process and highlighted the key aspects of application that the Panel considers.

The CATSEP is an independent panel of seven people appointed to assess CATS applications. Their evaluation comments and recommendations regarding the quality, suitability and sustainability of applications go to Forest Enterprise Scotland who make the final decision on applications.

Panel members have a wide range of experience and expertise in economic, environmental and social sectors. More details on members and the CATS EP role can be found at <http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/managing/get-involved/community-asset-transfer-scheme/cats-evaluation-panel> and <http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/managing/get-involved/community-asset-transfer-scheme>, the latter linking to the Evaluation Guidance and Template. Evaluation of an asset transfer request is carried out at an evaluation panel meeting where they consider the written application and any comments / feedback from an EP member site meeting with applicants.

In advance of an Evaluation Panel meeting all members of the Panel will read a CATS application in detail and share any queries or questions that arise from this. From this initial read through applicants may be asked for clarification via the Community Asset Transfer

Manager, Rebecca Carr or when a panel member visits the application site and meets with representatives of the community group.

In their evaluation the Panel will be looking closely at all aspects for an application, e.g. they want to know why a group wishes to take on the site, and need to be confident that they understand just what they are taking on in economic, environmental and social terms. Groups need to have thought through all the issues of capacity and capability associated with this not just in the short term but for years to come. The Panel needs to be clear what benefits – to the local community and wider public interest- will be provided. They will want to see evidence of community support for what is proposed and a well thought through, realistic and sustainable business plan. They do not want to say ‘yes’ to a nice idea that the community cannot cope with in the long term or regret taking on.

Applicants should follow the information and guidance given on the CATS web pages and that they receive from Rebecca as Asset Transfer Manager. Panel Members cannot give individual / specific guidance on development of applications, but will give constructive comment and recommendations in the evaluation feedback that applicants receive with the application decision.

Eilidh Todd (Development Manager, Highlands and Islands Enterprise Community Assets Team) (<http://www.hie.co.uk/community-support/community-assets/default.html>) gave an overview of the Scottish Land Fund.

The Scottish Land Fund (SLF) supports rural and urban communities to become more resilient and sustainable through the ownership and management of land and land assets. Funded by the Scottish Government and delivered in partnership by the Big Lottery Fund and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), it offers grants of up to £1 million per project to help communities take ownership of the land and buildings that matter to them, as well as practical support to develop their aspirations into viable projects.

To start a SLF application, contact the Big Lottery Fund to discuss your idea at advicescotland@biglotteryfund.org.uk or on 0300 123 7110. If your project is eligible you will be assigned an adviser from HIE, who will help you develop your idea and get ready to submit your application. SLF has funding in principle until the end of March 2020 and no funds can be requested for beyond that date.

Group work on key aspects of project development

Participants were allocated to one of five tables to ensure that delegates from the same group were on separate tables. Four participants (Rebecca, Judith, Eilidh and Jon) rotated around the tables through the course of the day.

The main part of the day was spent working in these small groups, discussing 4 key aspects of project development:

- Objectives
- Capacity
- Community engagement
- Finance

Flipcharts for each aspect contained a series of questions to stimulate discussion.

Objectives

- Why?
- What are you hoping to achieve?
- Who will benefit and how?
- Phasing? What order?
- Is this an appropriate piece of land (type, scale)?
- Why community ownership?

Whilst there is a general recognition that community ownership and management of assets contributes to community development and empowerment and delivers a range of public benefits, individual communities need to effectively articulate the specific objectives and public benefits of their asset transfer.

Where the group has multiple objectives they will need to show how these are prioritised: which will be delivered in the short term and which are more aspirational. The community's plans should be commensurate with the land which is to be bought or leased, and if the land has not been earmarked for disposal then it should be clear why the community's objectives could not be delivered in partnership with FES.

Capacity

- Do you know what you're getting in to?
- Decision-making structure?
- Who will manage the forest / other projects?
- Do you know where to get external advice?
- Partnerships?
- Relationship with private sector?
- Do you understand the regulatory processes and constraints?

Managing a forest is a complicated business, particularly when the community wants to deliver a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits. It's critical that potential community woodland owners / managers understand what will be required, know what they can deliver in-house and have thought through how and from whom they will buy-in the specialist skills they need.

Fortunately a great deal of help is available, from CWA and other community intermediaries, from statutory bodies and funders, and from other community woodland groups.

