

Morvern Community Woodlands

Lochaline Community Forest Feasibility Study for Community Ownership & Woodland Crofts

25/05/2025



Aerial image of feasibility study area, with boundary line (courtesy of Bing, 2022)

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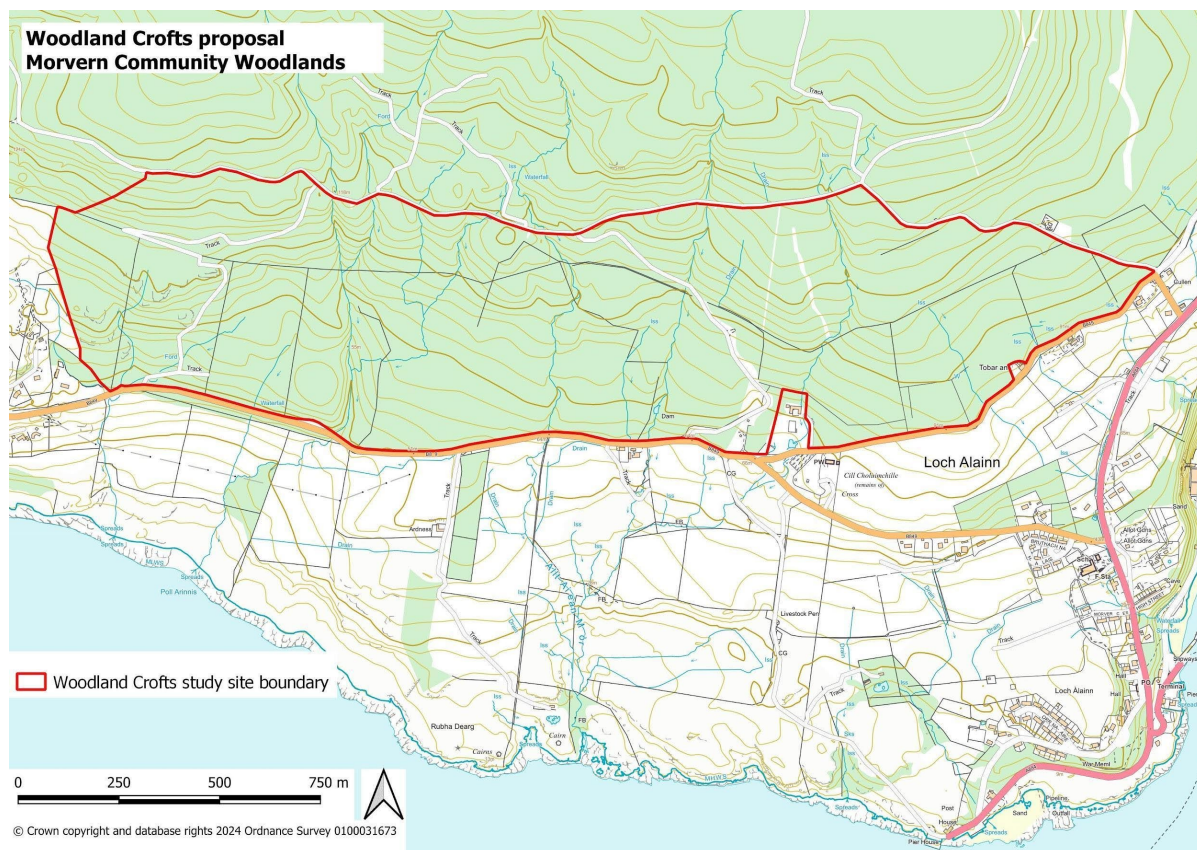
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I Executive Summary



Map I: Lochaline Community Forest study area within the red-line boundary

This feasibility study was commissioned by Morvern Community Woodlands (MCW) to assess the purchase of national estate forestry land by a community body in an area adjacent to Lochaline. In late 2024 MCW commissioned the Community Woodlands Association to undertake the study following a competitive tendering process. It was funded by the Highland Council Community Regeneration Fund.

Under Scottish Government legislation, through the Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS), Forestry & Land Scotland (FLS) will consider any application from a community body to purchase land that they manage. There is a clear process to follow with support provided by the Scottish Land Fund (SLF). SLF is delivered in partnership by The National Lottery Community Fund and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

MCW is following the above approach to deliver key benefits for the Morvern community; notably access to land and livelihoods from the land for local & young families, public access improvements, engagement in woodland management through woodland croft and woodlot enterprises, and by volunteering with MCW. Benefits will also include enhanced amenity by increasing the area of native woodland and hopefully, longer term, reducing the area of clear-felling. This feasibility study aims to inform MCW and the CATS panel of the site constraints and opportunities, benefits and risks associated with this project.

The study site encompasses 130ha of forestry land, with the specific aspiration of establishing woodland crofts on a proportion of the area and managing the remaining area for other community benefits. The site will be known as Lochaline Community Forest.

Following an earlier study of a range of sites on FLS land (McIntyre, 2017) the site was selected due to the number of opportunities it presents. These include:

- proximity to Lochaline village
- proximity to the public road network (B849)
- proximity to power and water services
- potential to improve recreational opportunities for local residents and visitors through the reinstatement of paths which have been lost, and creation of new paths
- south facing site with relatively fertile soils which were cultivated in the past
- a diversity of tree species and age-classes within the forest suitable for a range of forestry activities and management approaches
- opportunities to enhance the forest's diversity and convert areas to native woodland
- opportunities to expand from an adjacent area of high biodiversity rainforest habitat
- opportunities to work with other local community bodies, businesses and an eNGO

Constraints that need to be factored into any business plan for woodland crofts on the site include:

- busy timber haul-road which means access for woodland crofts will need to be taken from new entrances off the B849
- existing domestic water supplies which need to be buffered and protected: connecting the croft sites to the existing water main will be advantageous
- historic features that need to be protected when establishing new development and working areas in the woodland crofts
- clear-felled areas with large stumps, some of which may need to be removed
- financial constraints for crofters in relation to house building due to financial limitations on loans for land under crofting tenure
- financial constraints for crofters in relation to fencing and ground preparation
- planning constraints due to parts of the site being underlain by active and inactive sand mine workings

As a concept, woodland crofts are supported in Scottish and Local Government policies. Another approach to community management of the woodland is to lease an area to be managed by local residents as a 'woodlot'. These and other options for community management of the woodland are deemed feasible on Morvern, given MCW's experience of managing the nearby Achnaha Wood, and the skills and interests embedded in the local community.

There is strong demand for woodland crofts near Lochaline with 17 expressions of interest in the form of draft proposals submitted to MCW at the end of 2024. During the preparation of this report community consultation and other information formed conclusions from all contributors that suggest the following is a feasible and practical way forward for the project:

- MCW applies to purchase almost 96ha of forestry land (Lots 1-4 in the valuation report)
- This includes the tree nursery site leased to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and this will help embed RSPB in the community and provide more opportunities for the community to engage in native woodland restoration.
- The forestry haul roads would remain in the ownership of Forestry and Land Scotland, , because they serve a strategic role in woodland management across several ownerships.
- Within the first 5 years, 6 woodland croft sites would be registered and occupied, covering just over 23ha.
- 28ha would be managed as a woodlot by a local team and this will provide fuel wood and construction timber options for the woodland crofts and wider community, working with and alongside the existing sawmill and firewood supplier in the area.
- The rest of the purchase area would be managed directly by MCW to deliver native woodland restoration, public access routes and opportunities for volunteering and community events.

- MCW staff appointments will be required to support woodland management, fund-raising for implementation of the project and administration of rental agreements.

