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Understanding the impact of scale and concentration of landownership: community perspectives from the south of Scotland

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Executive summary

What is the report about?

This report details the perspectives and experiences of rural community representatives from the South of Scotland regarding the impact of scale and concentration of landownership on community and rural life. It is understood that Scotland has a concentrated pattern of landownership, with large-scale landholdings concentrating ownership (and associated decision-making power) within few hands (Glass et al., 2019). Discussion points with community representatives therefore included: perspectives on the local pattern of landownership, community engagement and social cohesion, land management, the natural environment, agriculture, local housing needs, local economic opportunities, as well as visions and view on the future of landownership scale and concentration.

What did we do?

We undertook semi-structured interviews with 12 representatives of five communities located in the South of Scotland. Community case studies were selected to include comparable regional contexts, rurality, and size, but also a diversity of indicators of multiple deprivation. Case study communities were also identified according to whether they had 'experience' of land reform processes, e.g. through community landownership. Three of the five communities were landowners.

What are the main findings?

- It was perceived by local communities that they have little influence on the increasing area of forested land and wind farms in the South of Scotland.
- New landowners or those embarking on significant land use change can fail to prioritise community engagement.
- The reliance of the community on the landowner's attitude to community engagement can impact community sustainability.
- Landownership scale and landowner type influences how communities are involved in decisions relating to land use and land management.
- Community-landowner engagement is critical to land availability and housing security.
- Concentrated landownership was regarded as a threat to housing land availability.
- The main disadvantage of large-scale landownership was perceived to be the potential detrimental impact of large-scale land uses, especially forestry plantations, both environmentally and aesthetically. Interviewees described a preference for a more diversified landownership pattern in future, which comprised smaller landholdings, as well a diverse mosaic of land uses.
- Community landownership was regarded as an alternative landownership model that has and could provide multiple benefits to rural community sustainability.
- Interviewees did not separate 'landownership' from 'land use', highlighting the critical role of landownership, and therefore land reform, in achieving land use outcomes.

What needs to change in the future?

- There is a need for greater trust and transparency in landowner-community engagement.
- Communities wish to be empowered within land use decision-making.
- New landowners should be encouraged (or directed) to adhere to the Scottish Government's guidance for engaging communities in decisions relating to land and the Scottish Land Commission's Good Practice Programme.
- The cumulative impact of land uses adopted by multiple landowners must be considered both at the local scale by individual landowners, and at a regional and national scale.
- Greater public awareness regarding land management and land reform is required to inform the public interest.

1. Introduction and background

This report summarises the views and experiences of community representatives in southern rural Scotland of the impact of scale and concentration of landownership on community and rural life. It aims to fulfil an evidence gap identified by the Scottish Government's Land Reform Division, in particular a perceived lack of community perspectives on this topic from the south of Scotland. This report refers to and seeks to build on the Scottish Land Commission's 2019 report: 'Investigation into the Issues Associated with Large Scale and Concentrated Landownership in Scotland' (Glenn et al., 2019). The primary goal of this project was therefore to enhance understandings of community perspectives of the impact of scale and concentration of landownership from the south of Scotland, in light of the Scottish Land Commission's report, and contribute to the evidence base required for ongoing land reform policy development.

Scale and concentration of landownership

Scotland is considered to have the most concentrated pattern of private landownership in Europe (Wightman, 2010; Glass et al., 2019), in large part due to historic factors including feudalism, succession laws, fiscal policies and agricultural support (Thomson et al., 2016). Over recent decades, there has been a societal and political shift to rebalance the power of private landownership to ensure greater public access to the benefits arising from landownership, and that land ownership and management contributes to the public good (4). The Scottish Government has advocated for a greater diversity in the types of landowners, the scale of land holdings, and the range of tenure availability. The Scottish Land Commission's 2019 report documents the experiences of community representatives and land management representatives from across Scotland, collated following an open call for evidence regarding issues related to scale and concentration of landownership. The call requested responses from people who had experience and examples from areas of concentrated landownership, defined as where:

"The majority of land is owned by either a single individual or organisation or a very small number of individuals or organisations; and the individuals and organisations have the power to make decisions about how this land is used that effect the whole community" (Glass et al., 2019: 4).

This investigation concluded that *"while there are some benefits in economies of scale, there are significant risks of concentrated power and evidence that this is having adverse impacts in some places"* (Scottish Land Commission, 2021). The Scottish Land Commission's report also stated that the existence of large-scale landholdings does not automatically lead to poor rural development outcomes, but that there is 'convincing evidence' of the negative impact on rural community development as a result of concentrated landownership. This is largely due to the power held landowners and the lack of opportunity for communities to influence decision-making, for instance regarding economic development, land use, housing need, and agriculture.

In early 2021, the Scottish Land Commission put forward legislative recommendations to Scottish Ministers designed to address the negative effects of the concentrated pattern of Scottish landownership. The three key recommendations were that:

- (i) Significant land holdings would be required to engage on, and publish, a **Management Plan**.
- (ii) A '**Land Rights and Responsibilities Review**' process would be undertaken where there is evidence of adverse impacts of concentrated ownership.

(iii) A **'Public Interest Test'** would apply to all significant land acquisitions where the risk arises of monopolistic power (Scottish Land Commission, 2021).

Subsequently, the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2021-22 states that during this parliamentary term, the Scottish Government will bring forward: *"a **Land Reform Bill to tackle the scale and concentration of land ownership across rural and urban Scotland, including provision for a public interest test to apply to transfers of particularly large scale landholdings, with a presumption in favour of community buy-out when the test applies"*** (Scottish Government, 2021a: 86).

Critically, this project has provided new understandings of community perspectives during a period of land ownership and land use transition, driven by increasing interest in Scottish land acquisitions by private and investment entities with 'ESG' (Environment, Social, and Corporate Governance) agendas. This report aims to provide insights that may support the Scottish Government to manage this trend and ensure that land ownership in Scotland provides to the 'public interest', not least through ensuring a 'just transition' towards net zero carbon.

The implications of the 'Just Transition' for Scottish land ownership scale and concentration

The Scottish Government has committed to becoming a net-zero society by 2045, and that the transition to a low carbon economy is 'just', conducted fairly and inclusively, while *"account[ing] for the current injustices associated with land use in Scotland, and the wider challenges faced by many rural communities"* (Scottish Government, 2021b: 34). This means that the changes required to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and to achieve the carbon emissions targets set out by the Government will be undertaken with social justice in mind. The 'just transition' will ensure that those employed in traditionally carbon-intensive industries are re-trained and avoid any disadvantage due to the decline of such industries.

Critically, the Scottish Government's target of becoming a net-zero society by 2045 will require significant change in land use and land management practices. There are calls for considerable woodland expansion and the restoration of peatlands as important carbon sinks. The expansion of renewable energy generation will have implications for Scottish land use, management, and ownership. The growth of the market for carbon sequestration and ecological restoration has implications for land value and use, and it has led to an increased demand for land ownership for these purposes. There has been a notable recent rise in companies and individuals seeking to buy land in Scotland to benefit from the 'offsetting' potential of the land resource. These owners range from multi-national corporations seeking to offset the carbon emissions from their business activities, to individuals and companies wishing to undertake regenerative land management. While the developing carbon market could bring opportunities to rural Scotland, risks can be seen in parallels to international contexts of land financialisation (Fairbairn, 2020) and arguably 'land-grabbing' (van der Ploeg et al., 2015).

The pace and scale of land use change is both a key challenge (i.e. to the 'just transition') and potential opportunity (i.e. to achieving net zero, and community wealth building), yet as Shona Glenn of the Scottish Land Commission summarised: *"we can't allow the drive to net zero to pitch community and private interests against each other. Our approach must benefit everyone"* (Glenn, 2021). A recent evidence review has found that large scale private acquisitions of land for

natural capital may bring real risks, including potentially concentrating the distribution of benefits associated with natural capital, and conflicting with wider policy ambitions around diversifying landownership and increasing opportunities for communities to influence decisions around land use (McMorran et al., 2022; Atkinson and Ovando, 2021). The rise of carbon value in the land market has become a key policy area for the Scottish Land Commission, and it is anticipated to feature in the forthcoming Land Reform Bill, for example in how we define what is the ‘public interest’.

The influence of landownership scale and concentration on community engagement practices

The Scottish Land Commission’s 2019 report highlighted the influence of scale and concentration of landownership, and associated power, as a key influence on the ability of communities to participate in land use decision-making. This finding echoes earlier research on landowner-community engagement and the risk of persistent power imbalances on community empowerment within engagement processes (McKee, 2015). This report seeks to understand community perspectives on relationships between landowners and rural communities and experiences of community engagement processes. These community perspectives also provide insights into the public awareness of land reform in Scotland (Warren et al., 2021), and enhances understandings around the social justice aspects of landownership concentration and scale, for example, in locations with different socio-economic contexts. The themes of ‘trust’ and ‘absenteeism’ that are highlighted in the report findings (Section 3), and that arose during discussions about community engagement are critical to the implementation of current policy (e.g. the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement, the ‘guidance for engaging communities in decisions relating to land’, the ‘right to buy land for sustainable development’), and forthcoming policy development (e.g. the public interest test).

