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## **Scottish Government Consultation: Community Empowerment Bill**

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**Date of Submission:** 17<sup>th</sup> January 2014

### **Q1 Do you agree with the definition of community body at section 1? Do you have any changes to suggest?**

*We find this definition to be somewhat restrictive and legalistic, and that this could act as a deterrent to those without skills, or access to networks to obtain those skills, to designate their group as a 'community'*

*There is a danger that the definition confuses the common-sense understanding of a community (as something place-based, inclusive or between those who feel that they share something in common, such as beliefs, behaviour, interest, kinship or ethnicity) with a more legalistic definition of a voluntary association.*

*This definition is also confusing when considering the one given in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.*

### **Q2 Do you agree with the list of public bodies to be covered in this Part at Schedule 1 (Annex C page 21)? What other bodies should be added, or removed?**

*We think that third parties that have some involvement with public bodies, for example charities and churches, should also be considered.*

### **Q3 What do you think would be reasonable timescales for dealing with requests, making an offer and concluding a contract, in relation to sections 5(6), 6(2)(c) and 6(6)?**

*No opinion.*

**Q4 Do you agree that community bodies should have a right of appeal to Ministers as set out in section 8? Are there other appeal or review procedures that you feel would be more appropriate?**

*We agree that community bodies should have the right of appeal as set out in section 8.*

**Q5 What form of appeal or review processes would be appropriate in relation to decisions made by local authorities and by Scottish Ministers?**

*No opinion.*

**Q6 Do you have any other comments about the wording of the draft provisions?**

*We feel that use of the term 'community' in the title of the Bill could be misleading. A community body as defined in section 1 is more like a voluntary association than a 'community' as most people understand the term.*

**Q7 What costs and savings do you think would come about as a result of these draft provisions? Please be as specific as you can.**

*No opinion.*

**Q8 Do you agree with the definition of community body at section 11? Do you have any changes to suggest?**

*We find it confusing that there are two different definitions for the same term. This (second) definition reinforces the idea that there can be 'communities' within (geographical/ethnic/religious) communities.*

**Q9 Do you agree with the list of public bodies to be covered in this Part at Schedule 2 (Annex C page 21)? What other bodies should be added, or removed?**

*No opinion*

**Q10 Do you agree with the description at section 13 of what a participation request by a community body to a public service authority should cover? Is there anything you would add or remove?**

*We would like to see third sector organisations that provide services (such as meals) included.*

**Q11 Do you agree with the criteria at section 15 that a public service authority should use when deciding whether to agree or refuse a participation request? Are there any other criteria that should be considered?**

*No opinion.*

**Q12 Do you have any other comments about the wording of the draft provisions?**

*No further comments.*

**Q13 What costs and savings do you think would come about as a result of these draft provisions? Please be as specific as you can.**

*No opinion.*

**Q14 Do you think the draft provisions will meet our goal to increase transparency about the existence, use and disposal of common good assets and to increase community involvement in decisions taken about their identification, use and disposal? What other measures would help to achieve that?**

*We think that the draft provisions will meet these goals but we again stress that the use of the term community in this context is potentially misleading. Our understanding is that the intention is for greater local involvement, or more direct democracy?*

*In addition, we would like to draw attention to the ongoing debate about what is a 'common good', with often differing opinions between members of the same community.*

**Q15 Do you agree that the cost recovery powers in relation to dangerous and defective buildings should be improved as set out in the draft Bill?**

*No opinion.*

**Q16 Do you agree that the same improvements should apply to sections 25, 26 and 27 of the Building (Scotland) Act 2003?**

*No opinion.*

**Q17 The Scottish Government proposes to extend right to buy to communities in all parts of Scotland, where the Scottish Government is satisfied that it is in the public interest. Do you agree with this proposal, and are there any additional measures that would help our proposals for a streamlined community right to buy to apply across Scotland?**

*The understanding of what it is that is in the 'public interest' needs to be clarified as this can be disputed.*

*We also note that this is another, and possible different, usage of the term community? Why not just say 'to all parts of Scotland ...'?*

**Q18 Do you think that Ministers should have the power to extend "registrable" land" to cover land that is currently not included as "registrable land"? What other land should also be considered as being "registrable"?**

*No opinion.*

**Q19 Do you think that there should be a compulsory power for communities to buy neglected or abandoned land in certain circumstances? What should these circumstances be?**

