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Q & A with Kirsty Conti, Community Land Unit

Graeme Scott introduced Kirsty Conti from the HIE Community Land Unit (CLU) and circulated a framework for the discussion.

Kirsty provided a brief introduction to the CLU. The CLU was established to assist communities in the process of buying land and properties. CLU funding has been reduced and current Scottish Government policy is that the CLU should only support communities intending to establish a social enterprise with growth potential. The community should be aiming not only to break even on its activity but to generate surplus for reinvestment in the project and / or the wider community.

Funding is available for both start-up (75% of costs up to a grant of £1500) and feasibility study / business plan (75% of costs with no explicit cap). In order to ascertain whether or not ACF is eligible for these funds Kirsty requested that the committee provide an outline proposal. It was agreed that Mia Scott would draft the outline proposal and Graeme Scott and Andrew Leaver would comment. The Committee agreed this could be submitted to CLU without their full approval. Kirsty indicated that if the proposal was submitted by 1 May she would reply by 8 May. At this early stage it is acceptable to use a vehicle such as Kilmorack Community Hall to access these funds.

It is also Scottish Government policy not to provide capital funds for the purchase of land or property from a public body. This excludes ACF from any CLU capital funding. Kirsty noted that since the CLU know they won't fund the purchase of the forest then it reduces the likelihood they will fund start-up and feasibility unless a suitable justification is provided. For ACF the restrictive timescales laid down by the NFLS may be a suitable justification for CLU intervention at this stage.

With regard to tendering for completion of the feasibility study / business plan, if the total cost is less than £10k, CLU need to see three quotes. If the cost is greater than £10k there needs to be a formal tendering process.

Other points raised include:

- The forest has potential for commercial harvesting although the general quality of the timber is low and access is problematic.
- Timber would be suitable for pulp or pallets and also for production of wood fuel chips or pellets.
- ACF to be established as a working forest creating employment opportunities and supporting local skills development as well as being an area for recreation and habitat restoration. It was noted that there may be conflict between these aims.
- There is a mobile phone mast on site which may provide an annual income.

M Scott
G Scott
A Leaver

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of other ideas were suggested at the public meeting of 25 March. To this list could be added a woodland burial site. • The natural heritage value of the forest is low at present but restoration of native woodland and habitat management would improve this. • Consideration of some sort of private / community partnership arrangement to purchase and run the forest. Examples given included Balcas and Summerlees, both wood pellet manufacturers. • Lara McDonald agreed to contact HISEZ (social enterprise zone) to see if they had any advice • Potential sources of capital funds were suggested: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Scottish Rural Development Programme ○ SNH (if there is ancient woodland) ○ The Carnegie Trust • It was highlighted that in the current economic climate many charitable trusts are short on cash as income is usually generated by investments <p>It was agreed that all of these points should be investigated as part of the feasibility study.</p>	
<p>4 Brief and Tendering for Feasibility Study</p> <p>A number of documents were circulated as part of this discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of e-mail from Graeme Scott to Committee dated 21 April 2009, outlining a process for the appointment of consultants. • An unsolicited quotation for a feasibility study from C J Piper & Co • Community Land Unit Consultants List • A Gantt chart outlining the actions required by the Committee to meet the NFLS deadlines • A draft brief and a draft template for the assessment of tenders prepared as a basis for discussion by Amanda Bryan • Copy of a study for Salachry Forest which was well received by the community there <p>It was agreed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of a brief to secure a consultant to provide both a feasibility study and a business plan should be progressed on the assumption funding for the study would be sourced. • A maximum of budget of £10k (inc. VAT) was set for the contract • Experience of forestry and of community engagement were equally important and that in order to secure these skills joint tenders would be encouraged. 	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee members should read the papers circulated and forward any suggestions for both the content of the brief and for consultants to be invited to tender to Andrew Leaver by 4 May • Andrew Leaver, Mia Scott and Lara McDonald would use the draft brief provided by Amanda Bryan as a starting point and include ideas from the Committee to provide a brief for Committee approval by 12 May 	<p>All</p> <p>A Leaver M Scott L McDonald</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>Funding</p> <p>→ The Highland Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lara McDonald spoke with Ward Manager Louise McCaul and Cllr Margaret Davidson about the Ward Discretionary Fund. There is potential to source funds to match the CLU grants for start-up and the feasibility study / business plan. <p>→ Strathglass Community Woodland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lara McDonald spoke to Bob Hemingway who confirmed that around £700 should be available from the Strathglass Community Woodland. • It was agreed that Lara ask Bob if the SCW directors could meet to agree a change of name and a change of signatories to their bank account so that ACF could takeover their existing structure <p>→ Other potential sources of funds</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investing in Ideas lottery funding. It was felt that this body would be too slow to respond given the NFLS timescales. • LEADER. Mia Scott agreed to investigate the potential to obtain LEADER funds if the CLU say no. 	<p>L McDonald</p> <p>M Scott</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>Future Meeting Dates</p> <p>The next meeting was set for 7.30pm on 12 May. Thereafter it was agreed to hold meetings fortnightly on Mondays starting 25 May. Andrew Leaver will arrange venues and inform the Committee.</p>	<p>A Leaver</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>AOCB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lara McDonald highlighted the importance of keeping on top of FCS staff and of the valuation process at all times. Jake Willis from CWA has offered to attend a meeting with the District Valuer. • Lara agreed to try and identify the cost of the valuation process from either Malcolm Wield, NFLS or Jake Willis, CWA. 	<p>L McDonald</p>

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Summary of Actions from Meeting		
Ref	Action	Person Responsible
2/1	Add Community Boundary – Discussion to agenda for next meeting	Andrew Leaver
2/2	Circulate CWA website access details to committee	Lara McDonald
2/3	Prepare and submit an Outline Proposal to Kirsty Conti at the CLU by 1 May	Mia Scott Graeme Scott Andrew Leaver
2/4	Consider items for inclusion in brief for feasibility study / business plan and also any consultants to be invited to tender and forward to Andrew Leaver by 4 May	All
2/5	Prepare brief for approval by committee at meeting of 12 May	Andrew Leaver Mia Scott Lara McDonald
2/6	Ask Bob Hemingway at Strathglass Community Woodland Trust if the directors will vote to allow ACF to takeover their bank account and structure	Lara McDonald
2/7	Investigate LEADER as an alternative source of funds for the feasibility study / business plan	Mia Scott
2/8	Timetable and venues for future meetings to be prepared and circulated.	Andrew Leaver
2/9	Ask Malcolm Wield, NFLS and Jake Willis, CWA if they can provide an estimate of the cost of the valuation exercise	Lara McDonald