Working Together for Sustainable Estate Communities

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Working Together for Sustainable Estate Communities

Exploring the potential of collaborative initiatives between privately-owned estates, communities and other partners

Based on results from ‘Sustainable Estates for the 21st Century’, 2007-2012

‘Sustainable Estates for the 21st Century’ comprised four individual projects that were carried out between 2007 and 2012 by Annie McKee, Jayne Glass, Rob Mc Morran and Pippa Wagstaff. To ensure the practical relevance of the Sustainable Estates research, an Advisory Group helped to design the project.

The five group members represented: Scottish Land & Estates, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Knoydart Foundation, Scottish Environment LINK and the Scottish Government. The Sustainable Estates project was funded by the Henry Angest Foundation and supervised by Professor Martin Price (University of the Highlands and Islands), Dr Charles Warren (University of St Andrews) and Professor Alister Scott (Birmingham City University).

This booklet has been informed in general by the whole Sustainable Estates project and in particular by the study which explored ‘The role of the private landowner in facilitating sustainable rural communities’, carried out by Annie McKee. Detailed results from all of the projects will be published in a book entitled ‘Lairds, Land and Sustainability: Scottish perspectives on upland management’ by Edinburgh University Press.

The production of this booklet has been financially supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Scottish Government and Scottish Land and Estates. These organisations have not been involved in developing the content of the booklet. This booklet was compiled and edited by Jayne Glass, Rob Mc Morran and Martin Price (Centre for Mountain Studies) and Annie McKee (James Hutton Institute).

Photographs were taken in a range of places across Scotland and are not indicative of case study locations.

Design: Perth College UHI Marketing Department.
OVERVIEW

This booklet explores the potential of collaborative initiatives between privately-owned rural estates, rural communities and other partners in upland Scotland. This topic is being explored in depth because it emerged as a key theme from the 'Sustainable Estates for the 21st Century' project, carried out at the Centre for Mountain Studies, Perth College, University of the Highlands and Islands, between 2007 and 2012.

The booklet is divided into five sections:

1. An introduction to the research and policy contexts relevant to engagement and collaboration around land use decision-making and sustainable rural communities;

2. A summary of the key issues faced by rural communities in upland Scotland;

3. Real examples of the benefits of engagement and collaboration between privately-owned estates, community members and other partners, in order to address the issues identified in section 2;

4. An analysis of the practical challenges that surround engagement and collaboration processes;

5. A set of ‘ways forward’ and tools for addressing challenges and developing ‘win-win’ outcomes.

6. Three key messages that set out the implications of this booklet for estate representatives, communities and other partners (including policy makers).

A draft of this booklet was presented at three workshops in Braemar (Cairngorms National Park), Cairndow (Argyll) and Lochinver (Sutherland) in October and November 2011. At these events, a range of community members, rural estate representatives and other stakeholders gave feedback on the document and made suggestions for its improvement. The comments received at the workshops and via the project website were incorporated into this final version.

The booklet is based on evidence gathered from a range of sources (see Box 1). It has been informed in general by the whole Sustainable Estates project and, in particular, by Annie McKee’s study: ‘The role of the private landowner in facilitating sustainable rural communities’. Italics and an asterisk (*) are used in the main text to highlight the first use of key terms which are defined in a short glossary on page 26.

Box 1. Sources used to develop this booklet

=> A large postal survey of private estate owners (2008): respondents own 688,000 ha (1.7 million acres) of upland Scotland;

=> Over 200 hours of recorded interviews and discussions with a range of people, including estate representatives, community members and other stakeholders;

=> Interviews with nine ‘expert witnesses’ with experience and knowledge of estate management in upland Scotland; ¹

=> Household surveys of communities on six privately-owned case study estates;

=> Research observations made while studying, living and working on six privately-owned case study estates;

=> Secondary analysis of estate documentation from privately-owned case study estates;

=> Review and analysis of published academic and other literature;

=> Feedback on a draft version of this booklet, collected at three workshops and via www.perth.uhi.ac.uk/sustainable-estates in October and November 2011.

¹ See Warren and McKee (2011) for more detail.
1. INTRODUCTION

Land use and management decisions in upland Scotland are made within the context of a distinct pattern of land ownership: a large proportion of these areas comprises upland estates* owned predominantly by private individuals and organizations, as well as public bodies, and non-governmental (NGO) and community organizations. Management decisions for estates, whether on private, public or community land, have various implications for estate communities* in upland Scotland.

The size, shape, climate, soil fertility, land use, proximity to markets, management objectives and available funding streams all vary greatly across Scotland’s upland estates.

To a certain extent, estate management activities are therefore dictated by the opportunities afforded by the estate’s natural and other assets. However, the personal and institutional objectives of the owner and the influences of government policy and economic pressures also play key roles.