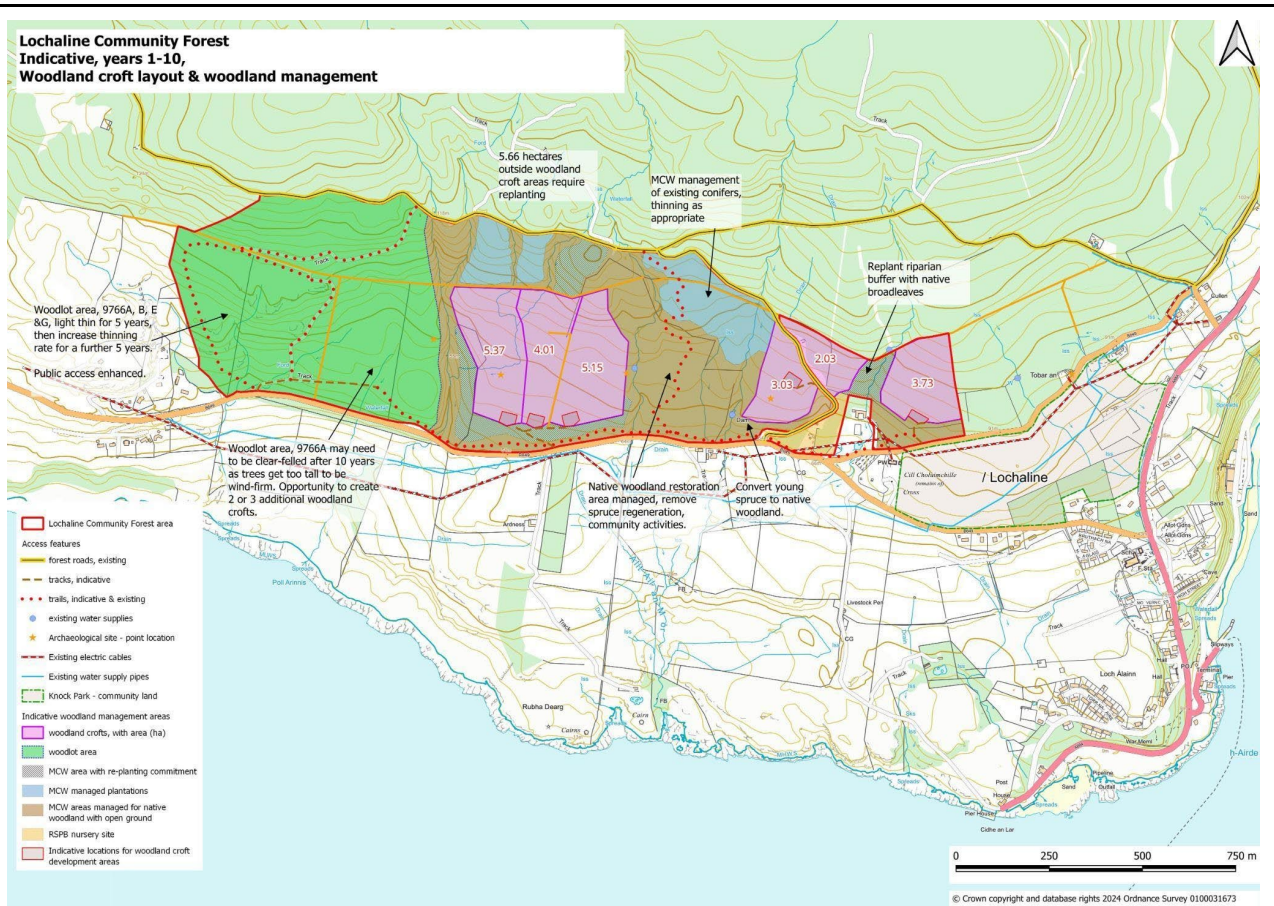
Income to support this community initiative would come from grants - SLF for purchase, forestry grants for woodland management, lottery funds and local community funds for public access developments. MCW revenue would be generated from annual land rents for the woodland crofts with small amounts of revenue initially from woodland thinning and/or woodlot rent. Woodland croft tenants would pay an 'entry fee' to cover any costs associated with setting up and servicing the woodland crofts. Longer-term larger volumes of timber will be sold as existing stands mature and this will help refund any outstanding loans.

The woodland croft sites will need to be serviced by short, new access roads taken off the B849, and in two cases from the forestry haul road. It is reasonable to expect that access to the woodland croft sites will be installed by MCW. Other services for the crofts (electricity, communications and water) will be more appropriately installed by the woodland croft tenants. All of these services lie not too distant just to the South of the woodland. A variation to this arrangement would be if, to support the land purchase, or to optimise the installation of services for the woodland crofts, MCW opts to sell a small number of small house plots for affordable housing. Access creation and servicing costs would then be met by MCW and paid for through the sale of house plots and entry fees for the woodland crofts.

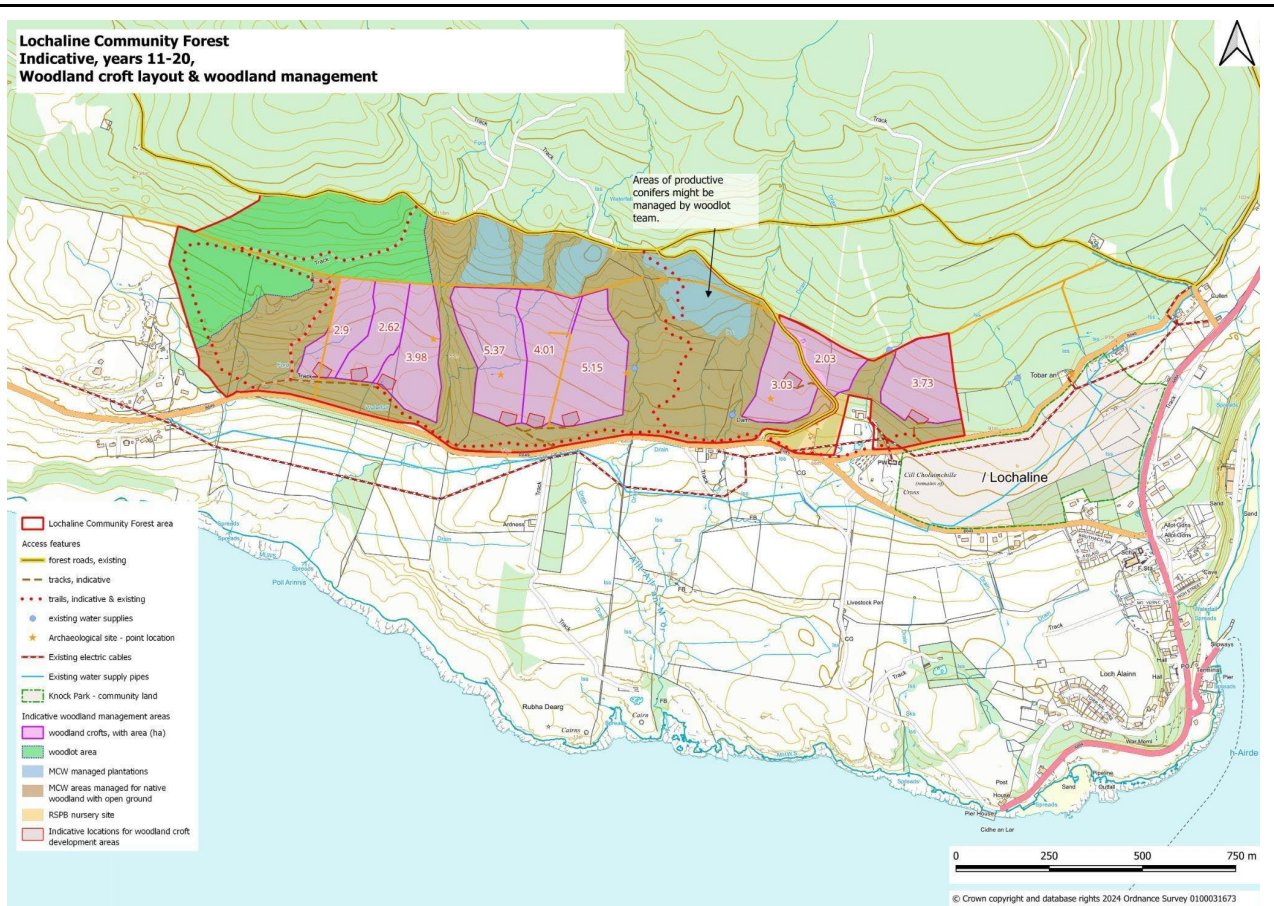
A master-plan for the whole site will support woodland croft planning applications.

A further option that is being considered by MCW is the installation of renewable energy generation capacity in the form of a wind turbine, a solar array and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS). The solar array alone would occupy an area of about 3.7ha, effectively replacing one of the woodland crofts. At this stage this is still a high risk element to the project due to uncertainties about costs and planning permission. In theory renewable energy generation on the site is a viable option and whether it is pursued or not depends on the priorities of MCW.

Woodland crofts in the proposed Lochaline Community Forest are a practical proposition and there is capacity and commitment in the community, as shown in the draft croft plans, and in this report, to make it happen. It will be a challenge to meet the full costs of servicing the woodland crofts, if all the services are required. There will be significant social and economic benefits in having viable, functioning woodland crofts as part of the Lochaline community. There is potential to deliver significant community benefit with respect to delivering public access and native woodland enhancement. In addition local woodland skills and enterprise will be consolidated through the leasing of a woodlot area, that in the future, in part, might be developed as a further 3 woodland crofts.



Map2: Indicative illustration of woodland croft layout and woodland management within years 1-10



Map3: Indicative layout of woodland crofts and woodland management by year 20.