2. Methodology

This report is based on interviews with twelve representatives of communities located in the south of Scotland. Case study communities were selected according to comparable regional context, rurality, and approximate population size, but ensuring geographical diversity and where possible, diversity with regard to indicators of multiple deprivation. An additional variable for selecting case study communities was whether they have ‘experience’ of land reform processes, for example, through becoming community landowners themselves. In total, five communities are represented in the interview data, including three who are community landowners, and two who are not landowners. The case study communities and interviewees will remain anonymous in this report.

Community representatives were identified and approached via publicly available contact details according to their role in the community. Interviewees therefore included community councillors, those involved with community development trusts, community bodies that own land, and other community organisations. Two of the interviewees were also local landowners and had a role within community organisations. Snowball sampling was used as a tool to ensure that key

community leaders were approached, and that a range of ages and genders were involved. All interviewees received an information sheet and returned a signed consent form prior to the interview (see Appendix A). Interviews were conducted by online video conference between November 2021 and March 2022.

The interviews sought to gather community views and perspectives on the pattern of landownership surrounding the interviewee's community, the impact of landownership change, the relationship between landowners and the community, and experiences of community engagement processes. The interviewee was also asked to consider the possible or actual benefits of land being owned by a small number of people or companies (i.e. a concentrated landownership pattern), and the possible or actual disadvantages of this landownership pattern. Finally, the interviewees were invited to share their vision for the future of their local community and the pattern of landownership that could support that vision. The interviewees were asked what they thought would happen and what they would like to see happen in approximately 10 years in the future. The full interview guide is presented in Appendix A.

We contacted around 40 individuals and organisations as representatives of the selected case study communities in southern Scotland. It proved difficult to recruit interviewees with many non-responses, despite email and telephone follow-up requests. It was assumed that those who did not respond were not sufficiently interested or felt that they didn't have adequate knowledge of the topic. Therefore, there may be an element of self-selection bias in the qualitative data collected. Despite the smaller than anticipated interviewee sample, saturation was reached within the data, with no new themes emerging after around 10 interviews (12 interviews completed).

Interviews were audio recorded and verbatim transcribed. The transcriptions were thematically coded using an analytical framework derived from the Scottish Land Commission's 2019 report, as well as identifying emerging themes. The following sections present the findings from the thematic analysis.

3. Findings

3.1 Perspectives on the pattern of landownership

Summary

Interviewees considered landownership primarily in terms of private large-scale estates, especially in relation to the historical context. Although not all interviewees had the same experience, many viewed the **increasing area of forested land, and to a lesser extent the development of wind farms, as a significant land use, and landownership, change**. Interviewees described these land use changes as happening on a large scale, with various implications for the surrounding communities and landscape. They perceived **decision-making for such changes as primarily concentrated in the hands of public bodies and private investors**. They cited economic and policy factors as key drivers for such changes. Interviewees with direct experience of owning land as a community and those without such experience both mentioned **the potential of community landownership and how this can diversify the concentrated pattern of landownership**.

Conceptualising landownership

Many interviewees were aware of who owned the land in their surrounding area and were able to outline the patterns of landownership in their locality. Interviewees largely described the presence of one or two large private estates surrounding their community, the ownership of land by public bodies such as Forestry and Land Scotland, as well as smaller landholdings including family farms and community-owned land. For many interviewees, private ownership was *“the first thing that comes into my mind”*, with large landowners and estates described as *“immediately what the vision is of people’s expectation of landownership”*.

Interviewees mentioned that their knowledge of landownership was developed through engaging with land-related issues, such as the development of community projects that required collaboration with several different types of landowners (e.g. developing core paths). One interviewee therefore described their experience: *“I’ve learned a bit about landownership...the ins and outs of it all, in that sense.”*

Some interviewees appeared more unsure than others regarding who owned the land surrounding their community. It was implied that it had not been necessary for these interviewees to know who owned the land, and therefore that some communities may not have faced significant, specific challenges that related to their local landownership patterns.

Changing patterns of landownership

The interviewees’ accounts of the history of landownership in their local areas were varied. Some of the communities have existed in the same way and with apparently the same landownership for many decades, and therefore have experienced little change, while others have undergone considerable change over time, or the community itself is relatively new development. Interviewees often described changes to the patterns of landownership in relation to changes to patterns of land use. Whilst many of the case study communities’ primary industry has been agriculture, a major land use change that was associated with landownership was the relatively recent, but significant shift from farming to forestry, thus:

“What I’ve noticed over the years most of all is the change in landownership with forestry, that has been a huge change.”

“Over the last forty years, the proportion of forestry in terms of land area has increased significantly with the planting of marginal land with largely commercial forestry.”

Some interviewees mentioned the fact that, historically, much of the rural land would have been divided into smaller farms with more landowners within the community. They suggested therefore that large-scale landownership is a modern phenomenon associated with the rise of forestry planting. Other interviewees, however, noted that large-scale and concentrated landownership has a long history in their area, which was usually related to the existence of large private estates. There was further variation within the case study communities, where some interviewees perceived that there had been no major changes in the pattern of landownership, with surrounding estates being owned in the same way for ‘hundreds of years’, whilst others described a shift away from large-estate landownership, stating that it has become ‘more broken up’ into owner-occupied farms.

A further major change in the pattern of landownership surrounding the case study communities was the growth of community landownership. Although one interviewee pointed out that *“landownership or responsibility is not something new to us as a community”* and highlighted several examples of long-standing community land assets in their area, it was evident that these case study communities in the South of Scotland are beginning to identify community landownership as an alternative landownership model and pattern. Examples of recent community land purchases and projects currently in process were described. This is a theme that will be returned to in Section 3.8.

Whilst many interviewees were able to speak to issues of changing patterns of landownership in their areas, some interviewees were unsure whether there had been any sizeable shifts during the time they had lived there, perhaps because the impacts of any changes were insignificant for that individual or their wider community.

Perceived drivers of change

With regard to the drivers of change of landownership patterns, many interviewees believed that *“forestry was the key”*. As a very visible land use change, many interviewees considered the increase in forestry planting to be hugely influential in changing the landscape and a visual signifier of an important shift in the landownership pattern of their areas. Some interviewees attributed the growth of forested land area to the Government’s need to fulfil environmental targets, the rise of private investors in forestry, and the business aspirations of public bodies and private landowners that seek to profit from tree planting, as well as a *“response to taxation and grant incentives”*. Interviewees also mentioned these drivers of change in relation to the growth of wind farm development, which was offered as another example of significant change in land use in southern Scotland. The scale of forestry and wind farm developments was also prominent in these discussions, and it was at times connected to landownership concentration. The impacts of these land use changes will be discussed throughout the report.

Several interviewees agreed that there are economic factors driving landownership changes, but this was used to explain both a shift towards, and a shift away from, large-scale landownership:

“I can see we’re moving away from [large estates owning all of the land] as the whole financial world changes.”

“Economies of scale largely, and existing businesses have fixed costs which tend to rise, and they like to spread these costs over a larger area. That’s the main driver. The go-ahead businesses are looking for ways to own or occupy more land.”

The interviewees who had experienced community landownership in their local area, considered the role of external grants and funding, and changes to legislation, to have made community landownership more visible, viable, and accessible. Interviewees from one case study community described how the introduction of community fuel pumps and other infrastructural improvements initiated by the community acted as the catalyst for change towards greater community landownership and community engagement with land reform more generally, positing community agency as an additional driver of landownership change.

3.2 Community engagement and social cohesion

Summary

Interviewees identified the advantages of large-scale, concentrated landownership to rural community sustainability mainly through providing specific examples of positive interactions with certain landowners. They contended that **direct communication is crucial** for creating positive community outcomes. The interviewees identified a **key disadvantage as being the reliance of the community on the landowner's attitude**, demonstrating how a large-scale, concentrated landownership pattern can contribute to community vulnerability. Many interviewees described how large-scale afforestation (as a result of landownership and/or land use change) has had a dramatic impact on community sustainability, and communities appeared to have little say in how forestry development progressed. There was acknowledgement of community apathy in engagement processes.

Interviewees described their views on both the benefits and disadvantages to their community related to the scale and concentration of landownership in their local area. They believed that ensuring good relationships and communication with large landowners was beneficial for social cohesion. However, the way in which this relies on the specific landowner's attitude to engagement presented itself as a key disadvantage and resulted in community vulnerability.

The influence of landowner scale and concentration on community engagement in land use decision-making

Interviewees perceived landowners' engagement with the community to be related to scale and concentration, noting both positive and negative examples. Several interviewees offered examples of positive engagement with landowners:

"Certainly with [named estate] they always had a very open policy. The new owners are slightly less welcoming to the community, but they try to mitigate that...they've engaged with the council...they do hold community events."