While all types of estate owners can play important roles in local development, often providing opportunities for employment and the development of local services, businesses, properties and infrastructure, this booklet focuses on data gathered from a selection of large, upland estates that are owned privately, by individuals, families, private organizations and trusts. The illustrative examples are taken from case study observations and other data gathered from privately-owned estates* and other stakeholders (see Box 1). Further illustrative quotes from research interviews and questionnaires are also included; these come from a range of stakeholders interested in upland estate management in Scotland and are attributed accordingly.

Public policy drivers

Community engagement and interaction with land use decisions are increasingly recognized in public policy. The Land Use Strategy (Scottish Government, 2011) places emphasis on the need for all communities (urban and rural) to be better connected to the land, with more people enjoying the land and positively influencing land use. The Strategy notes that estates engage with their communities to varying degrees and welcomes the progressive approaches increasingly adopted by many estates around the country. In addition, the strategy recognizes that there should be:

“opportunities for all communities to find out about how land is used, to understand related issues, to have a voice in debates, and if appropriate to get involved in managing the land themselves”. 

Photo: Micah Stanbridge
Promoting community empowerment to stimulate and harness the energy of local people is also a prevalent rural policy theme, enshrined in the Scottish Community Empowerment Action Plan (2009), the Land Reform (Scotland) Act (2003) and the forthcoming Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill. This will include action to build community capacity, recognizing the particular needs of communities facing multiple social and economic challenges.

Building resilient estate communities

Scotland’s National Performance Framework focuses on assessing progress towards sustainable futures for Scotland.

The Framework has five strategic objectives and 15 national outcomes, one of which seeks to achieve:

“strong, resilient and supportive communities, where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.”

The concept of community resilience recognizes the need for the intentional development of personal and collective capacity, in order for communities to be able to engage with, respond to, and influence change. Crucially, communities may need to develop new trajectories in order to sustain their futures.

In rural Scotland, estate representatives can play key roles in furthering the development of community resilience. In addition, the effective management of interactions between estate communities, estate representatives and wider communities of interest can have direct and indirect impacts on the sustainability of estate management outcomes more generally. For example, involving the local community in estate management planning can bring mutual benefits; the development of creative business opportunities on the estate can add value to the estate business, while also developing new employment for community members.

Similarly, working in partnership with community members and other organizations can increase mutual access to skills and other resources.
**What is an ‘estate community’?**

The research found that an ‘estate community’ comprises the landowning family or organization, estate employees (direct and indirect) and estate tenants (residential, agricultural and commercial). Broader definitions include the population of adjacent villages, owner-occupiers within estate boundaries, estate visitors, and those with a ‘sense of belonging’ to the estate.
2. KEY ISSUES FACED BY RURAL COMMUNITIES

Communities in upland Scotland live in a distinct environment, both geographically and in terms of changing demographics, public spending cuts and potential further economic downturns. For example, rural areas often experience: a reliance on primary industries, such as agriculture; below average Gross Value Added⁴ (GVA); lower business growth rates; slightly lower individual earnings; ageing populations and in/out-migration; peripherality and low accessibility to key services⁴.

Evidence from communities on large privately-owned estates highlighted challenges surrounding: access to assets and services; employment and business; community spirit and social capital.

Access to assets* and services

All of the communities reviewed in the Sustainable Estates project had a need for access to affordable housing. The need for ‘locals’ to have access to housing and the impact of second home ownership on local house prices were key concerns. Market forces and the desirability of living in rural areas have increased house prices beyond the means of many local wage earners, contributing to the outmigration of younger community members. In one case study community, where two-thirds of properties in the village were second or holiday homes, people said that a ‘generation was missing’, as a direct result of the lack of available affordable housing.

Although new housing had been built in some of the communities, development was not problem-free. Limitations on new developments included a lack of available suitable land, the high cost of building in remote areas due to a lack of infrastructure (e.g. connections to mains water supply), and planning restrictions. Concerns were also raised with regard to the quality of rental housing on some estates, and many community members suggested the need for schemes that allow affordable housing to be allocated to those who have grown up or lived in communities for a long time. Schemes such as ‘Rural Homes for Rent’ had provided grant assistance to some estate owners to develop affordable housing on their estates. However, tax legislation was sometimes a key barrier to the further growth of affordable housing, as the estate owner was often denied business tax relief on property letting, making it difficult to offer ‘affordable’ rents.

A number of further issues were also evident in relation to access to assets and services. In particular, available business infrastructure (e.g. appropriate buildings with the necessary facilities) was lacking on some estates. Access to high speed broadband was also viewed as a potential barrier for new businesses in some areas. Issues relating to remoteness influenced transport costs and public service provision. Crucially, a ‘critical mass’ of resident population was required to underpin the continued availability of rural schools, healthcare, shops and post offices.

“…four years ago…there were 600 people looking for a tenanted house and 27 opportunities arose in that year. So you can see where the frustration and tension is.”