2 Introduction

2.1 Community Woods and Woodland Crofts

A contemporary drive from communities in Scotland to take ownership of land that they depend on has been a reality for several decades and is now embedded in Scottish Government policy, enabled, to some extent by the Land Reform Act which encompasses the Community Right to Buy and the Community Asset Transfer Scheme. Alongside large-scale community land purchases such as North Harris, the Isle of Eigg and Knoydart, several smaller woodland-specific community buy-outs have enabled communities to manage woodlands for community benefit. Some of the woodland purchases have been made by woodland groups established in the community specifically for the purpose, or by the community's development company that has a wider portfolio of responsibilities. In recent years the concept of woodland crofts has become more of a reality and legislation is now in place to enable the formation of woodland crofts within the crofting counties of Scotland, with the same legal rights as agricultural crofts. Woodland crofts, like traditional crofts, can also provide an opportunity to create affordable homes and affordable living in communities where full-time living-wage employment is scarce and house prices and running costs are high. Woodland crofts offer families a chance to settle long-term into a community and build a livelihood based on woodland work and other part-time employment, as might be the case for families living off agricultural crofts. When a croft is created from existing woodland to form a woodland croft, woodland cover must be retained. There is a presumption in national policies against woodland removal, although open space is a necessary and desirable element of a woodland and up to 20% is allowed under forestry regulations.

2.2 Feasibility Study remit and outline

MCW has commissioned the Community Woodlands Association (CWA), working in partnership with Willie McGhee, Jamie McIntyre (Woodland Crofts Partnership) and Rural Design, to produce a comprehensive feasibility study for the establishment of woodland crofts within the proposed Lochaline Community Forest (as outlined in Map1). This would then support an application to the Scottish Land Fund, and Forestry and Land Scotland under the Community Asset Transfer Scheme. The area of interest identified covers approximately 135 hectares in the southern part of Fiunary Forest, to the North of Loch Aline, that is currently managed by Forestry & Land Scotland.

The study will also scope the feasibility of developing other potential community uses and benefits of the study area.

Scoping will require detailed surveys of the woodland and consideration of existing background information to inform a realistic business plan for developing up to 12 to 17 woodland crofts within the project area.

The required outcomes of the study are:

1. Survey data & options analysis reports. (Sections 3-8)
2. Draft feasibility study.
3. Community consultation report. (Section 3.3.4 & 5.2)
4. Final feasibility study, with likely crofts layout and designs.
5. Business plan with all costs, cash flows, funding strategy and implementation/project management plan (Section 9 & 10, Appendix).

2.3 Key outcomes of community ownership¹

This section describes how the project aligns with Scottish Land Fund priorities:

Local communities will achieve more sustainable economic, environmental and/or social development through ownership of forest land.

The focus for Morvern Community's ambitions for woodland crofts is to secure sustainable livelihoods for several families, based on active management of woodland. In an area where rural workers have been priced out of home ownership, creating woodland crofts is also a means by which several families will be able to create affordable homes and contribute to the life of the community. Active management of the woodland crofts and adjacent community woodland will safeguard the natural and recreational environment that is adjacent to Lochaline and in so doing will enhance the value of living and/or working in or visiting the village. Community ownership will ensure that woodland crofts remain actively managed as woodland in perpetuity. Community ownership will allow woodland management to focus much more on the conservation of native species. It will also allow the village to invest more in developing high quality public access through the woods.

The acquisition of the Lochaline Community Forest will enable MCW to generate modest income from crofting rents, with the crofting families generating income from sustainable forest products, be that the sale of logs, agricultural or forest gardening products, or using some of the land to host small-scale woodland-based enterprises. It may include the provision of visitor accommodation for woodland based holidays in the area.

Ownership of the forest will extend MCW's existing management responsibilities but will add experience, skills and knowledge to an already accomplished team. An increased diversity of activity will attract new directors to join the team.

Ownership of the forest resource will build community capacity and resilience, expanding the range of volunteering and employment opportunities, with consequential health and social benefits. Even with the woodland crofts, it will broaden wider community use of the forest by schools, families and individuals. Woodland crofts will enable families and young people to sustain their presence within Lochaline and potentially attract new people to the community.

Our communities will have a stronger role in and control over their own development.

The ownership of Lochaline Community Forest will empower the community to lead and control the development of the woodland and will bring new opportunities for involvement, volunteering and community activities.

Improvements to paths and trails will widen access to the forest, helping to ensure that more of the community can get involved and benefit from visits to the community forest.

The community will contribute to tackling the climate and biodiversity emergencies through environmental improvements in the woodland. Through the various business enterprises of the crofters the community will be made more financially sustainable as a whole and produce more of its own food and fuel.

Our communities own well managed, financially sustainable land and other assets.

¹ This section is intended to demonstrate alignment with the priorities of the Scottish Land Fund

Woodland crofts will provide a basic income for MCW to manage their woodland areas for community benefit. MCW will build on their proven track record of working with the wider community (volunteering & local fund-raising) to implement nature and people friendly woodland management.

MCW will build on their ability to deliver woodland management projects part-financed by national and charitable trust grants.

Woodland crofters will support the management of their woodland holdings by generating income from employment either on or off-site.

3 Community & Policy Background

3.1 National and regional policy

3.1.1 Community Ownership and the National Performance Framework

Community ownership of land and built assets has been encouraged in Scotland by a range of policy initiatives and legislation, and is recognised in the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework² which includes "Increasing the number of land and built assets in community ownership" as an indicator to measure progress against the national outcome "We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe".

Legislation including the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003³, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015⁴ and the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016⁵ have introduced a range of community rights to buy land and other assets; these have been underpinned by the Scottish Land Fund, which has an annual budget of £10 million to provide technical assistance to community bodies and support capital costs (and some revenue costs) of community acquisitions.

3.1.2 Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019–2029

This presents a long-term framework for the expansion and sustainable management of Scotland's forests and woodland. There are three objectives for the next ten years:

- Increase the contribution of forests and woodlands to Scotland's sustainable and inclusive economic growth;
- Improve the resilience of Scotland's forests and woodlands and increase their contribution to a healthy and high-quality environment; and
- Increase the use of Scotland's forest and woodland resources to enable more people to improve their health, well-being and life chances.

The Strategy has 6 priorities, including:

- Enhancing the environmental benefits provided by forests and woodlands;
- Engaging more people, communities and businesses in the creation, management and use of forests and woodlands.

3.1.3 Local Development Plan – Local Place Plan

Consultation on a new local development plan started in September 2024 and is now in its final phase. Establishment of Lochaline Community Forest with the option for woodland crofts is included in the Local Place Plan. The Local Action Plan was completed in 2022 and this document also refers to crofting as well as housing (which was voted as the 2nd most important issue for Morvern⁶).

3.1.4 Highland Forest & Woodland Strategy (2018)

There are 8 complementary themes in the Forest and Woodland Strategy developed for The Highland Council area.

Objectives under the economic development theme include

- Encourage the wider use of local woodfuel in domestic and smaller-scale commercial settings to support the development of the Highland-wide biomass supply chain;

² <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/>

³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2003/2/contents>

⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/6/contents>

⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2016/18/contents>

⁶ <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://morvern.org/sites/mcdc/files/basic-documents/Live%2520Life%2520Morvern%2520Action%2520Plan%2520FINAL%2520June%25202022-compressed.pdf&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1740739271717090&usg=AOvVaw2MwRGUyApVw0HDynkjZIN>

- Encourage a cooperative approach to the sustainable management of small woodlands under multiple ownership.
- Support the development of local hard wood products;

Objectives within the Community Empowerment theme include:

- Continue to support asset transfer, community woodland ownership and management within Highland;
- Encourage community owned wood-related energy projects in woodlands;
- Encourage and promote community led affordable housing within appropriate woodland settings as described in The Highland's Council Trees, Woodland & Development Supplementary Guidance;
- Support accessible access and recreational facilities, local employment, rural skills and community energy projects;
- Opportunities for the creation of new woodland crofts and woodland crofting communities should be identified in order to encourage a locally focused approach to forestry which delivers benefits to local and often remote communities.

Within the Community Engagement & Empowerment theme the following clauses are relevant:

4.33 Woodlands help foster community cohesion by creating a sense of place, connecting individuals and communities with their local identity, land and cultural heritage and help retain and support rural populations in fragile communities.

4.34 Forestry has also been shown to be an effective catalyst in community capacity building by providing opportunities for community ownership of woodlands that empowers communities to contribute directly to achieving locally relevant sustainable rural development, environmental, biodiversity, recreational and health benefits.

In relation to development planning, the following clause is relevant:

4.63 Scottish Planning Policy (SPP), the Highland-wide Local Development Plan and Trees, Woodlands and Development Supplementary Guidance will be used to guide development where it may impact on trees and woodlands. Scottish Government policy on the Control of Woodland Removal will be a consideration where proposals involve a permanent change in land use resulting in a net loss of woodland.