"[The private landowner] is very community-minded, [their] kids at some stages in their education were educated locally and so on, and [they are] very much involved with lots of community activities."

Interviewees also considered some larger landowners as impersonal, distant, unfamiliar, and external to the community, presenting this as a disadvantage related to scale:

"I don't know the [large estate landowner], but I'd imagine it would be quite difficult to get to meet him, you'd have to find out where he was, first of all, between all of his many properties."

"The owner of the forestry around me is...a pension fund for the electricity company. You can't speak to them! There isn't anybody. It's a faceless pension fund. There's no human element to that."

"When you start managing large areas of land it becomes much more impersonal and I think that's to the detriment of local communities."

Interviewees also perceived some large-scale landowners to be difficult to contact and communicate with, and unwilling to listen to the community:

"[The private landowner] wasn't an absentee landlord, [but they were] someone you had to make an appointment with."

"They are basically robotic and semi-alien to the community."

"They find it difficult to engage with local communities, they find it more difficult to engage with local communities than individuals because they are generally operating remotely."

Many interviewees mentioned a poor relationship and difficulties in communicating in with particular public bodies, such as Forestry and Land Scotland. They were referred to as 'the Forestry', which also conflated the land use with landownership. Community views on Forestry and Land Scotland included that:

"[Forestry and Land Scotland] seems to be impregnable and a law unto themselves."

"You cannot speak to [Forestry and Land Scotland], you cannot get a contact."

"We've never been able to speak to [Forestry and Land Scotland], they've been a body that we haven't been able to talk to, they won't commit to anything, they won't meet and that's putting the community at risk."

"At one time, [named private estate owner] was being very helpful and the Forestry was not being so helpful because we were building a [mountain bike] uplift...but the forest through which the mountain bikers were coming, was [Forestry and Land Scotland]. And it was an interesting dichotomy in the ways they viewed it."

Interviewees highlighted these issues as specific to dealing with organisations operating on a large scale, with some interviewees making a distinction between such organisations and other types of large-scale landowners:

"What's the relationship between the bigger landowners and the community? So long as there are still family farms, that relationship still stands. If they are forestry companies or big corporate renewable companies, there is no relationship between the landowner and the community."

Interviewees made it clear that 'faceless organisations' and large estates with management teams are less favourable to deal with than private landowners who tend to 'live locally', 'be part of the community', and can be contacted on an 'individual basis'.

Some interviewees perceived local private landowners to be more enthusiastic about engaging with community issues, due to being part of the community themselves:

"Quite a few of the local landowners who have bought their farms from the [large estate owner], have been involved in their local communities for years, are well known and have children at the primary school and are known, so when you see them in the street going around, you wave to them."

"We've got a good rapport with many of the local landowners, and they'll usually approach us and say they are looking at doing something."

This sense of being personally invested, rather than simply financially invested, in the local community was important to interviewees:

“I would sooner deal with a group of individuals like that, who have common interests or a common purpose, rather than a bureaucratic state organisation, it’s much easier to talk and deal with people who have, what the Americans call, skin in the game, it’s important to them.”

This suggests that a poor relationship with the community is not inherently a symptom of scale, but instead it is an interaction between size, type, and landowner attitude, which can in turn reproduce uneven power relations. This was evident in the descriptions of perceived benefits of concentrated landownership as provided by some interviewees, which outlined positive interactions with large-scale landowners, describing good relationships and open communication. For example:

“[Named landowner] own a large part of land on the other side of the river from the village, so they are quite a large landowner, and they are very good to deal with. They always work through us, any plans that they’ve got they’ll work through us and see what our ideas are, and they’ll always want to try and integrate the village and do things that the village can use.”

In both scenarios of perceived ‘good’ and ‘bad’ community engagement, it is evident that rural communities are impacted by the decisions and approaches of key individuals involved in land management. This was summarised by interviewees:

“[Named estate] are far more amenable now. If you talk to an estate, again, it depends on the factor, who is running the estate. So, you may start off working with a factor who is very, very amenable and then he moves on, and someone else comes in and they are not as amenable. So, it’s very complicated.”

“There’s a theoretical disadvantage in that someone can be bloody minded and just go ‘I’m not going to do this because I don’t want to, don’t like to or don’t need to’.”

It was believed that large-scale landowners could be less easily influenced by communities, and that communities could be vulnerable to being ‘acted upon’, rather than being ‘actively involved’. One interviewee made a clear link between the community’s inability to influence decision-making and the concentration of landownership:

“Locally, there is peer pressure because if that farmer is seen to be not helping the community, that peer pressure works, where peer pressure, usually to an estate or a very large landowner, doesn’t work...if it’s a smaller amount of people [owning the land], you lose peer pressure.”

Interviewees explained the pragmatism needed to engage with large organisations effectively and get the best outcome for the community:

“They do come and hold meetings with the community and have discussions, which I’m generally involved with if I can. To be fair, there’s a lot of spin goes on within that, they obviously put the best spin on it as possible. I try and read between the lines but to be fair, I’ve actually gained a bit of insight and I try and utilise these big companies to our advantage as opposed to disadvantage.”

One interviewee mentioned how wind farm developers are ‘falling over themselves’ to ask what the community wants, and that they ‘do listen, sort of’, for example, investigating issues such as the interviewee’s concerns regarding birds and wind farm development. However, interviewees

were unsure about how much difference being able to voice opinions has on the actions of these types of companies, with some processes considered ‘tokenistic’, and with the outcome that ‘developers end up dictating more to the community’. As explained:

“We’re left with this illusion, almost, that we are able to influence the process and a lot of community councils put in a huge amount of time to go through the whole consultation process and then it seems at the end of the day, perhaps understandably, we’re ignored. Our voice doesn’t seem to actually influence the decision much.”

“If we don’t have an influence – which we don’t – on certain things, because planning don’t require us to have an influence and the landowner doesn’t think it’s important enough to ask, then they can kill us off.”

These quotes highlight the overlapping perceptions of land use (e.g. windfarm developments) and landownership, and the impact of the scale of both development and landownership as a challenge to community involvement and influence in land use decision-making.

Several interviewees, however, acknowledged that community apathy is a barrier to engagement with landowners and in land use decision-making. Interviewees explained their difficulties in fostering community involvement and obtaining community views, due to a perceived lack of interest in, or knowledge of, the relevant issues. One interviewee described that much of their community is a ‘silent majority’, who choose not to engage. Additionally, they described how large-scale landowners do not act to mitigate this, and as such they tend not to proactively approach the community for comment on any land use or ownership changes:

“It’s...very often the case of the push comes from the community first and then they will respond, they are not always forthcoming.”

As mentioned, interviewees conceded that wind farm developers were an exception and carried out ‘scoping’ activities in the area to engage with the community. However, much like many of the examples offered by participants, landownership and land use were conflated in this discussion, making it difficult to unpick the extent to which these engagement issues are directly related to large-scale, concentrated landownership patterns.

The impact of scale and concentration on community sustainability

Interviewees believed that large-scale, concentrated landownership can impact on the sustainability of their community. They perceived that over time, large-scale landownership can threaten community sustainability, as described:

“The community is fragmenting because we can’t bring young couples in to keep the whole thing going because these big corporate landowners are passionately against selling small pieces of land.”

“Our community is on the brink of dying, it’s on the brink of not being a community anymore.”

Interviewees also linked landownership change to depopulation and the decline of community diversity:

“I think had the village, way back in the day, been allowed to keep hold of their land, we’d have seen a far more vibrant and a far more populated valley.”

The interviewees highlighted that land use changes enacted by landowners on a large scale can impact on community sustainability. As mentioned in Section 3.1, interviewees emphasised the significant negative impact of afforestation in their area:

“All this push for forestry has been seriously detrimental to communities.”

“[With the introduction of forestry] the communities started disintegrating.”

Interviewees described how forests have apparently ‘completely subsumed the area’ and that ‘there is now no community’ (i.e. noting one specific village example). Reflecting on their own community, they explained:

“I love the village and I don’t want it to disappear. It’s a thriving, wonderful community and it’s trying to cope with this huge change in land ownership.”

As the quote above again reveals, the interviewees frequently interchanged land use with landownership. Interviewees expressed similar concerns relating to the impact of wind farm development on community sustainability:

“There potentially could be six or seven windfarms within our little area and, again, it’s saturation point; we don’t have a problem with windfarms as such, but it’s got to the point where it appears we’re the sacrificial lamb in this community. There will be nothing left of the community between – it’ll either be trees or turbines, basically.”

This demonstrates how the experience of landownership is inextricable linked with the experience of land use, and that changes initiated by large landowners have the potential to be more impactful due to the size of the area undergoing such changes.