Private estate representative

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² Skerratt et al. (2010). Rural Scotland in Focus. SAC report.
³ GVA is a measure of the value of goods and service produced in an area, industry or sector of an economy.
⁴ Consumer Focus (2011). Living in Rural Areas – Rural Consumers in the UK.
Employment and business challenges

In all of the case studies, some community members worked for the estate on which they lived. Estates provide a range of employment opportunities, including tourism, administration, and land management (farmers, gamekeepers, forestry workers, etc.). Others worked in non-estate businesses, often outside the estate boundaries; and many commuted to their workplace. Several estates had an active policy to develop estate employment and increase the number of local jobs (although the quality of these jobs and prospects for career development often remained a point of discussion). If the estate was not able to increase employment directly, its willingness to provide land or property for business or commercial tenants often had an impact on rural employment.

In every case study, communities and estate representatives identified employment and business opportunities as key concerns. The impact of fluctuating global markets and the loss of large employers – such as military bases, mining operations, fish farms and associated infrastructure – often had a significant impact on local employment, and career development potential within the local market tended to be limited.

Many community members described these limited career development opportunities (particularly in skilled employment), low wages, and the seasonal nature of most local jobs in their home communities. These perceptions of limited job prospects have contributed to the increased out-migration of younger people. This leads, in turn, to a ‘spiral of decline’ where unemployment and population decline (particularly among younger generations) present challenges to the estate in meeting its own employment needs and because of reduced locally available social capital* and financial resources to establish new businesses.

“There is very little work here now because the forestry is not taking anybody on, the mine is closed, the fish farm is not taking any more and the estate will not take any more.”

Estate community member

*social capital: social and cultural capital which exists within a community and which is built from relationships, networks and shared values.
Community spirit and social capital

The research found evidence of strong community spirit and social capital in the case study communities, particularly from observing and attending local events and engaging with local community groups. However, both external and internal challenges were often found to be detrimental to maintaining positive community spirit and increasing locally available skills and resources. In some cases, external societal changes were associated with altered lifestyle aspirations, rising numbers of single-person households, and entertainment which is now provided largely ‘in house’ by television and other multimedia, rather than within the community. This latter phenomenon was regularly associated with the decline of community groups and the rise of an apathetic attitude. People in one community said that the local branch of the Women’s Rural Institute (WRI) had been replaced by television soap operas, which isolated women in their homes.

In some other cases, internal community cohesion was undermined by negative attitudes towards people coming into the community. In particular, longer-established residents often expected newer residents to be more likely to oppose the development of industry and services in the community. Longer-term community members reported a sense of uncertainty about incomers, who were often perceived as more forthright and articulate, potentially overshadowing traditional, local knowledge and practices. A particular threat to community identity could emerge from difficulties in agreeing on ‘who is local’. However, incomers were also often viewed as beneficial in terms of boosting population levels for service provision, bringing in new ideas and businesses, and addressing problems of volunteer fatigue in smaller communities, where the burden of responsibility for community development activities sometimes limited the ability of community groups to achieve their goals. The out-migration of potential young farmers, particularly as a result of changes in hill farming support, was also seen as a problem.

“I think...bringing families in creates things. And people coming in...they get involved, right from the beginning, whether it is toddlers, nursery, playgroup, school, youth club. Older people come in - they get involved with the ‘Old Folks’, the church. It just enriches...”

Estate community member

Key issues – making the links

Crucially, these challenges do not exist in isolation from one another. The simple diagram in Figure 1 illustrates how the key issues identified in this section are linked. Access to assets and services, in particular rural housing, has a direct impact on the retention of young people, which in turn can impact on community spirit and the reservoir of social capital. Equally, a lack of available infrastructure to support potential business development can discourage the in-migration of people and businesses, at the same time discouraging young people from staying within the area and pursuing their business ideas locally. The resulting lack of, and decline in, employment opportunities can further impact on local social capital and community resilience, resulting in a collective cycle of community (and potentially estate business) decline.

Figure 1: Key challenges identified in the case studies
The role of the estate

Historically, many private estate owners have adopted a paternalistic role as one of the main providers of employment, housing and other services for the people who live and work on their land. Today, public policy increasingly focuses on the need for land management to deliver multiple, integrated benefits (both private and public), which adds new dimensions to the scope and impacts of estate management decisions.

Partnerships can deliver a wider range of social, environmental and economic benefits and strengthen the sustainability of estate management, and there are many opportunities for estates to lead or join these. Collaborative initiatives between estates, communities and other partners, such as government agencies and NGOs, offer considerable potential to deliver rural services such as affordable housing, enable the development of community and private enterprises, and empower rural communities.

However, several key factors may inhibit a private estate's capacity and willingness to address the challenges identified earlier in this section. These may include:

• Economic viability of estate businesses;
• Motivations and management objectives of the land owner;
• Limited funding for new ventures;
• Legislative and regulatory requirements, and planning barriers;
• Complex divisions and contrasting perspectives within the community and other partners.