*Recent research highlights the benefits to community empowerment through community asset ownership, in particular, landownership (Skerratt, 2011; Mc Morran and Scott, 2013). Given the likely negative impacts of land abandonment/neglect on sustainable community development (i.e. contributing to loss of landscape character, out-migration and service decline; see FAO, 2006), it seems sensible to support the proposition for a compulsory power for communities to buy neglected or abandoned land in certain circumstances. These circumstances should be based on the land use proposals by the community body according to the principles for sustainable land use (Land Use Strategy). It should also be necessary to consider any counter land use proposal from the current landowner.*

**Q20 How do you think this should work in practice? How do you think that the terms “neglected” and “abandoned” should be defined?**

*These definitions are critical. Previous experience has highlighted divisions in crofting communities where individual crofts are perceived as ‘neglected’ or ‘abandoned’. Definitions could be based on criteria according to historic and future land use plans of the current landowner, and their contribution to sustainable development. Indicators of ‘neglect’ may include infrequency or lack of land management practice(s) on the area of land in question, according to typical practices for the landscape/land capability, such as forestry management, cropping, grazing, drainage maintenance or management for biodiversity purposes. ‘Abandonment’ may therefore correspond to the frequency with which the landowner or a representative of the landowner oversees such land management practices. If no site visits have occurred over a certain timescale (i.e. to have resulted in neglect) then the land may be considered abandoned. However, the challenge arises regarding how and who records such visits, particularly in remote areas, and what sort of timescale is needed to constitute neglect. Visual evidence of land management may be more accurate and less open to manipulation.*  
*- Definitions of neglect and abandoned could be linked to a local land-use plan (in turn aligned with the national Land Use Strategy), which provides criteria for assessing land management practice.*

**Q21 Do you think that the criteria to be met by a community body in section 38(1) of the Act are appropriate? Do you think that there should be additional criteria? Please set out what changes or additions should be made to the criteria.**

*No opinion.*

**Q22 Do you think that the information that is included in the Register of Community Interests in Land is appropriate? If not, what should that information include?**

*No opinion.*

**Q23 How could the application form to register a community interest in land be altered to make it easier to complete (eg, should there be a word limit on the answers to particular questions)? Should the questions be more specifically directed to the requirements of sections 36(2) and 38(1) of the Act? Do you have any other suggestions?**

*No opinion, except that it should not be onerous as the primary aim of the Act is to support greater access to land by communities.*

**Q24 Do you agree that communities should be able to apply to register an interest in land in cases where land unexpectedly comes on the market and they have not considered using the community right to buy? If so, what changes should be made to section 39 to ensure that such communities can apply to register a community interest in land?**

*We consider that community groups should be able to register their interest in lieu of completing registration process within a given timescale; until that point land sale cannot progress.*

*This would allow groups to have a breathing space to consider whether they are able to form a community body that would be capable of acquiring and managing the asset.*

*At this point in the consultation we are confused whether these legislative amendments are located appropriately – i.e. in this Bill or instead in an updated Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. There is also the concern that such issues of community capacity in successfully utilising the 2003 Act are being considered before the final report of the Land Reform Review Group, which also asked these questions. We would prefer to consider the findings of the LRRG before responding further to questions regarding the 2003 Act, and gain a better understanding of why community registrations are now included in a new Bill.*

**Q25 Do you agree that the process to re-register a community interest should be a 22 re-confirmation of a community interest in land?**

*As above – we are confused that this is included here as we understand it is also being considered by the LRRG.*

**Q26 Do you think that the community body should be asked to show that its application is (1) still relevant, (2) has the support of its “community”, and that (3) granting it is in the public interest?**

*Yes, but in the least onerous way.*

**Q27 What do you think should be the length of the statutory period for completing the right to buy, taking into account both the interests of the**

**landowner and the community body? Please explain the reasons for your proposal.**

*No opinion.*

**Q28 Do you think that some of the tasks within the right to buy (such as valuation, ballot etc) should be rearranged and the timescales for their completion changed in order to make the best use of the time available within the right to buy? Please set out what changes you think should be made and why.**

*No opinion.*

**Q29 Do you agree that Scottish Ministers should organise the undertaking of a community body's ballot and pay its costs? If you disagree, please provide your reasons.**

*This seems a sensible proposition to support the potential for community landownership.*