Another interviewee also highlighted the perceived risks to the community due to the long-term large landowner selling land:

“[Named estate] with certain pressures on large landownership, lifted their interest in southern Scotland...which has been quite interesting, because it’s sort of lifted this protection that we’ve had for hundreds of years.”

This interviewee therefore perceived the reduction of concentrated landownership from a trusted landowner as creating opportunity for greater community vulnerability. This viewpoint frames long-standing, large-scale landowners as paternalistic and caring for the community, perhaps due to the potential for such landowners to establish good relationships and open communication with the community over time. It appears that newer, large-scale landowners, or those embarking on significant land use changes are primarily considered a threat to community sustainability by the community representatives interviewed.

3.3 Land management

Summary

When discussing land management, interviewees mentioned issues of scale and concentration of landownership, and the potential for landowners to influence and instigate significant land use change. **The level of influence that the community has in decisions relating to land use and land management varies and is connected to landownership scale and landowner type.** Whilst some interviewees considered the ease of dealing with fewer landowners as an advantage of large-scale landownership, others believed this led to complications, and lack of ‘success’ across a landscape scale (e.g. with regard to conservation; see Section 3.4). Interviewees emphasised that a major consequence of a concentrated pattern of landownership is **the impact on the community due to substantial and cumulative land use changes** (e.g. afforestation and wind farm developments). The community representatives interviewed believed they have limited influence over these land use changes and do not benefit from them locally. Experiences of this differed in relation to whether the land is privately or publicly owned, highlighting the **importance of considering scale and concentration alongside other factors, including landowner type.**

Interviewees described both advantages and disadvantages of scale and concentration of landownership on land management, both concepts frequently entangled. Interviewees maintained that large-scale landownership was linked to extensive management practices, with advantages such as the development of long-term land management plans that include community perspectives. Concerns included a view that managing land on a large scale can lead to destructive land use changes and it was asserted that some landowners are ‘unable’ to manage large land areas. On the other hand, issues that cover land owned by different landowners can be more difficult to resolve than where there is a concentrated landownership pattern. Interviewees made notable distinctions between private and public landownership in discussions of land management, highlighting the importance of landowner type on the community acceptance of management outcomes.

Management practices

Land management practices was a feature of land-based concerns amongst interviewees, including concerns regarding drainage and flooding, as well as afforestation and agriculture. Interviewees considered long-term land management plans were an advantage associated with large-scale landownership, as the process of developing such plans can enable community engagement:

“Long-term plans are a very good thing, they focus the manager on objectives and there is a requirement to consult with the local community and other stakeholders, which we’ve done, there’s a very vigorous process on that.”

“[Named estate] have just put a twenty-year woodland management plan, and they’ve just reached out to the community for comments and have engaged all of the local landowners, including ourselves, to say whether we think they are being sensible and so on...[they] have, I think, been wise enough with the woodland management plan, to decide that they need to engage with the community.”

However, interviewees were also of the view that increasing landownership scale could lead to a lack of resources available for good quality land management, as described:

“The good land goes to waste because you’ve not got the time to manage it. It’s not good management.”

“Where landowners and farmers don’t have the financial ability to maintain boundaries, things like that or make things safe, that’s potentially an issue.”

“I think the organisations like the [public landowner], do have more land than they can cope with satisfactorily.”

Furthermore, some interviewees felt that some land management practices are not effective at larger scales, as described for example:

“Nowadays, there is no shepherds, I think we’ve only got about two left in the whole area. And these people just sent contractors in as and when they need them, basically ranching is what we’d call it now, as opposed to day-to-day management and farming. And I actually get concerned about animal welfare in that situation because there’s no way people actually individually can do the job properly and look after them properly, shall we say, when you are looking after that sheer number and volume. You are not seeing them every day and it’s just not right, but that’s just the modern economics of the thing.”

Decision-making

It was explained that land management decision-making was the prerogative of the landowners, as described:

“The people who own the land, they basically make their own decisions.”

“The community, I don’t think, has its own axe to grind and landowners have their own side of the story, so I think landowners should be in charge of their own land.”

Nonetheless, interviewees explained that being involved in land management and/or land use decision-making was beneficial for educating the community on land management issues:

“I’ve had a lot of positive feedback from people who are saying ‘We’ve just read the [estate name] management plan and through going to your meetings, we now understand what it means when they talk about ‘continuous canopy forestry’.”

Although most interviewees agreed that the person or organisation that owns the land have rights to decide what land management and land use occurs, it was also apparent that decision-making based purely on financial reasons was viewed unfavourably by interviewees, and that interviewees believed this motivation was more common amongst large-scale landowners. This concern is further considered in the discussion regarding local economic opportunities (Section 3.7).

Landownership scale and land use planning

The interaction between land use planning and landownership scale was considered by the interviewees, who presented a range of viewpoints. As mentioned in Section 3.2, interviewees perceived that individual, large-scale landowners can be more difficult for communities to engage

with than small-scale landowners. Interviewees perceived the planning process to be trickier to navigate and more complex with bigger landowners, as described:

“People might say it’s easier to deal with one big body, it’s not, because there’s so many layers that you have to go through. Whereas if you are speaking to a farmer you go and knock on his door and speak to him, have a craic and a cup of tea, blah, blah. Try and speak probably to the estate office, is far harder.”

On the other hand, a concentrated landownership pattern is perceived to lead to more streamlined decision-making. Interviewees believed that collaboration and coordination for projects spanning different areas of land is simpler with fewer landowners. For example, interviewees mentioned negotiations regarding new developments and public access as occurring more easily with a more concentrated landownership pattern, due to fewer parties being involved in the decision-making process:

“If you’ve got a local access officer, for instance if they are trying to create a path network and access, if they are dealing with half a dozen landowners to join [one village to another] and they can assist those owners in putting in an application to the agri-environment scheme or something like that, it’s a lot simpler process.”

However, interviewees identified substantial changes to land use as a disadvantage of large-scale landownership, describing recent increases in forestry as detrimental to the diversity and the aesthetic of the landscape (see Section 3.4). Interviewees also considered windfarm developments as detracting from the landscape (which was a feature important to community heritage and tourism), and they asserted that windfarms tend to be more easily enabled by large-scale landowners. Despite acknowledging the benefits to the wider public interest of afforestation and renewable energy developments (i.e. with regard to climate change), interviewees stressed their sense that such land use changes had a negative cumulative impact:

“We’re being inundated by wind farms. That probably wouldn’t have happened if we hadn’t had these very big land holdings which, transferred out of local ownership, they were being run by family farmers whose families were working on the land, into being simply a corporate figure at the bottom of a spreadsheet. The land is now valued pretty much exclusively in pounds, shillings and pence, rather than any sort of social benefits or any of the rest of it and having these massive holdings I think it’s that at the bottom of it that’s impacted upon us.”

The impact of land management on the community depending on landowner type

Interviewees made a distinction between public and private large-scale land management. They believed that private landowners can be easier to contact and more invested in the community (as described in Section 3.2), and therefore are more responsive to maintenance issues and the need for community involvement in management processes, for example:

“The issue is the [named private estate] cleared up [fallen trees]...so we could get in and out without any grief whatsoever. No complaints. [Public landowner] haven’t even reopened the public paths or the tourism routes that we need to sustain our community because they don’t see it as any value.”

Interviewees also believed, however, that land management by private owners can become complicated, in contrast to public bodies, as described:

“A lot of people that can afford to buy land, how they go about that and the reasons they go about managing it the way they do, can get very complex. And that’s one of the things that’s a lot easier with a public body or largescale charities...”

Others perceived private estates to be easier to hold to account, for example through the planning process:

“We’re surrounded on the one side by land that the [private estate owner] owns that we can’t control or have an influence over, but he’s required to go through the planning process if he wants to do something and as a community, we have a sacrosanct right to comment on any of his plans. On the other side of the hill behind us, land that we equally can’t touch, is a forest...and yet the [public landowner] can do what the hell they like.”

These quotes demonstrate the entanglement of factors including scale and concentration of landownership with land management approaches and landowner type.

3.4 Natural environment

Summary

Interviewees perceived **operating at landscape scale to be one of the main advantages of large-scale landownership**. This was described in terms of it being easier for both management and communication purposes, with interviewees seeing a clear link between aspects relating to the natural environment and the scale and concentration of landownership. Interviewees maintained the main disadvantages to be **the detrimental impact of large-scale land uses, in particular the rise of forestry planting, in terms of both negative environmental and aesthetic impact**.

Interviewees described both positive and negative impacts related to the scale and concentration of landownership on the natural environment. They perceived operating at landscape scale to be beneficial for decision-making (as described in the previous Section), access, and some conservation issues, but detrimental for landscape aesthetics and biodiversity.