See Glass et al (2013) for more detail on how estates can deliver sustainability actions.
“One of my aims is to move away from the paternalistic tradition of past estate management. The aim is to enable independent development of a variety of businesses and to enable a diverse range of housing types. Part of this is the recognition that the community is responsible for its own future and should not be reliant on the estate.”

Private estate representative
3. BENEFITS OF ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

Many of the challenges identified in the previous section were effectively addressed in practice through engagement and collaboration between private estates and communities, as well as other partners. This section highlights the mutual benefits of collaborative initiatives and attitudes, and gives some practical examples from private estates that were case studies in the research.

Benefit 1: Reducing a perceived disconnect between private estates, communities and other partners

A recent survey of attitudes to estates in Scotland revealed that land ownership per se is not a top-of-mind issue for the general public, and that few people consider what, or how much, land is privately-owned. The same survey found that, when prompted about land owners or estates, many people mentioned a stereotypical image of the ‘Monarch of the Glen’, focusing on individuals or families in a perhaps outdated or romantic manner, rather than considering more modern rural businesses and diverse types of estate owner.

In the Sustainable Estates research, private estates were often found to be able to address these challenges by becoming more actively involved with community groups (especially community councils), development groups, and companies. Becoming more visible within the community often helped to challenge outdated stereotypes and promote mutual understandings of the aspirations of both estates and communities. In particular, an ‘open approach’ to developing long-term plans and/or new revenue streams provided community members with opportunities to influence estate management and understand how the estate functions as a rural business.

George Street Research (2010)
Case Study: The ‘face’ of the estate

The resident factor* of one privately-owned estate was very much a member of the estate community, as well as other, nearby village communities. This allowed him to understand community concerns regarding estate activities from a personal and professional viewpoint, particularly as some challenges also affected him as a community member. He played a key role in informally consulting and informing the community about developments and activities on the estate, often over weekend drinks in the village pub. The owner of the same estate was also very approachable: many members of the community referred to him by his first name. The active involvement of the owner’s family in community groups also played a role in fostering an open relationship between the estate and the community.

In other examples, community members praised private estate representatives for their commitment to community development activities and approachability, facilitating effective and flexible community engagement, and generating a sense of community. The participation of estate managers in community councils and development groups provided a direct link between estate, community and the local authority activities, and an immediate contact for community and media queries regarding land use. This type of ‘involved’ estate management approach helps to avoid potential conflicts and raises awareness of the activities of estates within the local community.

“If estates and communities and agencies and government come together, then I think that is where the big things will happen…and no matter who owns the land, or who is going to benefit from it…let’s just work together and improve things, where we will all benefit in some way.”

Community development worker

*Note: In this context, the term “factor” refers to a person who actively engages with the community and plays a key role in informal consultations and information sharing.
Benefit 2: Developing new business and asset opportunities

The research found several examples of collaboration in developing new business opportunities for both private estates and communities. In many cases, the development of new tenancies or community-based enterprises increased the financial stability of the estate business itself, for example through leases of land and/or premises. Some estates were directly engaged in initiatives, in partnership with other stakeholders, to develop the infrastructure necessary to attract and facilitate private business development.

These initiatives varied from large-scale infrastructural initiatives to smaller-scale projects, and were developed through estate owners supporting local business proposals through collaborative initiatives, such as brand development and providing premises. Collaboration and interaction also reduced opposition to estate development projects, prevented misunderstanding, and enabled costs and benefits to be shared.

Case Study: Recognizing business potential

One privately-owned estate had made significant contributions to local employment through a combination of entrepreneurship and providing business sites to local companies, at affordable rental prices. Recently, the estate had leased land to a local community organization to develop a hydro-electricity scheme. The community organization will receive income from the scheme, and the estate will receive lease income, without the costs or risks associated with either party investing in the scheme individually. In response to local concerns regarding local reliance on a few key businesses, the estate has recently consulted the community on the development of several business units within a housing development. Community members viewed both this process and the proposed development positively.

On another estate, the wider community had benefited from a new extensive path network, developed by a community development group, working in partnership with the estate and the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust. The active involvement of the resident factor in the development group and other community groups helped to facilitate a successful partnership with the community, and the health and quality of life benefits have been widely recognized. The path network is expected to boost the potential of the estate as a tourism destination, contributing to both estate and non-estate tourism businesses. In addition, the estate’s active involvement in path planning and development ensured that paths ‘funneled’ walkers away from estate activities that might otherwise be disrupted by visitors.

Benefit 3: Accessing wider knowledge, skills and resources

Involvement in partnerships can allow estates, communities and other stakeholders to access a wider range of funding streams and resources than if they acted alone. For example, community groups can access different funds than private and other stakeholders, and partnership projects may attract more investment from public development agencies, due to raised levels of confidence and trust. Involving other stakeholders in an advisory capacity can also allow an estate to access and make productive use of a wide range of knowledge and experience to enhance management activities, as well as provide opportunities to include and listen to peripheral interests.