Section 3.2 of the supplementary planning guidance states:

Developments Designed to Co-Exist with Existing Woodland: The Highland Council has a strong presumption in favour of protecting its woodland resource. Development proposals within existing woodland will only be supported on a suitable site where the development and the woodland will co-exist to provide mutual benefits, and where a clear and significant public benefit can be demonstrated.

Section 2.6 British Standard 5837:2012 (Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction) is the industry standard concerning trees and development. The standard provides recommendations on the principles to be applied to achieve a satisfactory relationship between trees and new development. The Planning Authority will normally expect all planning applications involving trees to comply with BS5837:2012. The amount of information required will be at the discretion of the Planning Authority depending on the scale of development and sensitivity of the site.

3.1.5 Woodland Crofts

The Woodland Crofts Partnership⁷ (WCP) defines a woodland croft as ‘a registered croft with sufficient tree cover to be considered a woodland under UK forestry policy’. While it is useful to be able to distinguish woodland crofts from ‘traditional’ ones, and indeed from conventional models of forestry, it is important to note that this definition is descriptive rather than legal – in law a woodland croft is simply a croft like any other.

Accordingly, many of the benefits of woodland crofts to both crofters and their communities are similar to the benefits delivered by traditional crofting. For communities, these include retaining population, contributing to sensitive land management, providing economic opportunities and building resilience, including to emerging threats such as pandemics and climate change.

For individual crofters, a croft can provide a place to live and a site for a business, an opportunity to contribute to their household needs in food and fuel, and crucially, security of tenure. Crofting provides a regulated framework which provides certainty as to the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved.

Woodland crofts themselves provide access to woodland for the crofter, to manage in support of their lifestyles and/or livelihoods. This is a significant and rare opportunity given the concentration of forest ownership in Scotland, in contrast with the situation in most other countries. There are also minimal opportunities to lease woodland, and taken together these factors mean that woodland management is currently a minority, generally professional, activity. As a result the ‘forest culture’ common in many parts of the world has died out here – woodland crofting provides an opportunity to revive it.

Crofting is regulated by the Crofting Commission according to crofting law, which involves a combination of rights and responsibilities for crofters. As well as the security of tenure mentioned already, other rights include the right of succession, the right to a fair rent and the right to compensation for improvements. Key responsibilities include the requirement to reside on or within 32km of the croft, to cultivate the croft or put it to other ‘purposeful use’, and an obligation not to misuse or neglect the croft. Importantly, cultivation is defined to include “the planting of trees and use of the land as woodlands” thereby enabling woodland crofts and other forms of crofter forestry.

The woodland aspects of a woodland croft are regulated by Scottish Forestry, just like any other woodland; there is nothing unique about a woodland croft in this respect. Forestry regulation is based on a system of grants and licences, and includes a presumption against woodland removal – new or existing woodlands cannot generally be converted to another land use. It is the use of the land that is important here, not the presence of (mature) trees – so both a newly planted site and a harvested area are both ‘woodland’ despite having no established trees on them.

3.2 Morvern

Morvern is a peninsula on the west coast of Highland Scotland, covering some 200 square miles (520 sq km). It is bounded by the Sound of Mull to the south and west, Loch Sunart and Glen Tarbert to the north and Loch Linnhe to the East. Land ownership is largely held in large estates, e.g. Forestry and Land Scotland (5,900ha), Ardtornish Estate (14,150ha), Drimnin Estate (2,800ha).

7

An informal partnership between the Scottish Crofting Federation, the Community Woodlands Association, the Communities Housing Trust and Woodland Trust Scotland which seeks to promote & develop woodland crofting [Woodland Crofts | Supporting Lives & Livelihoods through Managing Woodland](#)

It is also the location for RSPB's Glencripesdale reserve (614ha) and Scottish Wildlife Trust's Rahoy Hills reserve (1,691ha). Morvern is a focus area for the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest which is made up of several government agencies and NGOs.

The resident population is largely scattered around the seaboard rather than inland with two main population centres at Drimnin and Lochaline, but it is Lochaline (Scottish Gaelic: Loch Àlainn) that is the community hub for the peninsula. The coastal village is situated at the mouth of Loch Aline, on the northern shore of the Sound of Mull.



Map 2: Ardness Wood location

3.2.1 Demographics

The population of Lochaline is approximately 200 (Wikipedia reference to NRS 2016) with a wider Morvern population estimate of 320.

3.2.2 Economy

Forestry forms a significant part of the land-use on Morvern but contributes relatively little to the economy as nearly all forest workers come from elsewhere and the timber is processed elsewhere. Forestry & Land Scotland manage close to 5,900 hectares in the Morvern area. Other private estates such as Ardtornish also contribute to the productive area of forestry.

One local resident operates a part-time sawmill business. Another resident runs a wood-fuel business, supplying logs and kindling locally as well as further afield.

Tourism is a main income generator for Morvern. Family businesses as well as the large estates provide accommodation. Some of the estates focus on recreational hunting for a small part of the year.

A silica sand mine in Lochaline started operations in 1940. It was opened to replace sources of silica lost at the onset of World War II. A source was needed for the manufacture of optical quality glass. In 2008 the mine closed, but reopened again in 2012. The operating company Lochaline Quartz Sand Ltd, is a joint venture between the Italian mining company Minerali Industriali and glass manufacturer NSG.

The Glensanda super quarry has minimal economic impact on the rest of Morvern, being accessed from Loch Linnhe.

The Nc'nean distillery operates from Drimnin.

A CalMac ferry operates between Lochaline and Fishnish on Mull.

The village's facilities include a grocery shop, post office, petrol station, hotel, restaurant, social club, marina, snack bar and public conveniences.

3.2.3 Live Life Morvern (Local Action Plan) 2022 & Local Place Plan 2024

Morvern's Local Action Plan, Live Life Morvern, was completed in 2022 after consultations in 2020 and 2021⁸. Since then various local organisations have worked together with Planning Aid Scotland to create a Local Place Plan⁹. This has included public engagements in July 2024, the submission of proposals from local groups, companies and landowners and further public consultation in November 2024. Morvern Community Council embarked on this project as a response to the community's desire to take more ownership and be more involved in future development on the peninsula and to ensure the community has some control on development and can steer proposals in a way that benefits the whole community.

The proposed acquisition of Lochaline Community Forest is included in the Local Place Plan with the purpose of addressing the following community needs:

- Enhanced path networks within walking distance of Lochaline.
- Improved visual landscape of woodland close to Lochaline.
- Reinstatement of the crofting culture in Morvern: There are certain economic advantages only available to registered crofts, they can improve access to affordable homes and they support sustainable livelihoods. There are currently only five registered crofts in Morvern.
- Community access to woodlots to help sustain rural living, e.g. harvesting firewood.
- Retention of young families in the community to improve the population spread and school roll.
- Access to additional community land that could offer alternative sites for renewable energy generation.

Suggested projects that might impact on how woodland crofts in the community forest are developed include:

- Work & Storage Units at Knock Park.
- Renovation of the West Pier to facilitate future timber transport to a wider range of markets.
- Motorhome/campervan aire at Knock Park.

⁸ <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://morvern.org/sites/mcdc/files/basic-documents/Live%20Life%20Morvern%20Action%20Plan%20FINAL%20June%202022-compressed.pdf&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1740739271719092&usg=AOvVawIMRfCSZALAnp2GGQkfnoNL>

⁹ <https://www.pas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Draft-Local-Place-Plan-and-Proposals.pdf>

- Public access path around Knock Park
- Improved public access routes on Morvern in general to facilitate sustainable travel between communities and enhance experiences and opportunities for visitors.
- Development of appropriate housing stock. 10 affordable homes have now received Planning Permission in Principle. The application can be viewed on The Highland Council Planning website with the following reference: 23/03950/FUL - Erection of 10 dwellings - Land 70M East Of Dunaline Lochaline Morvern.

3.2.4 Morvern Community Development Company

On behalf of the Morvern community, Morvern Community Development Company own and manage the fuel pumps in the village, a community electric car, ebikes, Lochaline Harbour, Lochaline Business Hub, three one-bedroom houses at Miners' Court and Barr Hydro which is one of the largest community owned hydro schemes in the UK. The Hydro scheme is operated by an MCDC subsidiary Morvolts.

3.2.5 Community facilities and activities

Alongside Morvern Community Development Company, various community groups manage and own land and assets on behalf of the wider community. Knock Park has recently come under community ownership under the management of the Morvern Games and Gala Committee. Morvern Community Woodlands have owned and managed Achnaha Community Woodland on behalf of the community since 2014 and host various activities there throughout the year. Lochaline Village Hall and Drimnin Village Hall both hold numerous community events throughout the year and are available to hire. CLAM (Community Land Association Morvern) runs the allotments, including their own pizza oven. The local Gaelic Choir, Burach, have achieved national success at the Royal National Mod. Morvern Heritage Society hosts talks and walks throughout the year and are currently converting the phone box in Larachbeag into a St Kilda Museum to commemorate the St Kildans who were evacuated to Morvern in 1930.