The influence of landownership scale on environmental conservation

As mentioned, interviewees described their view that large-scale and concentrated landownership was important for conservation success:

“If you can manage things on a landscape level you have significantly more chance of success. If you are dealing with multiple landownerships it becomes very, very complicated and you need all those landowners on board and whether you are asking them to put their hands in their pockets to contribute or just agreeing to a management style, there’s no point in one estate managing for deer or for squirrels if every landowner isn’t involved because all you are doing is creating vacuums and all your neighbour’s problems become your problems

and so on, and so on. So, from a conservation point of view, I'd say largescale landownership is very, very important."

Others noted however that large-scale land management could lead to a lack of landscape diversity, in particular if this was accompanied by large areas of afforestation, which was perceived as environmentally detrimental:

"It's not great for wildlife, forestry. It's not great for the land. And I think we've got enough. There doesn't seem to be a saturation point."

The impact on the community of forestry extraction by large-scale landowners was also described:

"In the end all they are bothered about is getting their wood to the roadside. So, they are not bothered about the HGV damage, they are not bothered about air quality, they are not bothered about the quality of life of people in the village who have [noise] twenty-four hours a day. They are not bothered about the quality of what they leave in the forest, the mess they leave, the mess that they leave the countryside looking like. The unhelpfulness of deciding they are just going to open a track onto the main road from a forest and they will not tell the community, so it just appears one day. All these things, they seem to think is above them."

Interviewees noted that the potential for negative impact of large-scale landowners that lack care for conservation issues, highlighting the role of scale and landowner type:

"If it's a large landowner who owns a lot of land and isn't...looking after the land or taking on environmental issues or community needs, then obviously then that's going to have quite a negative impact and I guess sort of smaller landowners, in that sense would be preferable."

"I guess it depends on the type of landowner, we know that the [private estate] here, the landowner is quite – he's quite concerned about conservation, he's done a lot of tree planting, that sort of thing. I think it's really important trying to give something back to the land rather than just continually taking. I guess I associate the taking and taking perhaps more with larger landowners."

As these quotes imply, landownership scale and concentration generate a potential disadvantage to environmental sustainability, due to the scale of the land over which such landowners hold influence, rather than the fact that they inherently cause damage.

The impact of landownership change and scale on landscape aesthetics

One interviewee perceived an aesthetic advantage of large-scale landownership, explaining that:

"There's not a lot of sheep on the hill and not many cattle but there's gamekeepers and shooting and those bits of land are really identified quite as shooting estates. I don't see the point in having lots of grouse and pheasants and then just letting them go and then just having a pot-shot at them myself, but it does retain the land visually."

The recreational use associated with this large-scale landholding was a primary reason for the owner having maintained the landscape in this way. However, a more commonly held view

amongst interviewees was that large-scale landowners had the potential to negatively impact the aesthetic of the landscape. This was mainly discussed in relation to the increase in forestry plantations, as described by several interviewees:

“So, they can come in and suddenly before you know, the hillside has changed dramatically and there’s tractors running about, lorries charging about, and this is what antagonises the local community.”

“We’re surrounded by forestry, which is probably the biggest blight we suffer as a village. They are not a much-loved organisation, [public landowner], in this area.”

“[Land becoming owned by Forestry] has been a huge change, not only with the landscape - and all those heathery hills have vanished under Sitka spruce.”

“I think, what I’ve noticed over the years most of all is the change in land ownership with forestry. That has been a huge change, not only with the landscape - and all those heathery hills have vanished under Sitka spruce - but it’s also the price of land as a result has gone scorching up.”

The sentiment from interviewees across most case study communities, was that the landscape has been severely and abruptly changed due to extensive afforestation, negatively impacting the natural environment. They feared that this landscape change would likely continue in the long term, and that landscape diversity – an asset they consider crucial to attracting tourists – would continue to disappear to forest, with one interviewee summarising: “I just worry about this sort of endless gobbling up of open land.”

Access to natural land

An advantage described by interviewees was the appreciation that rural communities have access to enjoy the surrounding countryside and nature:

“There’s plenty of space and it doesn’t really matter, on the whole people have lots of space to walk and can keep well away from the animals and things. It makes it easier for people to...be together and not have the aggro that you can sometimes get if there’s pressure on the land”.

Although this ease of access was not directly linked to landownership scale, interviewees suggested that “large landowners tend to realise their responsibilities of access to the public”. Another interviewee provided the following example of a neighbouring large estate:

“Their land is there for the public to walk on, to fish on, to cycle...I mean [it] is open to the public, so especially during lockdown, I felt very grateful for being able to use that space and it’s obviously well maintained.”

Despite this, there was some evidence of tensions arising over recreational land access. One interviewee described their community’s reaction to an instance where a local landowner created a ticketed car park to allow the public to access a natural area which previously did not require payment, due to increased visitor numbers because of the pandemic:

“That’s really got people’s back up because that’s restricting access to a huge amount of hill that people used to enjoy.”

There was an expectation that regardless of who owns the land, and on what scale, the local community and wider public should have the right to freely access nature. There were concerns that the encroachment of forestry could pose as a limitation to this right:

“I think there’ll be less legislation and more grants for trees which is a concern because the landscape will disappear, and people won’t be able to buy the land or have access to the land.”

3.5 Agriculture

Summary

Interviewees identified **commercial viability of large-scale agricultural land to be a key advantage related to scale**. The disadvantages presented by interviewees related to agricultural practices considered ineffective when carried out on a large-scale and issues concerning agricultural land being lost to forestry. The perceived **risk of increasing transfers of land used by agriculture to forestry** was also connected to the potential increased scale and concentration of landownership.

Interviewees mentioned both benefits and disadvantages of large-scale landownership in relation to agriculture, but concentration of landownership appeared less significant. The main advantage identified was the commercial viability of large-scale agricultural land, whilst the main disadvantages included perceived ‘ineffective’ farming practices at large scale (as mentioned in Section 3.3) and the loss of agricultural land to forestry.

One interviewee provided a context for discussions on agriculture, indicating that there is a higher proportion of agricultural land in the south of Scotland, thus:

“Well disadvantages, it’s hard to categorise it because a lot of the land directly around us is farmland so, unlike in other areas of Scotland where you’ve got large estates owning large amounts of land that could potentially be recreational, this is more agricultural land, whether it’s arable or with livestock on it.”

Interviewees maintained that one key advantage of large-scale landownership was the importance of the role that such landowners play in supporting the economic viability of local agriculture, stating that *“you’ve obviously got to have some economies of scale in agriculture”*.

On the other hand, interviewees also believed that some agricultural practices carried out on a large scale are less effective or of lower quality than if conducted on smaller landholdings, thus:

“When you get into some of the larger areas, there is no way one person could farm at that size.”

The primary discussion point with interviewees relating to agriculture was the apparent loss of arable and hill grazing land to forestry plantations. As described:

“If the forestry buy-outs continue there’s two farms being planted as we speak right now, and there’s been more in the last two years, so that’s another several thousand acres away and there’s another one that’s going to be 50% of it planted, I believe, and another forty-odd percent or 49% to be left for agricultural use, it’s basically areas that were unplatable for

whatever reason, they would either rot or deplete and the intention was that theoretically they were going to farm that...the theory is fine but the reality is the kind of ground they are talking about, the sheep will not survive on that in any shape or form, a desk-top exercise, you've 49% of the land, but the quality of the land and the exposure of the land, it will not work."

This land use change was associated with large-scale landownership change and potentially increasingly concentrated landownership. Interviewees described farms that were previously tenanted becoming afforested, as well as owner-occupier farmers selling land to forestry companies.

Some interviewees felt that it is not just the disappearance of existing farms to forestry that is a concern, but that the domination of landowners with afforestation motivations renders the use or purchase of land for any other use more challenging:

"In more recent times we're still losing hill farms to forestry because the values that they are prepared to pay are just way beyond and ridiculous, in comparison to what is valuable to run an agricultural business from."

"I think, what I've noticed over the years most of all is the change in land ownership with forestry...Somebody hoping to spend his life as a sheep farmer can't possibly get into a sheep farm because the land price is so high. Myself, I've tried to buy a few acres round about here and I haven't succeeded yet. But the price of this very poor hill land is extremely high and the only way you could possibly get it back is by grant-given forestry, which I am not keen to do."

3.6 Local housing needs

Summary

According to the interviewees, **local housing needs are a pressing matter** in some case study communities, but not all. Interviewees' views on housing issues did not often relate to scale and concentration of landownership. Nonetheless, concerns regarding **engagement between landowner and community with regard to land availability and housing security were apparent, and concentrated landownership is recognised as a threat to housing land availability**. The role of central (including national level regulations) and local government, including planning authorities, was highlighted as critical factors that influence rural housing, not only landownership.

Interviewees discussed housing issues mainly in isolation from large-scale landownership and concentrated landownership patterns. However, interviewees noted such landownership patterns to have some relation to housing security and lack of land availability, both of which were perceived as disadvantages of landownership scale and concentration.