Case Study: Learning in a Liaison Group

One estate had established a ‘liaison group’ that consisted of several neighbouring landowners, community members and estate representatives. The group met biannually and aimed to assist the current estate owner with their local knowledge and professional experience.
The meetings were not chaired by the estate representative, and minutes and action points were recorded. The group was able to stimulate the development of ideas and raise awareness of risks, using their varied expertise. This element of ‘looking in’ on estate activities broke down the perception of the estate ‘keeping its cards close to its chest’ and integrated estate and community decision-making. In general, group members found the meetings valuable and constructive, and the involved estate representatives valued the expert advice of the other members.

In other examples, community members viewed crofting developments as a potential way to re-establish community ‘roots’, through inter-generational land-based activity. However, a lack of awareness and experience of practical land management on rural estates among community members could be a potential driver for conflicts between communities and estates. In such cases, collaboration and engagement between estate representatives and local communities on a wide range of activities represented clear opportunities to strengthen relationships.

**Case Study: Reaping the benefits of a ranger service**

Several estates studied during the Sustainable Estates project had established successful ranger services that played vital roles in raising local awareness of land management issues and natural heritage assets, and attracting visitors to the estate, boosting tourism-related revenue. In particular, the rangers were pivotal in delivering initiatives that re-connected people to the land.

On one private estate, a partnership between a conservation-focused NGO and the estate enabled a ranger from the NGO to manage a nature reserve on estate land. The ranger provided guided walks for local people and visitors, regularly monitored habitat condition, and managed demonstration sites for scientific investigation, arguably raising the estate’s awareness of biodiversity conservation and management impacts. He also coordinated a collaborative and innovative grazing initiative across a number of estates, acting as an independent and expert third party, thus avoiding and alleviating conflicts between neighboring estates. Crucially, because the ranger was an active local community member, he provided a link between the community, estate management and the natural environment of the estate.

“There have been increases in population and you’ve got the knock on effect that the education authority has the confidence to improve the school, the housing association has the confidence to build property... so I think giving that stability has a knock on effect and people want to live here......”

Private estate representative

**Benefit 4: (Re-)connecting people to the land**

Scotland’s Land Use Strategy emphasizes the need for communities to be better connected to the land, with more people enjoying the land and positively influencing land use. Efforts to develop strong connections between communities and the land were evident on different levels, from encouraging recreational access, interpretation and estate open days, to efforts to strengthen and develop community involvement in traditional land-based activities, such as forestry and agriculture.
“We really need to find mechanisms to get people much more engaged in the land and reconnected with the land...there are just so many good reasons why people should be able to relate to the land in an intimate way.....and that for me has always been very important.”

Private estate representative

Benefit 5: Releasing volunteer energy

Empowering community members through collaborative work involving the estate and the community can release volunteer energy and generate significant support for wider estate activities. Estates that develop relationships with environmental charities and educational institutions are able to tap into volunteer energy from conservation work parties, including people in activities such as litter picking, bracken management, removal of invasive species, and path repair. In many cases, direct community involvement in estate activities results in a greater awareness and understanding among community members of why the estate is engaged in certain activities. This increased understanding leads to greater transparency relating to estate management throughout local communities, reducing the potential for conflicts.

Case Study: More hands on deck

Some of the private estates who took part in the research had embraced the potential to involve local community members and visitors in practical estate management activities. One estate had organized conservation work parties; another held a series of community tree planting days. Another estate encouraged school pupils from the Central Belt to undertake work experience, staying on the estate for a week and accompanying the gamekeeper and maintenance manager during their day-to-day tasks. This work experience arrangement had been ongoing for several years, and was considered a positive experience for both the pupils and the estate staff.

“...the more you involve the community, the more they actually take an interest and care for the land that’s out there.”

Private estate representative

Benefit 6: Making robust and accepted decisions

Inviting community members to be involved in and influence estate management decision-making processes helped to ensure healthy relationships between the communities and estates that were studied. This was particularly important when estates generated proposals for new developments which could influence the lives of local community members. Where examples of disagreements between local communities and estate representatives were evident, this was usually because early communication of new development proposals by estate managers was inadequate. In contrast, where inclusive, effective and early consultation of the estate community took place (through a mixture of methods, including local newsletters, public meetings, drop-in estate ‘surgeries’, community survey questionnaires, opinion boxes etc.), this was vital for mitigating conflict and facilitating community support for proposed initiatives.
Case Study: Involving the community in housing plans

One privately-owned estate planned a housing development, based on a local housing needs survey which it carried out. The estate also organised a series of community planning days, involving people from estate management, the primary school, a local history group, and a community development group. Community planning events were considered the best means of gauging community reaction to development plans, and ensuring ‘that the village as far as possible understands what the estate is trying to do.’ The resulting plans for housing development included a significant proportion of affordable housing, as well as allotments and a community garden.