Caolas is the Community Association of Lochs and Sounds and was set up to raise awareness of marine conservation issues and recently has initiated a project to re-introduce native oysters to Loch Aline.

The Morvern Community Trust was established in 2009 to provide for Community Benefit in the area of Morvern Community Council. The Trust Deed specifies the purposes of the benefit which may be summarised in four main areas: Community Benefit and Enterprise, Education and Formation, Health and Welfare, Culture, Sport and Recreation.

3.2.6 Local schools and services

Lochaline Primary School (rated Excellent by Ofstead in 2019) was built on the site of the old school and opened in 2013 alongside a brand-new fire station. The school roll was 10 in 2021/22, with 4 in the nursery, and currently has 8 in the primary classes and 8 in the nursery¹⁰. In the 1970's the school roll was 64.

3.2.7 Outdoor Recreation

Walking trails: The area around the village has several walking paths. These include the coastal walks (the Kinlochaline Low Road and Ardtornish Castle Walk) along the shores of Loch Aline and forest paths and roads within Fiunary Forest.

¹⁰ [Lochaline Primary School, Gaelic Medium Education Promotional Video](#)

Water sports: Alongside the community-run marina and moorings, there is a small and active water sports club which facilitates a range of activities from sailing tuition to skiff building and rowing and open-water swimming. Lochaline is also on the Scottish Wildlife Trust snorkel trail.

3.2.8 Transport

There is essentially one public road in and out of Morvern, and also the option to travel South via Mull on the Lochaline-Fishnish ferry.

Shiel Busses operates a service, once a day from Fort William, and one additional service from Ardnamurchan High School (Strontian).

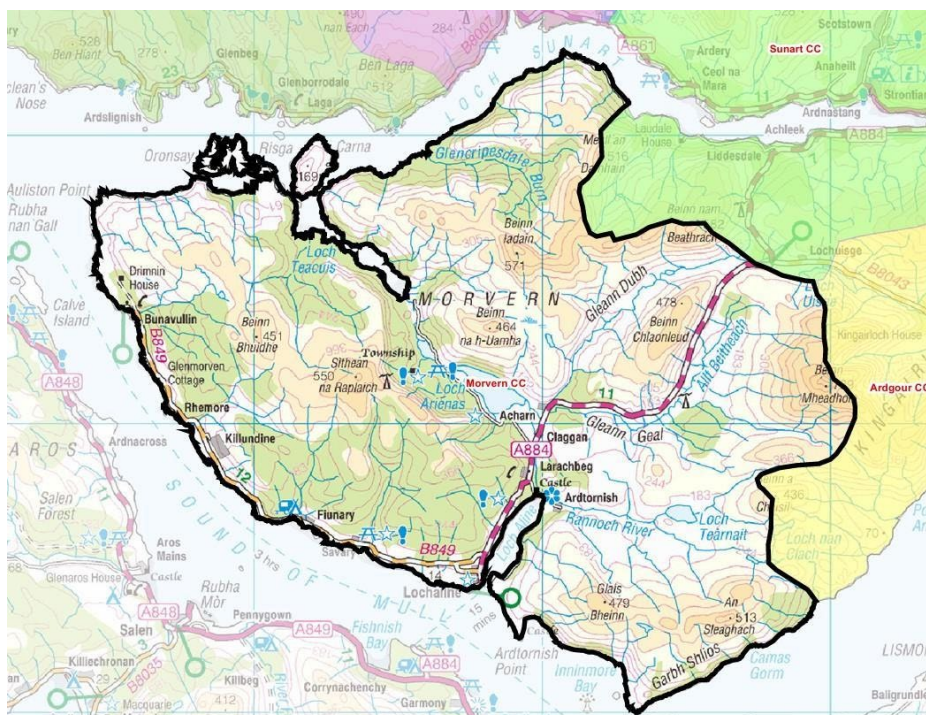
3.3 Morvern Community Woodlands

3.3.1 Organisation structure

Morvern Community Woodlands (MCW) was set up in 2004 to help the people of Morvern connect to their land and to encourage the enjoyment and use of woodland and timber in Morvern. MCW is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity with over 120 members from the local community. It is run by a board of volunteer directors. drawn from this membership.

3.3.2 Assets and activity

In 2014, Morvern Community Woodlands purchased Achnaha Wood (3 miles West of Lochaline) from Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS - now Forestry & Land Scotland (FLS)) with help from the National Forest Land Scheme and generous donations from local people. Previously, a management agreement with FCS had enabled MCW to undertake work in the woods: clearing rhododendron (which previously occupied more than a quarter of the wood); building new paths; and constructing a woodland shelter.



Map 3: Morvern Community Council area. MCW membership is defined by postcode and also includes areas of the Morvern peninsula that lie within Sunart Community Council (green) and Ardgour Community Council (purple) - see also Community Right to Buy¹¹

¹¹ From <https://crtb.sedsh.gov.uk/crtb/>

3.3.3 *Objects and Action*

Following community consultation in 2021 the directors agreed the following priorities for MCW:

- **Achnaha Woods:** MCW will focus on maintaining and improving the path infrastructure, buildings and silvicultural management.
- **Education and training in woodland-related skills:** MCW will identify and support opportunities for encouraging the nursery and school groups to use the woods and look for additional opportunities.
- **Support woodland protection and expansion in Morvern:** MCW will raise awareness of the amazing woods on the peninsula and look for ways to support their protection, working with other community groups and landowners.
- **Support provision of access to woodland in Morvern:** MCW will look for ways to maintain and improve the path network in Morvern, working with other community groups and landowners.
- **Focus on the essential tools we own and sell items that are not useful for the core aims:** MCW own some heavy machinery, specifically a forestry alpine tractor, a grapple loader and a mobile sawmill. The tractor and grapple loader require special training and certification to use, which has a cost they have not been able to find funding for. MCW will sell this equipment, locally if possible, to members of the community who will be able to use it on their own woodland projects.
- **Continue with existing events and support other events in the woods:** MCW will continue to organise the annual pensioners' firewood and Easter egg hunt in the woods and facilitate the use of the woods for other events.

In addition MCW commissioned the Woodland Crofts Partnership to carry out an initial high-level scoping exercise into the potential for woodland crofts in Morvern and this was completed in 2017

In 2023, due to the increasing interest locally in woodland crofts, MCW revisited the original scoping survey, started to explore the process by which woodland crofts are created and commenced the preliminary stages of planning and gauging interest for the creation of woodland crofts within Morvern. They were also awarded a Community Asset Knowledge Exchange grant in 2023 and visited three different woodland croft sites at Kilfinnan and north west and south west Mull.

3.3.4 *Community communications & consultation to date*

An initial meeting in relation to woodland crofts was held on the evening of the 21st of November 2023 in Lochaline Community Hub with people within the community who were interested in taking on a woodland croft. The attendance was significantly greater than expected and MCW now has over 30, predominantly local, parties interested in taking on a woodland croft for a variety of uses.

In September 2024 there were open consultations by FLS on the Morvern Land Management Plan and the Morvern Local Place Plan, both of which made reference to the possibility of establishing woodland crofts within a community forest area north of Lochaline and Ardness.

In preparing this draft of the feasibility plan, every attempt has been made to talk with neighbours adjacent to 'Ardness Wood', especially those that draw water from the site. A 'drop-in' consultation event to present the woodland crofts and Lochaline Community Forest project proposals was held on Tuesday 25th March, 2025. Feedback from this event and online responses, along with other conversations with stakeholders is summarised below.