There were mixed views regarding the need for housing in the case study communities. An interviewee in one case study community believed that having more housing was undesirable for their local community, but they believed that this view was not heard by central and local government, for example:

“We are seeing a lot of pressure from central government to expand the housing and there’s a lot of resentment in some ways, by local people, and I know through knowing councillors that quite often it’s more of a dictate than a request, from central government. And that makes it...quite difficult for a community to accept.”

Other interviewees were keen to see further development, although did not highlight a particular need:

“Nobody is going to be against that because the village could take a little bit new housing.”

“There’s not been building recently but if there was to be I think people would be quite for it.”

One interviewee contextualised the historical relationship between large-scale landownership and housing or farmland accessibility and security, explaining:

“Smaller communities with one big landowner, it all depended on the factor and on the cruelty at the time of that factor, in what they charged for the land. They could make smallholders’ life a misery by the rents he charged.”

Although this extent of perceived control did not appear in interviewees’ accounts of the current housing situation, they indicated that the approach of contemporary large-scale landowners still influenced communities’ experiences of housing:

“[Public landowner] have been a body that we haven’t been able to talk to, they won’t commit to anything, they won’t meet...that’s putting the community at risk because we’ve flooded twice in the last eighteen months, we had seventy or eighty people made homeless for over a year.”

This interviewee perceived that a lack of communication with a public landowner has had a negative impact on housing security, and they considered that this is related to landowner scale and their apparent disconnect from the community.

Land availability

Interviewees recognised that land availability varied according to location, with several interviewees stating that land for housing would be available locally, as described:

“There is land available in [named places] where you can go and get your 10 acres, get your 20 acres, and there will be a little bit of help to start you off, you can build your own house.”

“I think land would be made available, I don’t think we’d struggle to find land.”

“We are looking at development of no more than a dozen houses so anything under that, we’re fine and can cope well with. So no, I don’t think that’s been a problem at all.”

“One of the things on our agenda is affordable housing and we have identified land which is available, and we are working on funding for it.”

However, other interviewees described struggles associated with accessing appropriate land for housing, and obtaining planning permission for building:

“There was actually an area designated outwith the village, on the perimeter of the village, beyond the limits, and that was all flooded so that was taken off the radar, it became a flood-risk area. But we do have a little area within the village that could be used. The other alternative is people are talking about the woodland or whatever else, but we’d have to secure ownership of some sort of piece of land that was going to be suitable and then get planning permission.”

“We need the planners to work with us to cut up the land, the masters’ land that’s agricultural land so that we can put housing on it. That’s what they want. So, it isn’t just about the types of land; it’s about the planning designation on the land and what you can do with it and what makes it valuable.”

This suggests that it can be an extended process in finding appropriate land, and that it is a combination of factors, including ownership, that influences land availability for rural housing. The interviewees did not mention whether land availability was influenced by large-scale or concentrated landownership. However, one interviewee described their wish to get a ‘third-party to approach landowners’ about potentially acquiring land for housing development, which indicated a disconnect between community and landowners perhaps associated with a lack of community engagement. This interviewee explained that they felt awkward to make this approach without additional support, reflecting the image of the distant landowner, as described by other interviewees (see Section 3.2).

Several interviewees discussed the issue of rural depopulation and the impact on community sustainability. In one case study community, where there is reportedly a lack of new people moving in, interviewees linked this to land availability:

“The school role dropped to zero, there wasn’t a single child to go in the school. So that’s one. And this is directly related to the availability of land; if people could come here and buy land to come on live on or lease land or have some sort of crofting lease on land, they would come!”

“Our need is different; we haven’t got families that need houses: we want to build houses to bring in the families. And that doesn’t seem to tick any boxes anywhere, there doesn’t seem to be any schemes or any funding that allows you to build housing specifically to attract people.”

Others highlighted the risk of increasing numbers of empty homes due to increasing regulation affecting private rented properties. One interviewee was clear that this problem was not directly linked to scale:

“So rural housing, is that a symptom of scale? I find that hard to answer really. I don’t think it is particularly...Houses are going to be abandoned and nothing will be done until it actually starts to happen. But that’s not a problem of scale, that’s a problem of governments being over-ambitious over green targets without thinking through the consequences.”

3.7 Local economic opportunities

Summary

Interviewees linked local economic opportunities to the scale and concentration of landownership. They identified **economies of scale to be a key economic advantage of large-scale landownership**. However, they perceived the **commercialisation of the land surrounding their community to be a disadvantage**, in addition to where large-scale landowners are seen to view the land purely in commercial and business terms.

Interviewees identified several advantages and disadvantages of large-scale and concentrated landownership in relation to local economic opportunities. Such landownership patterns may enable economies of scale, which was considered an advantage for generating income and employment. Others, however, believed that large-scale landowners have a greater tendency to view their land purely as a commercial interest, which was considered to potentially disadvantage community sustainability.

The influence of forest ownership and development on rural economies

Interviewees depicted a landscape of economic insecurity in remote rural communities in southern Scotland, for example:

“You don’t expect to make any money at sheep farming - and I think it’s very hard for the people who live on local farms to farm...I’ve had to futureproof the farm because it’s not an economic unit at all.”

Although not necessarily attributed to landownership patterns, some interviewees drew a link between land prices rising unsustainably and forest development (as described in Section 3.3). Local economic opportunities related to landownership scale and concentration were often framed against the role of forestry development. Some interviewees identified employment opportunities as a historic economic advantage of the former Forestry Commission becoming a prominent landowner in their area:

“In the 1970s, the forestry people moved in, and this was supposedly going to be a saviour for these isolated rural communities, shall we say, in as much as employment. Farming was, basically in a depressed situation at that time in the early seventies, and a lot of farms, hill farms in particular around this area, were sold for forestry. And the families were actually taken on by the forestry people. To be fair, for the first five years it worked really well because there was so much work needed to be done in establishing these forests. I’m afraid after five years, they moved all the workers from the local areas.”

However, many interviewees mentioned that the scale and speed of more recent forest development has brought with it a range of economic disadvantages, from job losses and depopulation, to lack of compensation for changing the landscape:

“We have our land and our views ruined for hundreds of years (because that’s what forestry does), right, and we’ve received not one penny. Not a penny comes to the community, right?”

“I don’t see why fat cats in London who have no interest in the area at all should be given lots of money for investing in trees up here.”

This viewpoint was posed as in contrast to windfarm development, which does contribute community benefit funding. Another major concern was that forestry (both as a land use and as a perceived type of landowner) apparently had the economic power to ‘stifle’ the community, as described:

“They can stifle us as a community if they don’t work with us. The Forestry have never given a community a penny because, you know, they don’t think they have to. And yet, the Government expects us to plant trees left, right, and centre over every single scrap of land and yet we don’t get a payback from that. We’re supposed to accept it and it takes away the landscape. Now, the landscape is what we sell! Tourism is our lifeblood. If you can’t see the shape of the land, you haven’t got anything... And I’m not trying to say there isn’t a place for trees, but there has to be a way of making trees pay for communities, the same way as making windfarms pay for communities. Community Benefit Fund...why isn’t there a Community Benefit Fund for trees?”

Although forestry was the focus of such discussions, this sentiment was also reflected in relation to other commercial developments, including wind farm developments, for example: “landowners are very often major beneficiaries of windfarms and that may or may not be fair or a good thing”.

Commercialisation of rural landscapes

Despite the perceived advantages of large-scale landownership being able to support economies of scale, interviewees approached commercialisation somewhat cautiously, making clear that not all aspects of such activities are favourable for the community. Interviewees primarily described forestry and wind farm developments as potentially problematic:

“There’s quite a few forests and there’s also quite a bit more planting going on, and there’s kind of a bit of concern about what that’s going to mean for the landscape in terms of that and also windfarms as well, really just changes the very rural look because sheep farms, hills, look very pretty and people love walking in them and like to see them like that. And sometimes people get concerned about wind turbines going up, and my personal opinion is you might not like a wind farm but if you are a walker who wants to be outside, then it’s maybe slightly better than walking through a coniferous commercial forest.”

Viewing land as a business was mostly portrayed as a disadvantage to community interests:

“They weren’t prepared to sell at any less than market price. That’s understandable. The way they’ve helped it is they have been prepared to make a few holdings available for sale. But they’ve all been at full market value, so it’s not really worked.”

“I don’t know very much about [private estate] but I know enough to know it’s not actually the [private owner] that does a lot of things, that they have a management committee and somebody manages that, and it’s just a job, it’s just a business enterprise and while I think the [private owner] possibly has some veto and things at the end of the day, I think a lot of things are just put to him as a good business plan and run as a business”.

Despite these negative perceptions, and the fact that they may also incur social costs for communities as discussed in previous sections, some interviewees described the economic benefits that can arise from such commercialisation:

“Our community at the moment is sitting at about four thousand pounds a year from windfarm income and some of them have got vast amounts of money...[and] to some extent people accept that if you are going to have a windfarm then you will maybe get some money for the community, it’s definitely a pay-back, we’re not in any doubt about this...”