In this community, there was a sense of a need to adapt to changing community needs; the benefits of increasing the village population were identified and housing expansion was accepted. Pre-emptive community consultation, driven by community members who work closely with the estate’s representatives, permitted positive interaction between the estate and the community, leading to robust, accepted decisions.

Regular follow-up events have continued the process of community engagement in estate development.
“It is a long-term process. It often requires quite a lot of work, effort and activity, and that is sometimes what is more difficult for some estate owners to actually achieve.”

Private estate representative
4. CHALLENGES OF ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

Although the research identified a range of benefits of collaborative initiatives and engagement between estates, communities and other partners, several practical challenges were also identified.

Challenge 1: Resource limitations

Effective collaboration and engagement can require considerable effort and cost to estates, communities and other partners.

A lack of estate staff with the time and ability to engage was found to be a challenge, especially when staff were often busy with general estate management tasks – a full-time, resident factor can help to address this. As active members of the community were often already committed to community initiatives on case study estates, a lack of community volunteer time was common. In addition, ‘community representatives’ were sometimes criticized for not being representative of the whole community, lethargy was identified as a real challenge, and cynicism within community councils sometimes presented barriers to progress. Importantly, building trust between the parties takes a lot of time (and patience), and small communities found it difficult to initiate and sustain activities/projects which could result from partnerships with estates.

Case Study: Consultation fatigue and apathy

‘Consultation fatigue’ was commonly encountered during the research. This often reduced the likelihood of communities and estates initiating or taking part in surveys, workshops and planning meetings. On one private estate, a sense of consultation fatigue and apathy towards engagement was apparent, due to recent dissatisfaction with rapid and what was perceived as ‘inappropriate’ housing development as well as an onerous local planning process that was perceived to have had little beneficial impact. This contributed to aversion to engagement and made it very difficult for local groups and estate representatives to encourage community members to attend meetings and take part in planning or project processes.

Challenge 2: Communication difficulties

The case studies showed that, often, the approach which estate managers and owners took to engaging with their communities and other partners was crucial in either moderating or exacerbating conflicts. For example, problems arose when one estate engaged with only part of the local community about land use objectives and plans, leading to general uncertainty. On another private estate, due to their well-established connections with the estate owner, crofters were perceived as more powerful than the non-crofters in community decision-making. The timing of communication is also critical: proposals must be communicated as early as possible if community members are to be able to influence decisions in a genuine manner. Approaches to estate management which were non-communicative and one-way tended to exacerbate existing disagreements or contrasts in opinion within estate communities. These non-communicative or ‘closed’ approaches to development were counter-productive, limiting long-term development and the socio-economic development of the estate and community. In particular, land owners who are not regularly on their estates cannot connect with the local community on a day-to-day basis. Again, a full-time, resident factor can help to address this.
“When they first came up with announcing the housing site, they just put maps in the various shops. And the Community Council said ‘we’d have done far better if you’d come along to a Community Council meeting and made it a prior announcement.’”

Estate community member

Challenge 3: Contrasting perspectives

Estate communities contained a diverse mixture of people from different backgrounds, often with contrasting perspectives, values and opinions. Residents included: longer-term residents, often with ancestral or generational links with the locality; newly-settled people from urban areas; and those who live in the area part-time in holiday homes.

Disagreements tended to result from personality clashes between community residents and estate management representatives, or between members of the community itself. Some community members perceived a division between the ‘estate’ and its employees and tenants, and the local community. In certain cases, this ‘them and us’ mentality was linked to a lack of awareness of estate activities among community members and, vice versa, a distance – either social or physical – of estate representatives from the community. In some communities, there was additional resistance towards external land management companies, with particular concerns raised about their focus on commercial, rather than community aspects.

“I think the trouble is that personalities become disproportionate within small communities.”

Private estate representative

Photo: Annie McKee
Case Study: The challenges of change

Negative relationships between estate representatives and the community had developed on estates which failed to embrace an opportunity for change and development. In many communities, the need for the estate to provide land for housing and other developments was a core concern.

In one community, a land reform group aimed to persuade the estate to provide land for housing, business units and for crofting. However, there was a polarised debate amongst the community, and personality differences between one group of community members and the owner of the estate. The estate owner was keen to promote local development, but the ownership and decision-making mechanisms of the estate prohibited the simple distribution of estate assets for no cost or for below-market rent. Nonetheless, community members dismissed this as a ‘smokescreen’ or a ‘lack of generosity’.

Challenge 4: Developing accountable decision-making processes

The case studies revealed a variety of leadership styles, which community members perceived as ranging from ‘dictatorial’ to ‘democratic’, raising questions about the balance of power in engagement processes. Difficulties were often encountered in terms of managing the expectations of people taking part in joint projects: the estate was regularly perceived as retaining the power in decision-making, which made it difficult for the community to expect ‘genuine’ engagement. The personalities and attitudes of estate representatives were pivotal to facilitating a successful process, as the development of personal relationships and trust contributed to positive working.

