

2001 Land Fund Results

The First Year of Scottish Land Fund Operations

Winter 2001

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The Fund's Purpose

The Scottish Land Fund was launched on 26 February 2001 by the New Opportunities Fund, a National Lottery distributor, with the aim of contributing to sustainable development in rural Scotland by assisting communities *to acquire, develop and manage local land or land assets*. The Fund will make £10 million available to help communities establish the feasibility, complete the purchase, and undertake the development and management of local land and land assets.

As well as providing a new resource for improving community involvement in land ownership and management, it is hoped that the Scottish Land Fund will enhance environmental diversity and facilitate positive use of the land reform legislation to diversify the pattern of land ownership in rural Scotland.

Contracted Management Agents

Highlands and Islands Enterprise in partnership with Scottish Enterprise are administering the Scottish Land Fund on behalf of the New Opportunities Fund. The Scottish Land Fund Committee established using the Nolan principles, meets monthly to consider applications and make grant award decisions.

What the Fund Supports

Three types of assistance are available:

- **Technical** – to assist the planning and feasibility study of proposals;
- **Acquisition** – for the actual purchase of land and land assets;
- **Land Development** – for the development of land and land assets associated with larger projects demonstrating land and natural resource management for rural development, conservation or amenity

Awareness Raising

Initially, Scottish Land Fund staff concentrated on promoting the Fund throughout Scotland, dealing with initial enquiries and processing the first cases to get to the application stage. By mid-November 2001, some 324 initial enquiries had been generated from throughout Scotland. Although the Highlands and Islands, with its history of community land ownership aspiration, has generated the majority of these enquiries, 39 percent have come from community groups based elsewhere in Scotland. The vast majority of enquiries are eligible to apply to the fund for assistance. The initial promotion phase is now complete, the team having delivered more than 100 presentations, and Land Fund staff are now concentrating on working with groups to bring forward competent applications for assistance.

Range of Applications

This outreach work has yielded 40 applications from throughout Scotland, covering a variety of land uses including woodlands, whole estates, village renewal, development plots and existing buildings. The projects have been at various stages, from earliest planning to acquisition and beyond to land development phases. Awards made by the Scottish Land Fund Committee have been well published in the national press, however it might be useful to review some of the decisions below to indicate the diversity of geography and project stages and types that have been supported to date.

Approved Projects

Twenty-eight projects have so far been supported and a net £3,275,000 has been committed. Excluding the Gigha project, the net commitment is £750,000. Highlands and Islands Enterprise's Community Land Unit have committed match funding of £672,000. Some £3.95 million of funding has been achieved to-date.

Technical Assistance Examples

In this category, grant was approved for the Woodhead - Windyhills Community Group (Aberdeenshire) to investigate the possibility of acquiring the 40-hectare Windyhills woodland, including sections of ancient woodland and an internationally significant underlying geology. The group subsequently incorporated as a legal body and applied successfully for acquisition funding. This was a classic example of technical assistance priming the acquisition stage of the project.

Other cases for technical assistance, the feedstock of future acquisition applications to the Fund include grants to Glen Beag Woodland (Lochalsh) and Gordon Community Woodland Association (Borders) for the investigation of possible woodland purchases. Also, the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust received support to carry out a

detailed study of the renewable energy potential of the untapped resources of the island.

Development Examples

In the development category, Fernaig Community Trust (Lochalsh) had land development and project officer funding approved. Fernaig has now appointed the officer for 3-years and completed drainage, fencing and new road and bridge infrastructure work. The Deputy First Minister, Jim Wallace visited Fernaig in August to review the community's achievements. Also in the development category, the well established Abriachan Forest Trust (Inverness) received funding to acquire environmentally sympathetic forestry machinery and revenue funding for paths infrastructure development in the Abriachan forest above Loch Ness. The path infrastructure will contribute Great Glen path network.

Acquisition of Building Examples

The first two existing building projects were from Mull and Iona Community Trust (Argyll), who sought to secure the only butchers shop on the island. The second application came from the Ross of Mull Historical Centre who acquired a derelict historical mill in Bunessan for sympathetic conversion into a historical centre from which to pursue their goals.

Acquisition of Land Examples

This is the core purpose of the Fund. The first actual land acquisition grant was awarded to Deskford and District Community Association (Moray) to enable extension and redevelopment of their village hall. The group have achieved the full funding package, acquired the land and have started redevelopment work.

The North Sutherland Community Forest Trust (Sutherland) was awarded assistance to pursue a land management agreement with Forest Enterprise over the Naver Forest. The Fund recognises that well negotiated and documented land management agreements provide communities with many of the advantages of actual land ownership. They also received support to clarify the legal possibility of the group taking ownership of the Borgie Forest. The group aims to enhance the economic opportunities for residents of the North Sutherland area.

The Success of Gigha

Finally, in a well-publicised case, the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust obtained sufficient support from both the Scottish Land Fund and Highland and Islands Enterprise's Community Land Unit in order to make a credible bid for purchase of the island. These grant awards demonstrate the flexibility that both funding sources were prepared to exercise for such an exceptional case. The islanders have now had their offer accepted and are busy raising funds for their contribution and as working capital for their enterprise. They will take possession of the island on 15 March 2002.

Gigha is obviously the most significant and high profile project that the Fund has supported to date. However, a healthy crop of projects, some of which have already received technical assistance, are now maturing and may receive further Land Fund support over the coming months. There are still ample resources within the Fund and

officers would be glad to hear from any rural groups who could be assisted in its aspirations for community ownership or management of rural land or land assets.

Further Information

For more information, contact

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 www.hie.co.uk (and search for *Scottish Land Fund*)