Twenty One (21) people attended the drop-in event and Thirteen (13) individuals submitted online responses (all of them Morvern residents). 62% of responses are supportive of the project, convinced it will contribute positively towards young families being able to stay in the area, engage

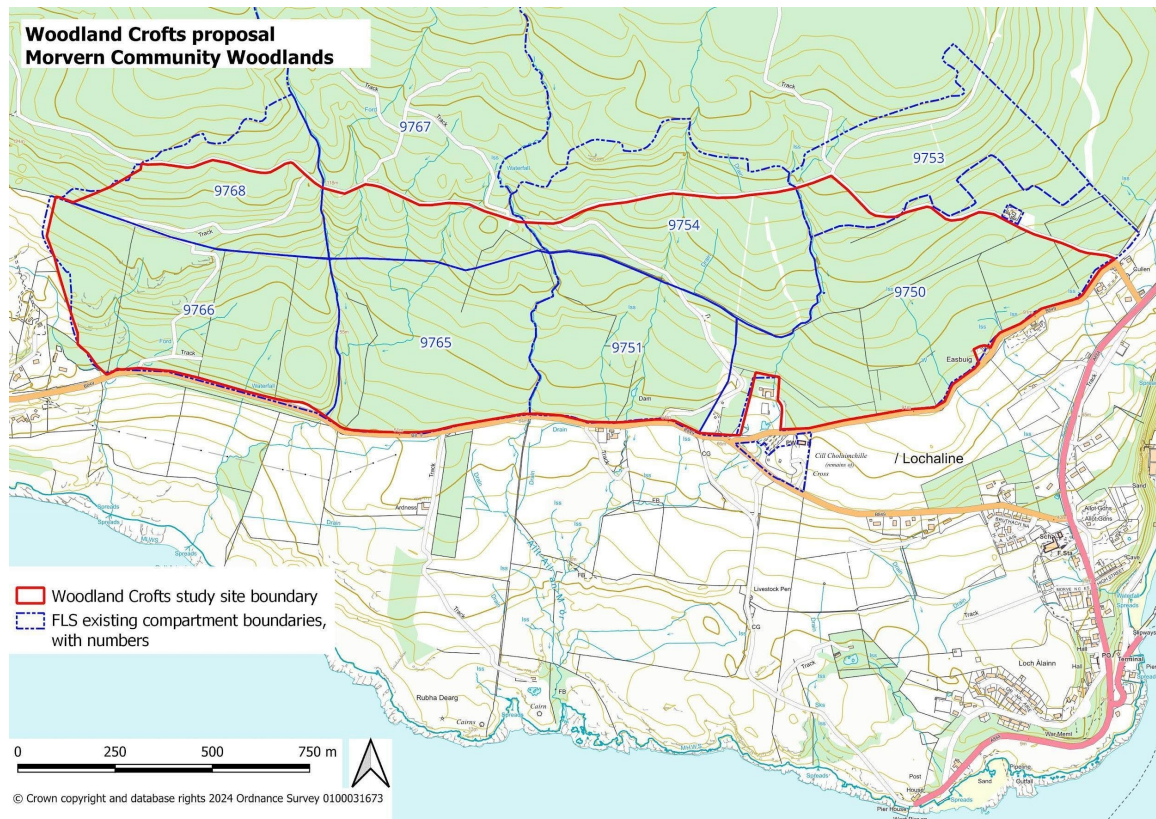
in land management and that the project will yield environmental and public recreation benefits. The following reservations or issues have been raised:

- Loss of amenity value due to development and low management standards.
- The high cost of servicing woodland croft sites and developing the woodland crofts might not lead to affordable homes, or they will only be affordable with significant input of public funds.
- Is a transfer in ownership necessary? Can FLS establish woodland crofts?
- The woodland is great the way it is and woodland crofts might be an unnecessary intrusion.
- More detail is required on how the existing water supplies will be protected.
- MCW might not have the capacity and skills to develop and manage such a large project.
- Will woodland croft allocation and the resolution of conflicts be managed fairly and transparently?
- Woodland croft allocation will always be subjective and involve bias and may add to existing community conflicts.
- Running holiday lets, even pods or small cabins, is not compatible with the principle of a woodland croft enterprise.
- It would be better to ensure that the existing community enterprises are working well before starting another one.
- Community ownership needs to enhance community access to recreation facilities.
- There will be a need for parking to facilitate access to woodland walks.
- There needs to be greater focus on wildlife corridors and restoration of native habitats.
- The Achabeag water supply is insufficient to supply the woodland crofts as well.
- MCW needs to be strong enough and have fair processes in place in order to evict tenants who can not comply with the management requirements of a woodland croft.

4 Background Information – Site Assessment

4.1 Lochaline Community Forest

The woodland crofts feasibility study site covers 135 ha of plantation woodland on the southern edge of Fiunary Forest. The centre of the study area is within 2km of the village of Lochaline, north of Ardness and Struthan House, wrapping around Kiel House and South of the forestry haul road that connects woodlands to the West with the A884. In the Local Place Plan it is referred to as Lochaline Community Forest.

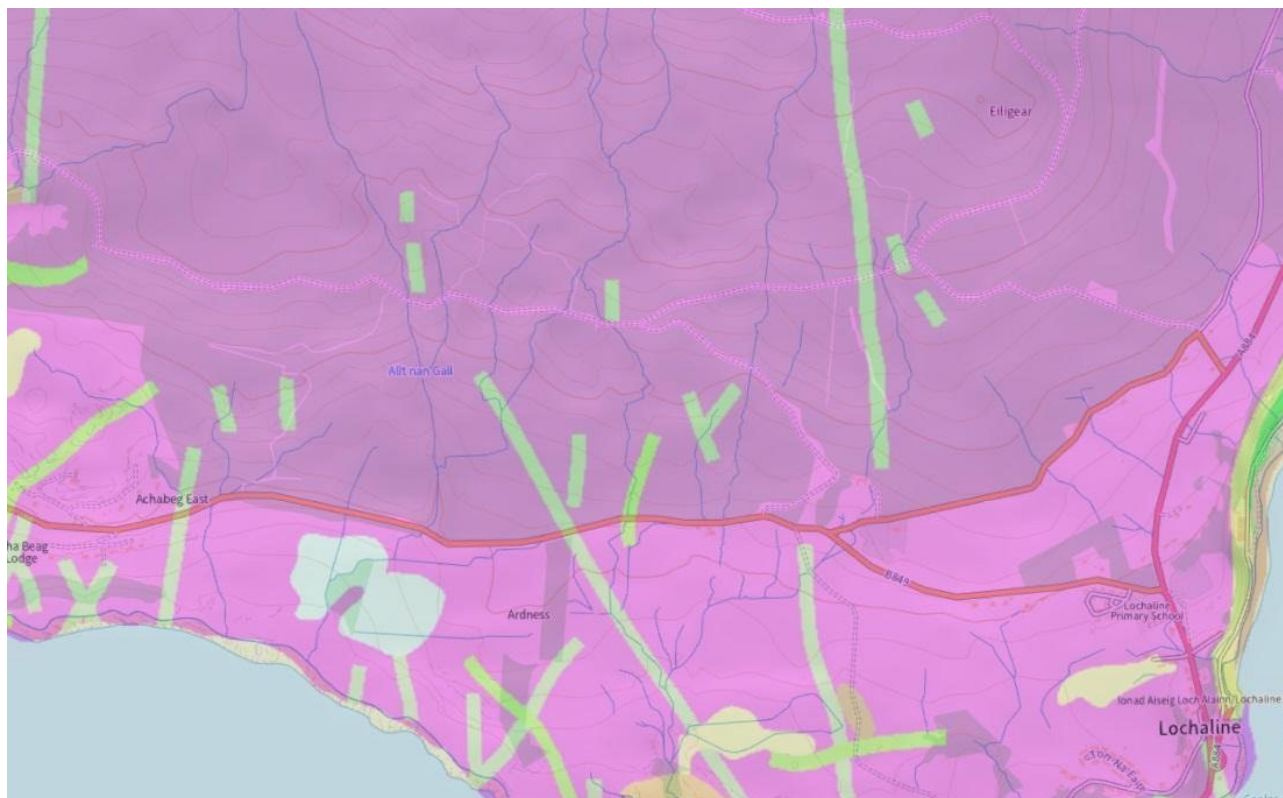


Map 4: Site map – with existing compartment boundaries and numbers for reference

4.2 Ownership and management history

The study area is owned by Scottish Ministers and managed by Forestry & Land Scotland (FLS). It is included as an integral part of the Morvern Land Management Plan. Within this wider area planting started pre-1940, establishing conifer timber crops (predominantly Sitka spruce and Lodgepole pine) on moorland and agricultural land, including areas of townships cleared in the 19th Century. The plantations have largely been managed by clear-felling and replanting with high yielding timber species (predominantly Sitka spruce). Some of the planting areas were deer-fenced but most of the fencing is now redundant and shooting is the primary means of controlling deer numbers. Some of the Lochline stands have been thinned and there has been recent felling to remove stands of larch infected by *Phytophthora ramorum* along with adjacent mature spruce. Several neighbouring houses still draw their water supplies from burns running through the woodland.

4.3 Geology



Map 5: Geology¹²

Underlying bedrock: Mull Lava Group - Basalt. Igneous bedrock formed between 66 and 56 million years ago during the Palaeogene period (pink).