Positive relationships and mutually acceptable outcomes tended to occur when the estate showed genuine interest in community matters and adopted the role of ‘enabler’, trying to establish equal terms/stakes with community members.

“…the reason I haven’t continued is quite simply that the Chairman of the company was deployed to chair those meetings and he’s not somebody I think engages well in that context.”

Private estate representative
Case Study: Managing conflict – building and community support

Estate representatives on one privately-owned estate were widely praised for taking a particularly inclusive and communicative approach. In particular, all significant proposals were brought forward at a very early stage to the community, through repeated postal consultations, public meetings and other means. Proposals which were not supported at this early stage were altered accordingly or, in some cases, shelved completely. This inclusive approach extended to wider partners and resulted in the development of strong partnerships, including with another private estate owner, the local community, an environmental charity, a local development agency and a number of government agencies. The inclusive and participative approach to estate leadership has resulted in the absence of significant conflicts, with strong community support for estate activities and proposals. The open approach to partnership working has also resulted in the good availability of local volunteer energy and ongoing access to a wide network of supportive organizations.
5. MOVING FORWARDS: SOLUTIONS AND TOOLS

The following solutions and tools are proposed on the basis of the research findings and should encourage mutual support, engagement and trust among estate representatives, local communities and other partners. They are suggested as additional aids to decision-making processes in order to explore mutually-beneficial projects, processes and outcomes, rather than as a 'one size fits all' toolkit.

Opportunities for engagement and partnership working are possible across a wide spectrum, from simply taking a more 'open' approach to estate management (an 'open door policy'), to the development of joint businesses between the estate and the community, or the development of shared equity schemes in relation to specific services or assets (Figure 2).

However, in carrying out any of these approaches, the following points must be taken into account.

1 All partners should take a proactive approach

To enhance community capacity and overcome contrasting perspectives, trusting relationships need to be developed. Estates should consider representation on community organizations in order to develop new relationships, and explore the benefits of working more closely with agencies and other stakeholders. All partners need to adopt professional attitudes and contribute equivalent time and resources where possible. Ultimately, relationship building should focus on the development of mutual trust and respect for the differing roles and interests of the different groups/individuals, as well as the development of open and transparent engagement processes.

2 Methods and timings of interaction are critical

Communication needs to be two-way (rather than 'top-down'), and consultation should be early, meaningful and transparent.

Figure 2: A spectrum of approaches
Engagement should take place when it is appropriate; (communities are unlikely to expect involvement in day-to-day estate management activities). Estate representatives should consider the potential mutual benefit of a range of approaches: community consultation ‘surgeries’; establishing a community-estate liaison group; estate open days; joint action planning; or an estate newsletter/website. Engagement activities carried out by the estate should deliver value for money in the long-term, by developing of social capital and wider community understanding and support for estate activities.

3 Estate representatives need to be visible and approachable

An ‘open-door policy’ and good visibility of the estate’s representatives are crucial for developing a positive relationship between the estate and the community (Figure 3). Similarly, estates that proactively developed relationships with wider partners such as community development trusts, public agencies and non-governmental organizations, were better able to access wider support, knowledge and resources.

It is recommended that the overall long-term estate strategy includes a community and stakeholder engagement policy to maximize the use of available resources and skills.

4 Developing positive relationships may benefit from the involvement of an ‘honest broker’

Agencies and other partners can provide support and play additional roles in partnership working. Where contrasts in opinions and perspectives may occur between the estate and the community, a suitable ‘honest broker’ can act as an impartial mediator, sharing policy information and guiding discussions without vested interest (e.g. representative body, local authority, external facilitator, researcher – depending on context/situation). Disagreement should not be seen as an impediment to progress. Mechanisms such as a Liaison Group may provide a forum for interactions and resolving disagreements, in order to find mutual solutions. In the case of housing, for example, Rural Housing Enablers can help to deliver mutually beneficial solutions on the ground, such as advice, facilitation, partnership working, access to funding and, expertise, planning gain, consultation, investment opportunities, and housing management.

5 Explore suitable models for rural leadership

Partnerships can increase the capacity of communities and estates to engage in local decision-making and develop increased confidence. Effective leadership can release volunteer energy and increase the availability of local social capital. The Sustainable Estates research found that estates which enabled the development of local capacity were most successful. By sharing responsibility among estate, community and other actors, a sense of reliance on the estate was removed and more productive, mutually-beneficial outcomes were regularly achieved.

Where the above solutions were adopted and productive engagement/partnership
processes were developed, local governance models were stronger, with diverse mutual gains. Where estate representatives, communities, and other partners adopted an open-minded approach, increased knowledge and resource sharing led to mutual benefits and enhanced trust among all these stakeholders. This led to increased support for estate activities within the local and wider community, local capacity building, and an input of energy from the community and other partners into estate activities.