Finance

- How much will it cost?
 - Acquisition
 - Ongoing management
 - Additional projects
- Where will the money come from?
- How will you manage cashflow?
- Business development: market info? displacement?
- How interdependent are your various projects?

- Discounts: how will you value public benefits?
- What is FES's financial interest?

Financial sustainability is essential for the long-term success of community ownership, and groups need to demonstrate that they have a good understanding of the costs of their proposals and the anticipated income sources. Where communities have several active projects, they need to be clear about their priorities and consider how this will affect their request (e.g. ability to raise funding / capacity in the community).

All asset transfer applications should have a business plan; even for small projects it will be useful in setting out proposals and explaining how initial and ongoing project costs will be funded. For significant land purchases, plans should cover the process of acquisition and financial management, setting out budgets and funding sources, for at least the first three years, with an outline of costs and income provided for longer term projects.

Community Support

- How will you evidence community support for your proposals?
- How was the wider community been involved in the development of the project?
- Is there wider demand for the outputs of specific projects (woodfuel, housing, health, etc)?
- How will you ensure on-going support and involvement?

It's usual for community projects to be led by a relatively small group of committed individuals, but it is essential that the wider community has opportunities for involvement at all stages of project development and implementation. There are many ways to engage with the wider community and it's usually best to employ a variety of methods to ensure as many people as possible are reached. Groups should also be able to show that they have attempted to address any significant concerns about specific aspects of their project.

Jon Hollingdale rounded up the event, thanking Forest Enterprise Scotland for their support of the day and all the delegates for their enthusiastic participation. He identified a few take home messages:

- All groups should seek to demonstrate that their plans have been well thought through, are achievable given the resources available, are realistically costed and have broad-based community support.
- With most aspects of project development, there are rarely absolutely right or wrong answers – the important thing is to ask the relevant question and have a considered answer.
- The level of evidence required from a community group should be proportionate to the scale of the project.
- There is a great deal of support available, from CWA, other bodies and other community groups – never be afraid to ask for help!

List of participants and groups

Dave Conroy,	Banchory Community Woodlands Association
Ken Henderson	Banchory Community Woodlands Association
Wendy Fenton	Carsphairn Community Trust
David McMillan	Carsphairn Community Trust
Andrew Metcalf	Carsphairn Community Trust
Judith Webb	CATS Evaluation Panel
Linsay Chalmers	Community Land Scotland
Jon Hollingdale	Community Woodlands Association
Chris Marsh	Community Woodlands Association
Amanda Bryan	Consultant
Duncan Bryden	Consultant
Wendy Reid	Development Trusts Association Scotland
Shiona Baird	Dronley Community Woodland
Linda Cockram	Dronley Community Woodland
Garry Stewart	Dronley Community Woodland
Ian Wilson	Dronley Community Woodland
Gavin Dick	Dunoon Project
Digby Guy	Dunoon Project
Brendon Wallace	Dunoon Project
Reuben Singleton	Eshiels Woodland Group
Rebecca Carr	Forest Enterprise Scotland
Heather Muir	Friends of Glenan Wood
Eilidh Todd	Highland and Islands Enterprise
Cristian Pizarro	Laggan Forest Trust
Moray Finch	Mull & Iona Community Trust
Martin Byers	North East Trail Centre Organisation
Simon Richards	North East Trail Centre Organisation
Izzy Baker	Sunart Community Company
Angela Williams	Sunart Community Company

Event Feedback

Feedback was sought informally from participants; many positive comments were received by email:

I did enjoy the workshop today and found it extremely useful – a good format too – it made us all work

The workshop was a very interesting and informative exercise and will prove to be very useful.

I really enjoyed the workshop and got a lot from it. The working as small teams and really getting chance to hear the other groups talk about their experiences was helpful.

Really helpful workshop – thank you for organising and running it!

I really enjoyed the CATS workshop in Perth last week and I found it very useful.

Thanks for organising such a great workshop. It was certainly very useful for me to see the stages where others are and realise we are in a good position. To hear other people's experiences is invaluable and I managed to get a couple of good contacts.

Thanks for a very informative day. I was surprised at the format, thinking we were going to listen but it certainly worked, by going through everyone's ideas a lot of queries and answers came out.

There were also a number of suggestions for improvement, should the workshop be repeated:

- Shuffle participants between tables after lunch to “freshen up” discussion
- Appoint a facilitator at each table to keep discussions on track and ensure everyone contributes
- Invite successful applicants to present “case studies”
- More sandwiches and cakes!