**Q30 Should Scottish Ministers notify the ballot result to the landowner? Please explain your reasons.**

*We feel the landowner should be informed of all stages of a community body's plan for land acquisition. Ideally this should be the 'norm' due to proactive engagement and interaction between the landowner, community and third parties. The results of a ballot should be conveyed to all parties involved (including the landowner) by whoever is conducting the ballot (not necessarily the Scottish Ministers).*

**Q31 Do you think Ministers should develop a pro-forma for community bodies to set out their plans for the sustainable development of land and community? Please give reasons for your view.**

*We strongly support the development of a pro-forma and, ideally, associated training/facilitation. This will help communities to develop their vision and action plan for the sustainable development of their community and associated assets (including land).*

**Q32 Do you agree that community bodies should be able to define their "community" in a more flexible way by the use of either postcodes, settlement areas, localities of settlements, and electoral wards, or a mixture of these, as appropriate?**

*Community definition according to the community body itself corresponds with principles of subsidiarity and contributes to sustainable development. Nonetheless, the options described in the consultation document provide only definitions of geographical communities*

**Q33 Are there any other ways that a "community" could be defined?**

*The definition of 'community' is central to the successful implementation of this key legislation, and multiple perspectives on 'community' exist. In order to provide a contribution to this definition, this response includes an extracts from McKee (2013). The following extract demonstrates the diversity and shifting meanings of 'community', confirming the challenge of defining such a concept in legislation. It may be suggested that the contribution of the Community Empowerment Bill is to enable communities to identify shared objectives and action plans for sustainability, whilst respecting their diversity and fluidity. Proposals such as the right-to-buy must focus on the existence of shared objectives and action plans rather than rigid definitions:*

*“Community’ has typically fallen into two sets of definitions regarding the geographical and territorial notion of the neighbourhood or village, and the ‘relational’, that of the strength of human relationships without the need for location (Gusfield 1975 in McMillan and Chavis George, 1986). Indeed, ‘community’ may be interpreted as “both a discursive and material phenomenon of social connection and diversity” (Liepins, 2000: 325). Earlier academic discourses regarded community as a relatively stable, homogeneous and detached concept, whilst more recent studies have approached it as a post-structural, more complex and often ‘fluid notion’ (Liepins, 2000), incorporating symbolic constructions, the influence of memory and concepts of ‘belonging’ (Cohen, 1985; Withers, 1996; Skogen and Krange, 2003; MacKenzie, 2004; McIntosh, 2008). The rural ‘community’ is considered uncertain because of increased mobility and out-migration, because people are no longer required to define themselves locally and the ‘politics of difference’ is increasingly providing ‘community’ (Bryden, 1994: 8). Consequently, much academic discourse on community and ‘rural communities’ has investigated the concept of ‘otherness’ and social exclusion, as well as social class systems and power relations (e.g., Bell, 1994 in Skogen and Krange, 2003; Pratt, 1996; Seymour et al., 1997; Phillips, 2009; Heley, 2010). Hence, ‘community’ may no longer be assumed synonymous with ‘locality’, and villages are not ‘homogenous lumps’ (Derounian, 1998):*

*Disparities within communities can disrupt aspirations of local-level sustainability. Often, populations of different social structures, economic, and income bands are demarcated together within settlement boundaries: Shucksmith et al. report the phenomenon of ‘communities within the community’ (1996; Derounian, 1998). Such boundaries cannot categorize a community, hence the academic shift in definition to ‘post-structural’ communities that are unlikely to result in representative community participation, with diverse and sometimes conflicting values and resource priorities (Midgley et al., 2005; Leach et al., 1997). As Brown explains, “struggles over resources are simultaneously struggles over the meanings attached to key categories, such as ‘community’” (2007: 635) and community ‘boundaries’ are sites of contestation (Alperson, 2002 in Brown, 2007; Leipins, 2000). Different interpretations of sustainable development are likely within such heterogenic communities, impeding the creation of shared objectives and action plans for sustainability (Shucksmith, 2010).”*

**Q34 Do you agree that other legal entities in addition to the company limited by guarantee should be able to apply to use the community right to buy provisions?**

*We have no experience of other legal entities but feel this relates to ‘community of interest’ question. Communities of interest may be geographically dispersed.*

**Q35 Do you agree that SCIOs should be able to apply under the provisions?**

*As far as we are aware, SCIOs are not required to be associated with a particular geographical location, therefore again raising the possibility of including communities of interest within those community bodies eligible for the right to buy. This must be considered in the final definition of ‘community body’.*