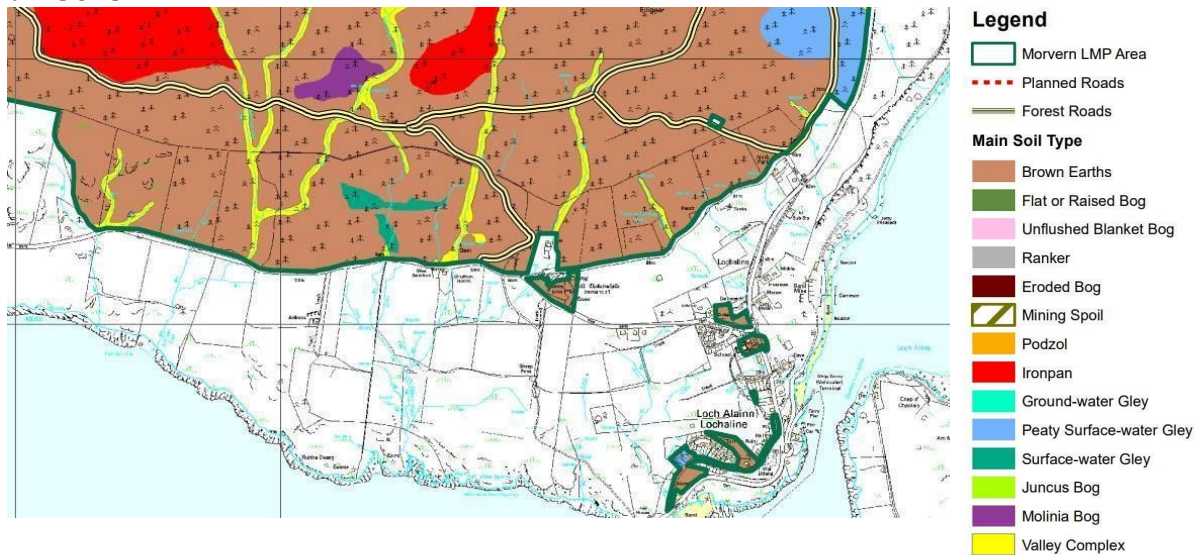
North Britain Palaeogene Dyke Suite - Microgabbro and basalt. Igneous bedrock formed between 66 and 23.03 million years ago during the Palaeogene period (pale green bands).

Underlying the basalt covering, that was deposited by the Mull volcano, is a silica-quartz sandstone that formed in the middle of the Cretaceous period approximately 93 million years ago. Minerals eroding from the Scottish landmass were deposited on the shore of a tropical sea on Jurassic shales and limestones, at the same time the chalk cliffs of Dover were forming. Frequent changes to sea level reworked the sandy sediment. Natural winnowing processes sorted the quartz from other minerals, separating grains of similar size. The resulting white sandstone is now being mined and sold to make high quality glass. Mine workings underlie the portion of the study area that is more than 250m East of Kiel House. There is little chance of subsidence or other impact from the workings due to the mass of basalt sitting on top of the mines.

The area is designated as Carbon and Peatland Class 0 which would not preclude housing development. (Source: National Soil Map of Scotland: Carbon and peatland 2016 map)

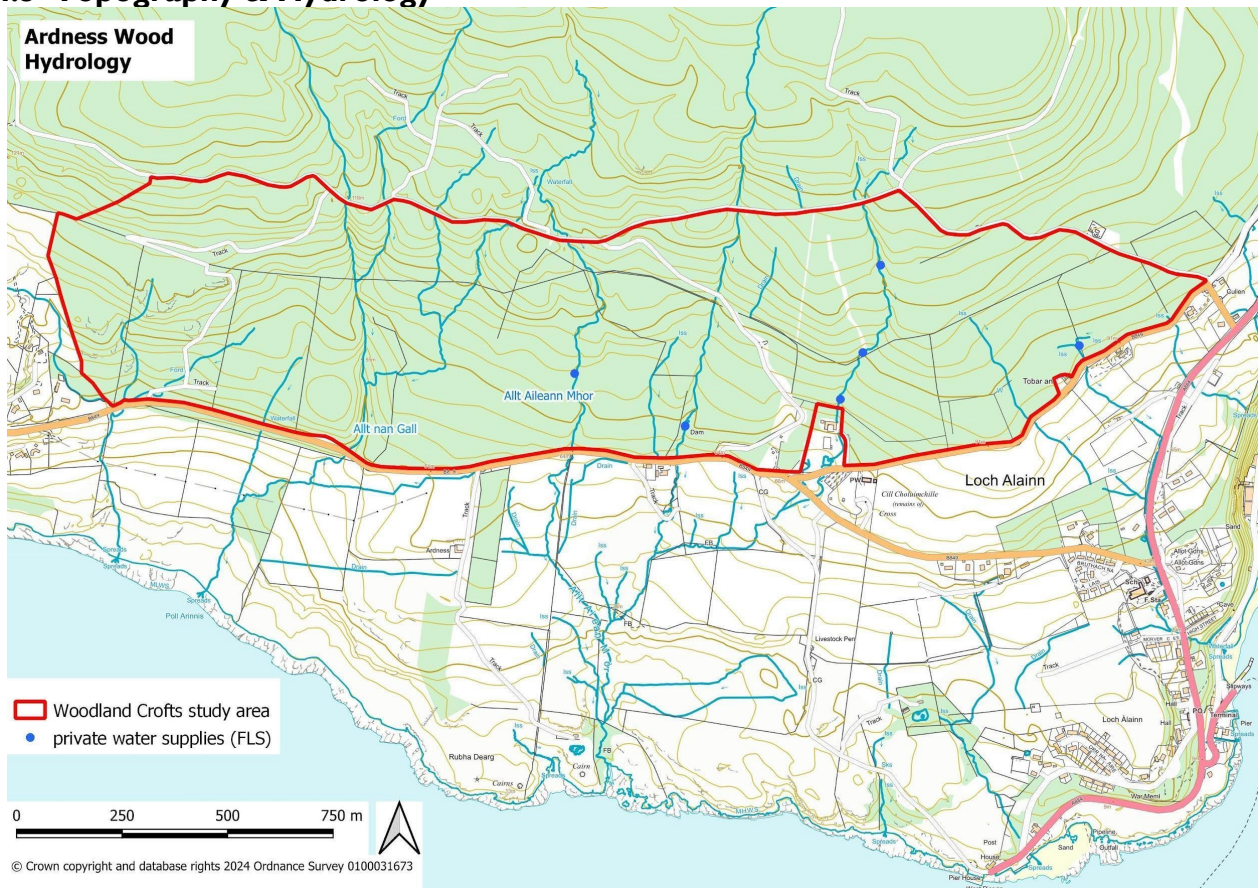
¹² From British Geological Survey mapviewer <https://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html?>

4.4 Soils



Map 6: Soils¹³

4.5 Topography & Hydrology



Map 7: Hydrology

The whole of the site is on a South-facing bank and all of the burns running from or through the site flow fairly directly into the Sound of Mull or Loch Alinne. There is relatively little artificial drainage or manipulation of the water courses. The most significant burn is the Allt Aileann Mhor that runs through the study site, gathering two tributaries, then flows through less than a kilometre

¹³ From Forestry & Land Scotland – Morvern Land Management Plan

of farmland/rough grazing before entering the Sound of Mull. At the east end of the woodland, a couple of small issues merge into a small burn that flows into the village of Loch Alainn. This burn is not known to cause any problems when in spate.

4.6 Environmental Site Classification

The Environmental Site Classification tool¹⁴ produced by Forest Research aids analysis and tree-planting species choice. The results for Lochaline Community Forest are:

Site description:

The site has a warm, highly exposed and moist climate. Exposure constraints may limit species options and the ability to thin woodlands without significant risk of windthrow. The area is coastal (within 3km of sea) so certain species may experience saltburn, a protective belt comprising one or more of Sycamore, Sitka spruce or Lodgepole pine may mitigate those effects. The soils are fresh moisture status and medium nutrient status. Tree species recommendations in ESC do not take account of each country's regulatory approval process, so prior to including species in a forest plan advice should be sought from relevant forestry authorities.

The site is suitable for a wide range of species, but the site exposure to wind restricts recommendations for many species that might otherwise be considered suitable for a mild site with good soils.

4.7 Fauna

Red and roe deer are present on site. Observations during the preparation of this report suggest that red deer trails and wallows are not difficult to find and there is heavy browsing on some of the Himalayan honeysuckle bushes.

Red squirrels were reintroduced to Morvern in 2022, with a further, smaller reintroduction in 2024. They have been seen recently in the Lochaline woodland area.

4.8 Flora

Wherever the canopy is not dominated by Sitka spruce, the ground flora is dominated by bracken and brambles on the better soils, and heather and brambles on poorer soils. Rosebay willowherb is well established and a dominant plant in many of the re-planting areas. Gorse forms a shrub layer in some open areas. Both purple moor grass and tufted hair grass are locally dominant; indicating wetter soils.