However, several interviewees considered the amount of compensation received to be insufficient:

“At the end of the day they do provide some form of recompense financially but that doesn’t help the people in as much as their landscape, their views, their peace of mind and quietness that they are here to enjoy.”

As described in Section 3.3, the interviewees believed that windfarm developments, especially those of a large scale, are more likely to be facilitated by large-scale landowners (i.e. they tend to work with or lease land to wind farm developers). This assertion should be investigated further using other sources (e.g. through planning applications).

3.8 Visions and views on the future of landownership scale and concentration

Summary

Interviewees likely visions for the future of landownership in their local area aligned with a continuing trajectory of the current patterns. **Ongoing forestry and wind farm development is also anticipated.** Landownership change is infrequently mentioned in isolation from land use. Most interviewees had a **preference for a more diversified landownership pattern in future**, which comprised **smaller landholdings, as well as more diversified land use.** **Community landownership was described as an alternative landownership model** that has and **could provide multiple benefits to rural community sustainability.**

Interviewees provided a range of visions regarding what they thought the future of landownership would look like in their local area, as well as how they would like it to look. Their visions of what they believed was likely to happen largely aligned with a ‘business as usual’ (i.e. no change) trajectory. They placed particular emphasis on the likelihood of ongoing forestry and wind farm development, focusing the discussion on land use, rather than landownership. In their descriptions of the future, interviewees stressed the importance of the impacts of such land use changes continuing and accelerating, and they rarely mentioned landownership change or impacts in isolation from land use.

Some interviewees were satisfied with the current pattern of landownership in their local area, and how they saw it continuing or progressing. Most interviewees, however, had a preference that differed to the current pattern. Many interviewees demonstrated a desire for greater diversity of landownership, stating that: *“my vision would be more diverse ownership”*, and they would like to ‘break up’ the land ‘into manageable chunks’. One interviewee asserted that: *“looking forward, I don’t think it benefits anyone from having one, large landowner”*. Others stated that:

"[Named private estate], who I still think has too much land, it needs to be spread up and made affordable, rather than going in massive chunks."

"I would like to see particularly the forest holdings sub-divided into manageable chunks."

As well as a diversity of landowners, interviewees wanted greater diversity of land use, in particular the halting of afforestation, especially by private forestry companies/landowners. There was more acceptance of the role of Forestry and Land Scotland in maintaining and developing forestry.

However, interviewees also highlighted challenges associated with a diversified ownership pattern that could impact on community interests. For example:

"We are quite worried as a community because the land adjacent to us...is bought by [community landowner]...and their proposed usage of that land, in our view, makes it worthless, because they're just going to rewild it, which means doing Sweet FA with it. Nothing. To us, that is seeing farming disappear; it's seeing opportunity, jobs, repopulation, you know, new skills, new opportunities disappear".

Different land use outcomes could therefore impact negatively on land use or rural sustainability goals of neighbouring landowners and/or communities, whatever the landowner type.

Community landownership

Many interviewees presented a vision for the future that included greater community landownership. These views were shared by interviewees with the experience of having engaged with land reform processes or being part of a community landowning organisation. Others were enthused by the potential for community landownership, despite having only theoretical rather than experiential knowledge. Community landownership was described as contributing to the following key advantages for rural communities in the South of Scotland:

- To contrast the approach of large-scale private and public landowners, and to provide alternative solutions to some of the issues related to these landowner types (as described throughout this report).
- To support greater community control over land use and land management decision-making, contributing positively to social cohesion, community engagement, educational opportunities for community members in relation to land, greater land access for recreation and other activities.
- Creating a legacy for the community, building community confidence, and enabling community members to take on responsibility (i.e. fostering community empowerment).
- Creating economic opportunities, raising money to support community initiatives, and having the means to create local job and training opportunities.
- Impact positively on housing opportunities, for example, giving people the opportunity to build their own house on community land.
- Giving back 'agricultural autonomy' and generating farming opportunities which are not possible when land is owned on large scale (e.g. the creation of new small-holdings).

Despite these perceived opportunities and advantages of community landownership within a diverse landownership pattern, interviewees also noted likely challenges. These included the

difficulties of community apathy and maintaining enthusiasm by community members and volunteers, as well as the challenges associated with taking on responsibility for assets (and risks of acquiring liabilities).

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Summary

- The increasing area of forested land and wind farms in the South of Scotland was considered a significant land use and landownership change.
- Such land use changes are decided primarily by public bodies and private investors, and it is perceived that local communities have little influence.
- The reliance of the community on the landowner's attitude to community engagement can lead to community vulnerability.
- New landowners or those embarking on significant land use change can fail to prioritise community engagement, with implications for community sustainability.
- The level of influence that interviewees perceived the community has in decisions-relating to land use and land management is connected to landownership scale and landowner type.
- Community-landowner engagement was a concern with regard to land availability and housing security, and concentrated landownership was recognised as a threat to housing land availability.
- The main disadvantage of large-scale landownership was considered by interviewees to be the potential detrimental impact of large-scale land uses, especially forestry plantations, both environmentally and aesthetically.
- Most interviewees described a preference for a more diversified landownership pattern in future, which comprised smaller landholdings, as well a diverse mosaic of land uses.
- Community landownership was described as an alternative landownership model that has and could provide multiple benefits to rural community sustainability.
- Interviewees did not often separate 'landownership' from 'land use', highlighting the critical role of landownership, and therefore land reform, in achieving land use outcomes.

This study has sought to gather views on issues relating to scale and concentration of landownership from rural community representatives in the south of Scotland. The primary aim was to enhance understanding of community perspectives from this region, adding to the evidence base detailed in the Scottish Land Commission's earlier report on the impacts of scale and concentration (Scottish Land Commission, 2019). This project has been undertaken during a period of significant land use change and an increased focus on the Scottish land market, as buyers seek to acquire land for carbon offsetting and ecological regeneration. This report acknowledges the Scottish Government policy context with regard to the just transition and land reform.

Landownership patterns local to the community representatives interviewed were described primarily as large-scale private estates, in addition to public landowners (including Forestry and Land Scotland), as well as owner-occupied farmland. **A key theme of discussion regarded the increasing area of forested land, as well as wind farms**, which many interviewees described in terms of both **significant land use and landownership change**. Interviewees described these land use changes as happening on a large scale, with various implications for the surrounding communities and landscape. They **perceived decision-making for such changes as primarily concentrated in the hands of public bodies and private investors**, who are motivated by economic and policy factors. It was **believed that local communities have little influence** in how large-scale afforestation and wind farm developments progress.

Perceived advantages of large-scale and concentrated landownership were described primarily in relation to positive interactions with certain landowners. Community sustainability is therefore promoted through good relationships with local landowners, but counter to this is the **reliance of the community on the landowner's attitude to community engagement**. At a large-scale, this factor can lead to **community vulnerability**. The view was shared that long-standing landowners can establish trusting relationships and open communication with rural communities. The risk arises that newer, large-scale landowners or those embarking on significant land use changes may not prioritise community engagement, to the detriment of community sustainability.

The level of influence that interviewees perceived the community has in decisions-relating to land use and land management is connected to landownership scale and landowner type. Experiences of this differed in relation to whether the land is privately or publicly owned, highlighting the importance of considering scale and concentration alongside other factors, including landowner type. Furthermore, **concerns regarding engagement between landowner and community with regard to land availability and housing security were apparent**, and **concentrated landownership was recognised as a threat to housing land availability**. The role of central (including national level regulations) and local government, including planning authorities, was highlighted as critical factors that influence rural housing, not only landownership.

Dealing with fewer landowners can support landscape-scale management, such as conservation objectives. Interviewees maintained **the main disadvantage of large-scale landownership was the potential detrimental impact of large-scale land uses, in particular the rise of forestry planting, in terms of both negative environmental and aesthetic impact**. The perceived risk of increasing transfers of land used by agriculture to forestry was also connected to the potential increased scale and concentration of landownership. Local economic opportunities were also related to scale and concentration of landownership. Interviewees identified economies of scale to be a key economic advantage of large-scale landownership (in particular for agriculture). However, they perceived the commercialisation of the land surrounding their community to be a disadvantage, in addition to where large-scale landowners are considered to view the land purely in commercial and business terms.

Interviewees likely visions for the future of landownership in their local area aligned with a continuing trajectory of the current patterns. Ongoing forestry and wind farm developments are also anticipated, and landownership change is infrequently mentioned in isolation from land use. **Most interviewees described a preference for a more diversified landownership pattern in future, which comprised smaller landholdings, as well a diverse mosaic of land uses. Community landownership was described as an alternative landownership model that has and could provide multiple benefits to rural community sustainability.**

This report highlights the **complex interrelationship between landownership and land use, as well as the motivations and approach of different landowners to land management and community engagement as perceived by rural community representatives**. It is important to reiterate that interviewees were **unable to disentangle landownership from land use, therefore highlighting the critical role of landownership, and therefore land reform, in achieving land use outcomes**.