**Q36 What other legal entities should be able to apply under the community right to buy provisions – and why?**

*No opinion.*

**Q37 Do you agree that Ministers should only have to “approve” the changes to Articles of Association for community bodies that are actively seeking to use or are using the community right to buy?**

*No opinion.*

**Q38 Do you think that the length of a registered interest in land should remain as 5 years or be changed? If it should be changed, how long should it be – and what are your reasons for making that change?**

*No opinion.*

**Q39 Do you agree that the valuation procedure should include counter representations by the landowner and community body? If you disagree, please give your reasons for your decision.**

*If valuation procedures were to include counter-representations, there would need to be a process by which the final value would be decided.*

**Q40 Do you think that there should be a provision to deter landowners from taking the land off the market after they have triggered the right to buy? Please explain your reasons.**

*Given the requirements for community bodies to register and express their plans for sustainable development, a similar requirement may be enforced on landowners when they wish to take land off the market. There may be an opportunity for Scottish Ministers to scrutinise land use plans from both the registered community body and landowner, and consider whether there is a case to prevent the landowner taking land off the market after the right-to-buy has been triggered, where the community body’s plan corresponds with the principles of Sustainable Land Use.*



**Q41 Do you think that there should there be greater flexibility in a community body's level of support for a right to buy in the ballot result than is currently permitted?**

*This question depends on the definition of community body.*

**Q42 Do you think that the ballot result should focus on a sufficient amount of support to justify the community support to proceed with the right to buy the land? If yes, please explain how secured community support should be measured.**

*Illustrating community support is challenging at times for 'communities of place' where their wider 'community of interest' may be excluded from a quantitative assessment, such as a ballot. There may be scope to include more qualitative assessments of support, such as written statements and agreed vision statements from all community 'stakeholders'.*

**Q43 Do you agree that community bodies should be able to submit evidence to Ministers in support of their ballot result where they believe that their ballot has been affected by circumstances outwith their control?**

*This question is inter-linked with the previous, regarding whether other measures of support should be submitted as evidence. There should be no difference in other evidence submitted if the previous proposal is accepted. Perhaps a repeated ballot may be more appropriate if circumstances are likely to have prevented a successful community representation.*

**Q44 Do you think that Scottish Ministers should be able to ask community bodies for additional information relating to their right to buy "application" which Ministers would then take into account in considering their right to buy "application"? Please explain your reasons.**

*No opinion.*

**Q45 Do you think that Ministers should be able to accept an application to register a community interest in land which is subject to an option agreement (on part or all of the land)?**

*No opinion.*

**Q46 If there is an option agreement in place, do you think that the landowner should be able to transfer the land as an exempt transfer while there is a registered interest over that land? Please explain your answer.**

*No opinion.*

**Q47 Do you think that the prohibition on the landowner from taking steps to market or transfer the land to another party should apply from the day after the day on which Ministers issue the prohibition letter rather than the day**

**when the owner/heritable creditor receives the notice? Please explain your answer.**

*This seems a sensible proposition.*

**Q48 Do you agree that public holidays should be excluded from the statutory timescales to register a community interest in land and the right to buy?**

*This seems a sensible proposition.*

**Q49 Do you agree that where a landowner makes an “exempt” transfer, this should be notified to Scottish Ministers? If you disagree, please provide reasons for your decision.**

*No opinion.*

**Q50 Do you agree that community bodies and landowners should notify Scottish Ministers of any changes to their contact details (including any registered office)?**

*This seems a sensible proposition.*

**Q51 Do you think that Ministers should monitor the impact of the community right to buy? How do you think that monitoring should be undertaken and what information should Ministers seek? Should the monitoring process be a statutory requirement, including provisions for reporting?**

*It would be beneficial for both the community body and Scottish Ministers (and public) to understand the impact of the community right to buy. This will help to target support for current and potential community landowners. Such monitoring may be best undertaken both through ‘self-assessment’ and with the assistance of independent monitoring agencies. This assessment must not be onerous for volunteer community body directors, and there may be a role for strategic research to provide data on impact. We are unsure whether a monitoring and reporting process should be a statutory requirement, as this may contribute to a volunteer burden and produce a tick-box exercise rather than genuine ‘impact’ development.*

**Q52 What are your views on our proposals for requiring a CPP to be established in each local authority area, and for amending the core statutory underpinning for community planning to place stronger emphasis on delivering better outcomes?**