6. KEY MESSAGES

For estate owners and representatives

Genuine engagement and collaboration with estate communities and other partners will result in a long-term change in the image of privately-owned estates, increased wider confidence in the estate sector, and recognition of the important role of estates in delivering multiple public benefits.

For estate communities

Estate communities need to identify their needs and priorities and engage with estate representatives. This may require overcoming prejudices and embracing involvement with the estate and other partners.

For policy-makers, public agencies and other stakeholders

There is a need to support the types of engagement and collaboration identified in this booklet, as well as to help to address challenges. In particular, the potential for privately-owned estates to develop positive partnerships that contribute to community resilience should be recognized. Public agencies and other stakeholders need to consider how to engage more effectively with private estates and estate communities, defining their role with the partners involved and committing to joint projects.

“It is right to call it a partnership because the benefits are entirely mutual. The owner of the business – the owner of the land, which is a business asset, depends absolutely on the people who look after it – and they depend absolutely not only for their pay packet, but for everything about their way of life, on that system continuing.”

Private estate representative
GLOSSARY

Assets
Both physical entities (e.g. buildings, land, public services) and more intangible social assets (e.g. volunteer energy, skills).

Community of interest
Group of stakeholders and/or organizations interested in a common place, issue or goal.

Community resilience
The existence, development and engagement of community resources by community members to thrive in an environment characterised by change, uncertainty, unpredictability and surprise (Magis 2010).

Estate community
The landowning family or organization, estate employees (direct and indirect) and estate tenants (residential, agricultural and commercial). Broader definitions may include the population of adjacent villages, owner-occupiers within estate boundaries, estate visitors, and those with a ‘sense of belonging’ to the estate.

Estate owners
These may be private individuals and trusts, non-governmental organisations, public bodies, or community organisations.

Estate representatives
People employed or associated with the estate (e.g. owner, staff member, land management advisor).

Factor
Person or company charged with managing estate business(es) and management activities. A ‘resident factor’ is, in general, employed only by one estate.

Partnership
Typically, rural partnerships include representatives of public, private, voluntary and community interests who are assumed to share a degree of commitment to specific policy objectives, at a strategic or delivery level (Derkzen and Boch 2009).

Privately-owned estate
An estate owned by a private individual, family, charitable trust or commercial organization.

Social capital
Two forms of social capital can be defined for the purposes of this booklet (see Pretty and Smith 2004):

Bonding social capital: The development of relationships and building of trust between people and organisations with similar viewpoints and with similar objectives.

Bridging social capital: The development of co-operative connections and trusting relationships between people and organisations with different viewpoints and objectives (including differing perceptions of sustainability). This may be of greater value than bonding capital in relation to sustainable estate management.

Upland estate
Large rural landholdings in excess of 2000 hectares (4952 acres), with areas higher than 185m above sea level (this definition was used for the selection of case studies in the Sustainable Estates research).
“…to help develop the capacity within the community to develop their own ideas…to get involved at various levels, in how things are taken forward – and it is a long term process, it requires often quite a lot of work and effort, and activity, and that is sometimes where it is more difficult for some landowners to actually achieve that.”

Government representative
REFERENCES


**Derkzen, P. and Boch, B. (2009).** Partnership and role perception, three case studies on the meaning of being a representative in rural partnerships. Environment and Planning C, 27, 75-89.


“If there is such a thing as innovation, it occurs when groups of people come together who don’t usually come together.”

Community development worker
“…community involvement must be an increasingly important sustainable estates outcome in the future.”

Private estate representative
Working Together for Sustainable Estate Communities

Exploring the potential of collaborative initiatives between privately-owned estates, communities and other partners

Based on results from 'Sustainable Estates for the 21st Century', 2007-2012

‘Sustainable Estates for the 21st Century’ comprised four individual projects that were carried out between 2007 and 2012 by Annie McKee, Jayne Glass, Rob Mc Morran and Pippa Wagstaff. To ensure the practical relevance of the Sustainable Estates research, an Advisory Group helped to design the project.

The five group members represented: Scottish Land & Estates, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Knoydart Foundation, Scottish Environment LINK and the Scottish Government. The Sustainable Estates project was funded by the Henry Angest Foundation and supervised by Professor Martin Price (University of the Highlands and Islands), Dr Charles Warren (University of St Andrews) and Professor Alister Scott (Birmingham City University).

This booklet has been informed in general by the whole Sustainable Estates project and in particular by the study which explored ‘The role of the private landowner in facilitating sustainable rural communities’, carried out by Annie McKee. Detailed results from all of the projects will be published in a book entitled ‘Lairds, Land and Sustainability: Scottish perspectives on upland management’ by Edinburgh University Press.

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Photographs were taken in a range of places across Scotland and are not indicative of case study locations.

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