Recommendations

Summary

- There is a need for greater trust and transparency in landowner-community engagement.
- Communities wish to be empowered within land use decision-making.
- New landowners should be encouraged (or directed) to adhere to the Scottish Government's guidance for engaging communities in decisions relating to land and the Scottish Land Commission's Good Practice Programme.
- The cumulative impact of land uses adopted by multiple landowners must be considered both at the local scale by individual landowners, and at a regional and national scale.
- Regional Land Use Partnerships, the Land Use Strategy, and the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement all have an important role to play.
- Greater public awareness regarding land management and land reform is required to inform the public interest.

Based on the evidence contained in this report, recommendations for the future include **the need for trust and transparency in landowner-community engagement**, and for **communities to be empowered within land use decision-making**. New landowners, such as those acquiring land for the purposes of carbon sequestration, should be directed and strongly encouraged to act according to the Scottish Government's guidance for **engaging communities in decisions relating to land**, as well as the associated Scottish Land Commission's Good Practice Programme. In addition to questions of landownership scale, the cumulative impact of land uses adopted by multiple landowners (and especially large-scale landowners), particularly afforestation and renewable energy developments, must be considered both at the local scale by individual landowners, and at a regional and national scale. **This finding highlights the important role of the Regional Land Use Partnerships, the Land Use Strategy, and the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement**. The report also indicates the value of greater public awareness regarding land management and land reform (after Warren et al., 2021), which is critical to informing what scale and concentration of landownership can be considered in the public interest.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A – Participant information sheet, consent form, and interview guide

Participant information sheet

Project information

Understanding the impact of scale and concentration of landownership



Timescale: November-December 2021

Funding body: Scottish Government, Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division (RESAS)

Version: 01/10/21

RESAS

What is this project about?

This project aims to understand the impact of scale and concentration of landownership on communities in central and southern rural Scotland. We are interested in how individuals and communities relate to the land in their area, and to what extent this influences their activities associated with the land. The project seeks to explore awareness of and access to decision-making relating to land, as well as the benefits or disadvantages of concentrated landownership in these areas. We will write a report based on the data we collect about the views and experiences of individuals from central and southern Scotland, to fulfil an evidence gap identified by the Scottish Government's Land Reform Division.

What is the aim of the interviews?

These interviews will explore the views and experiences of community representatives and representatives of stakeholder groups of the impact of scale and concentration of landownership on rural communities. Interview questions will explore awareness of and decisions regarding landownership, and the benefits and disadvantages related to the community's experience of these.

How will the interviews take place?

The interviews will take place over the telephone or a video-conferencing platform (e.g. WebEx), and will last up to one hour. They will be video or audio recorded and transcribed.

Why should I take part?

You have been invited as you are a community representative, or a representative of a stakeholder group, based in a rural area in central or southern Scotland. Your views and experiences of the impact of scale and concentration of landownership would be a valuable contribution to this study. We will document the findings in a detailed report to the Scottish Government, to provide data on currently underrepresented geographical areas and inform future land reform policy direction in the new parliamentary term.

Do I have to take part?

No, your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. Even if you agree to take part, you can choose to not answer a question(s) if you do not wish to, without having to give a reason.

Data confidentiality

All data will be treated with full confidentiality and every effort will be made to ensure you are not directly identifiable within any publications. Data will be stored on secure systems through the James Hutton Institute.

Aberdeen
Craigiebuckler
Aberdeen AB15 8QH
Scotland UK

What if I want to withdraw?

If you would like to withdraw your data at any point up until the publication of any outputs, please contact the researchers below.

Dundee
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Dundee DD2 5DA
Scotland UK

Who can I contact?

If you have any questions at any time, please feel free to contact:

- Annie McKee (annie.mckee@hutton.ac.uk) – Tel. 01224 395294
- Alys Daniels-Creasey (alys.daniels-creasey@hutton.ac.uk)

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Participant consent form

CONFIDENTIAL



RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Participant Identification Number:

Title of Project:	The impact of scale and concentration of landownership on communities in central and southern rural Scotland
Principal Investigator:	Annie McKee
Study Number:	James Hutton Institute Project code: S200030-00

Please Initial Box

I confirm that I have read, or had read to me, and understand the information sheet dated 01/10/21 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered fully and explicitly.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time, without providing any reason and without my legal rights being affected, up until the publication of any outputs. If I choose to withdraw during or after the interview and up until publication, my data will be omitted.	
I understand the study is being conducted by researchers from The James Hutton Institute, funded by the Scottish Government, Rural and Environmental Science and Analytical Services Division (RESAS).	
Any personal data collected via this consent form as well as the interview recordings and transcripts will be kept confidential within the research team and stored securely. I understand that while all efforts will be undertaken to anonymise my testimony and it will not be possible to directly identify me from any publications, the content of my testimony might make me identifiable in future outputs (participants may be identified in outputs by role and/or organisation).	
I understand that the interview will be video/audio recorded and transcribed.	
I agree to being contacted at a later date in relation to this study.	
I acknowledge that I have read and understood the privacy notice.	
I agree to take part in the above study.	

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature

Date

PI/Researcher Name (please print)

Signature

Date

CONFIDENTIAL

Privacy Notice

The James Hutton Institute ("Hutton", "us" or "we") will use your personal data for the purposes of the research undertaken in the project 'Scale and concentration of landownership - interviews' to understand the impact of scale and concentration of landownership on communities in central and southern rural Scotland and fulfil an evidence gap identified by the Scottish Government's Land Reform Division. Our legal basis for processing your data is that it is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest in relation to research funded by the Scottish Government (Strategic Research Programme 2016-2021).

We may be processing the following types of personal data about you:

-Name and contact details

- Any information we collect from you or hold about you as part of this research project, including i) data collected during the interviews ii) project management documentation e.g., consent forms and iii) records of communications with you e.g., email correspondence.

Your personal data will be stored securely at the servers of the James Hutton Institute and any access to it will be password protected and restricted only to the lead investigator.

We are the Data Controller over your personal data and shall only retain it for as long as is necessary to fulfil the research undertaken on the project and deliver project outcomes. When we use video-conferencing applications, personal data such as your IP address and device name may be collected by the companies who own these applications in order to schedule and create a record of meetings, improve and tailor your experience when using these applications. If you have agreed for your online interview to be recorded, personal data captured within the recording are stored within the cloud service owned by the video-conferencing company. We have in place appropriate contracts with any third-party suppliers who may be accessing your data on our behalf to ensure that your data is being protected adequately. Your personal data may be transferred outside of the EEA by the video-conferencing company. You have rights in relation to your personal data. Please see our Privacy Notice at www.hutton.ac.uk/terms for further information or contact our Data Protection Officer on dpo@hutton.ac.uk or by telephone at 01382 346814.

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Interview guide

Interview Guide – Understanding the impact of scale and concentration of landownership: community perspectives from the south of Scotland

Welcome and thanks to interviewee; introductions; Thank you for sending consent form – go ahead and record the interview now (please be reassured that you are anonymous); recording for our notes and to take some anonymous quotes. Does that sound ok?

Outline of project aims

In central and southern rural Scotland, what are community representatives' views and experiences of the impact of landownership scale and concentration?

Interview aims:

- To discuss the scale and concentration of landownership in central and southern rural areas of Scotland.
- To explore awareness and decision-making regarding landownership in these areas
- To explore benefits/disadvantages of concentrated landownership in these areas
- To understand the community's experience (engagement, involvement, etc.) of these

Interviewee background:

[Take note of interviewee's age and employment status through introductory conversation.]

Where do you live? How long for?

What is your role in the community?

Awareness and decision-making:

If you think of the term landownership, what comes to mind?

Who owns the rural land near your community? How would you describe landownership in your area currently? How do you feel about this?

How would you describe the relationship like between the landowner and you/the community?

Since you've been living here, have there been any landownership changes? What has happened and why?

How are decisions made about land management in your area? Who is involved? Who leads this process?

Opinions and experience:

What do you think are the benefits of the land being owned by a small number of people/or landownership pattern?

What do you think are the disadvantages of the land being owned by a small number of people/or landownership pattern?

What experience have you had of these benefits/disadvantages? Please can you give us an/some examples? Please can you tell us more about it?

How do these benefits or disadvantages impact on the community/what does that mean for the community?

[What is the community's relationship to this?] How is the community involved in land management decision-making, or not? How do they (i.e. the landowner and the people in the community) engage, or not? [Refer to who the respondent has described in their answers.]

The future:

What do you think the future of landownership in your local area will look like? How would you like it to look?

- What changes do you think will happen and what changes would you like to see?
- What things do you think will stay the same and what things would you like to stay the same?

Do you have any final thoughts? Is there anything that you thought we would talk about that we haven't talked about yet?

Thank you very much for your time [describe the next steps with the project].



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