*No opinion.*

**Q53 What are your views on the core duties for CPPs set out above, and in particular the proposal that CPPs must develop and ensure delivery of a**

**shared plan for outcomes (i.e., something similar to a Single Outcome Agreement) in the CPP area?**

*No opinion.*

**Q54 Do the proposed duties of the CPP support effective community engagement and the involvement of the third and business sectors? What other changes may be required to make this more effective?**

*No opinion.*

**Q55 How can we ensure that all relevant partners play a full role in community planning and the delivery of improved outcomes in each CPP area? Do the core duties set out above achieve that? What else might be required?**

*No opinion.*

**Q56 What are the respective roles of local elected politicians, non-executive board members and officers in community planning and should this be clarified through the legislation?**

*No opinion.*

**Q57 Should the duty on individual organisations apply to a defined list of public bodies – if so, which ones? Or should we seek to take a more expansive approach which covers the public sector more generally?**

*No opinion.*

**Q58 Local authorities are currently responsible for initiating, facilitating and maintaining community planning. How might the legislation best capture the community leadership role of Councils without the CPP being perceived as an extension of the local authority?**

*No opinion.*

**Q59 How can the external scrutiny regime and the roles of organisations such as the Accounts Commission and Auditor General support the proposed changes? Does this require changes to their powers or functions?**

*No opinion.*

**Q60 What other legislative changes are needed to strengthen community planning?**

*No opinion.*

**Q61 Do you agree with the definition of an allotment site and allotment plot? How else would you suggest they be defined?**

*No opinion.*

**Q62 In order to include all existing allotments in the new legislation they must fit within the size range. What is the minimum and maximum size of one allotment plot in your area/site?**

*No opinion.*

**Q63 Do you agree with this duty to provide allotments? Are there any changes you would make? Do you agree with the level of the trigger point, ie that a local authority must make provision for allotments once the waiting list reaches 15 people?**

*We agree with the duty to provide allotments. Allotments provide access to greenspace which has benefits for individual health and well-being, including mental and physical health; community cohesion and social capital (Dinnie et al 2013). In addition allotments can also make a positive contribution to local food growing, which has implications for addressing climate change, reinvigorating consumption of in-season produce, and forming the basis for healthy, fresh-food based diets.*

**Q64 Do you prefer the target Option A, B or C and why? Are there any other target options you wish to be considered? Do you agree with the level of the targets?**

*No opinion.*

**Q65 Do you agree with this list of local authority duties and powers? Would you make any changes to the above list?**

*No opinion.*

**Q66 Do you think the areas regarding termination of allotment tenancies listed above should be set out in legislation or determined by the local authority at a local level?**

*No opinion.*

**Q67 Are there any other areas you feel should apply to private allotments?**

*No opinion.*

**Q68 Do you agree that surplus produce may be sold? If you disagree, what are your reasons?**

*We feel that research is needed on the effects of selling surplus produce from allotments, since little is known about the potential benefits or drawbacks. On the one hand it could encourage local growers to intensify production and provide an incentive to local food production; on the other hand it presents a lot of questions*

*about how the sale of fresh produce would be governed, how quality would be guaranteed, and whether consumers would be covered by existing legislation. On the whole we feel that it may raise more problems than it would solve.*

**Q69 Do you agree with this list of subjects to be governed by Regulations? Would you make any changes to the above lists?**

*No opinion.*

**Q70 We invite your views on this proposal.**

*No opinion.*

**Q71 Given the actions that the Government and others already take to enable and support local democracy, together with the additional measures proposed in this consultation, are there any other actions we could take to reflect local democracy principles that would benefit communities?**

*No opinion.*

**Q72 Please tell us about any potential impacts, either positive or negative, you feel any of the proposals for the Bill may have on particular groups of people, with reference to the “protected characteristics” listed above.**

*No opinion.*

**Q73 What differences might there be in the impact of the Bill on communities with different levels of advantage or deprivation? How can we make sure that all communities can access the benefits of these proposals?**

*No opinion.*

**Q74 Please tell us about any potential costs or savings that may occur as a result of the proposals for the Bill, and any increase or reduction in the burden of regulation for any sector. Please be as specific as possible.**

*No opinion.*

**Q75 Please tell us about any potential impacts, either positive or negative, you feel any of the proposals for the Bill may have on the environment.**

*This Bill may contribute to the potential for more development on greenfield sites, therefore rigorous environmental impact assessment is crucial.*

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