Invasive non-native species include Himalayan honeysuckle (*Leycesteria formosa*). *Rhododendron ponticum* is not extensive and was rarely found in surveys for this study. Different species of *Cotoneaster* can be found quite extensively through the area. *Fuchsia* has expanded into the woodland in localised places from adjacent gardens. *Buddleia* is less common.

Tree species

The predominant planted tree species is Sitka spruce, some of it now well into its second rotation. Elements of larch (Japanese, European and hybrid), Norway spruce, open ground and planted broadleaves interrupt the dominance of Sitka spruce. Some lodgepole pine remains from the first rotation of planted conifers. There are two small stands of an unidentified spruce, one forming a shelter belt on the west side of Keil house garden, the other close to the B849 nearer to Knock.

Planted broadleaves include aspen, sessile oak, wych elm, ash, birch, a non-native alder, sycamore and beech, which seems to be a dominant roadside tree along the B849.

¹⁴ <http://www.forestdss.org.uk/geoforestdss/>

Sitka spruce, sycamore and beech are self-seeding into clearings.

Ash is being infected by Chalara dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) and the planted wych elm has been badly stripped of bark by deer. Dutch elm disease is not known to be prevalent in the area yet.

Within the gullies there is natural regeneration of hazel, alder, rowan and eared willow.

4.9 Environmental Designations

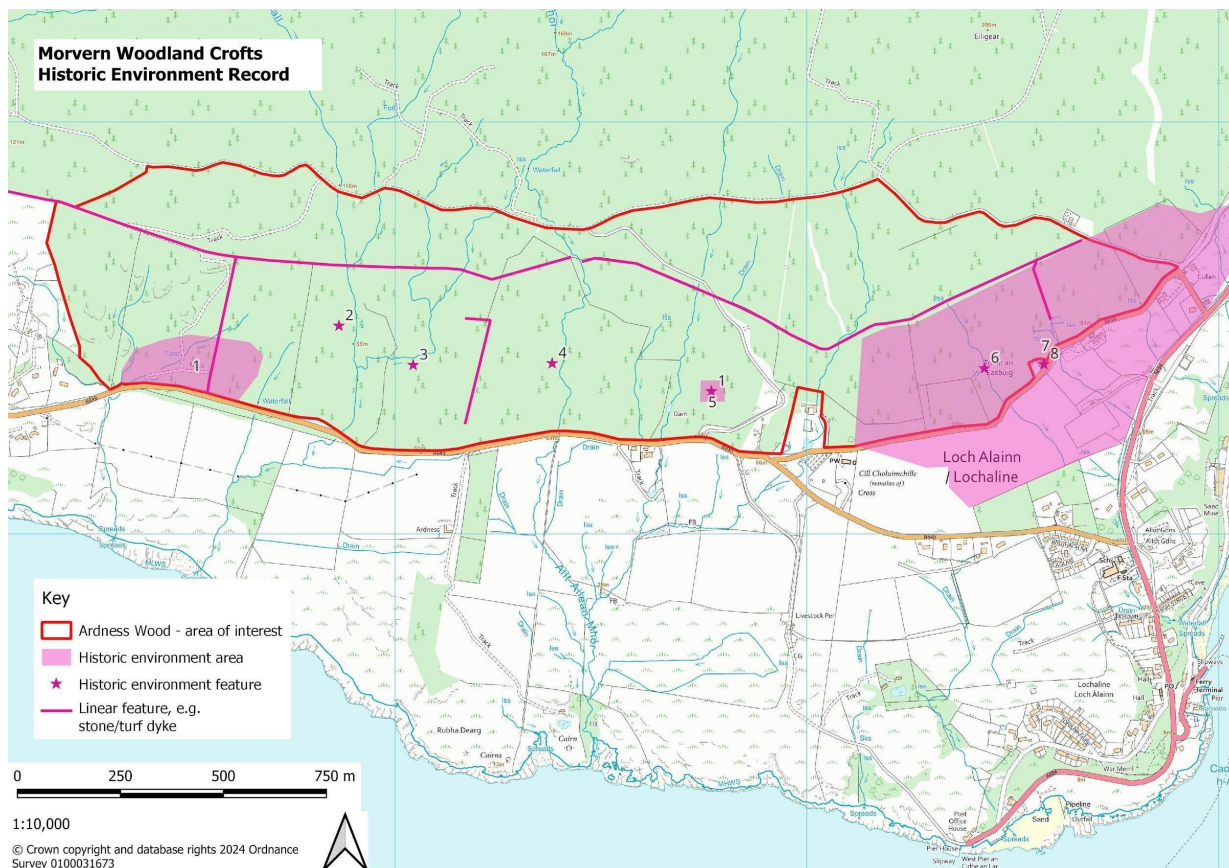
There are no environmental designations that overlap with the Lochaline Community Forest site.

4.10 Ancient / Native Woodland

The ancient woodland inventory for Scotland does not show any records for the study area.

4.11 Historic Environment

The current list of records that relate to the Community Forest study area is as follows:



Map 8: Historic environment – Canmore/Pastmap data

The numbered list below corresponds to the numbering on the map

- 1 Achabeg – township - period unassigned – ref Canmore 79962 – NM 654 454 - Outlines of 6 houses, occupied by 1755, when there were other houses at NM 656 456. There were 10 houses in the mid-19th century which were cleared in 1865.
- 2 Allt Nan Gall – building - period unassigned – ref Canmore 151984 - One unroofed building is depicted on the 1st edition of the OS 6-inch map (Argyllshire, Island of Mull 1880, sheet lxx), but it is not currently shown.
- 3 Allt Nan Gall – farmstead – period unassigned – ref Canmore 152151 - A farmstead comprising one unroofed building and one enclosure is depicted on the 1st edition of

- the OS 6-inch map (Argyllshire, Island of Mull 1880, sheet lxx), but it is not currently shown.
- 4 Allt Ailean Mhor – farmstead – period unassigned – ref Canmore I52025 - A farmstead comprising two unroofed buildings and one roofed building is depicted on the 1st edition of the OS 6-inch map (Argyllshire, Island of Mull 1880, sheet lxx), but it is not currently shown.
 - 5 Kiel 'Tigh An Easbuig' (aka The Bishop's House) – possible corn drying kiln, 18th Century dwelling, house & outbuilding (period unassigned) – ref Canmore 79963 - The turf-covered footings of this structure, situated in Forestry Commission woodland some 260m W of Kiel farmhouse, indicate a rectangular building measuring 11m by 5.8m over 0.9m walls, with an adjacent enclosure measuring 16.8m by 15.5m. The local name means 'the Bishop's House', a term which probably derives from Mr Hector MacLean, minister of Morvern from 1639 to 1679 and bishop of Argyll from 1680 to 1687. A member of the family that occupied the adjacent farm of Knock, he is on record in 1671 as tacksman of Kiel.¹⁵
 - 6 Tobar An Easbuig, Knock – Well - period unassigned - Ref Canmore 79960 - Now the water supply for Tighachroic. The name is known locally, but there is no recorded tradition of a holy well.
 - 7 Knock – possible township – period unassigned – Ref Canmore 79974 – centred on NM 675 454, extending SW are the markings of many early works. Occupied by 1755, cleared 1865. What may be a township comprising thirteen unroofed buildings, three of which are long buildings, one partially roofed building, three roofed buildings and six enclosures is depicted on the 1st edition of the OS 6-inch map (Argyllshire, Island of Mull 1880, sheet lxx). Five roofed buildings and seven enclosures are shown on the OS 1:10000 map (1975).
 - 8 Knock – cottage – period unassigned – ref Canmore I78629

Although some of the linear features mapped by the Ordnance Survey are revealed in site visits as fence lines, others are more historic stone-constructed field boundaries. All are being consumed by the plantation, although even under 2nd rotation woodland the lines of stones are apparent. They reflect past use of much of the area for agriculture; latterly probably as grazing land. Not all old field boundaries or enclosure boundaries have been mapped and more detailed surveys before further harvesting or woodland croft development would be justified.

4.12 Wayleaves & services

Five (5) households are known to draw private water supplies from drains or burns within the study area. Some of these burns originate further into Fiunary Forest. Most of the water supplies are at capacity and it is unlikely that the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) or FLS would agree to new supplies being installed to supply woodland crofts.

Mains water pipes are up to 200m to the South. They run from storage tanks in Fiunary Forest, just across the forest road from the eastern edge of the study area, to treatment works at Knock, just South of the wood. From the western edge of Lochaline the supply flows to Achabeag in a privately installed supply. This pipeline is believed to be in a process of adoption by Scottish Water.

Electricity wayleaves just touch on the edge of the site; to supply Kiel House as an overhead line and running underground on the West side of the haul road to the Scottish Water tanks. At the Achabeag end of the woodland power lines are some 250m South of the forest.

¹⁵ Further information: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/79963/kiel-tigh-an-easbuig>

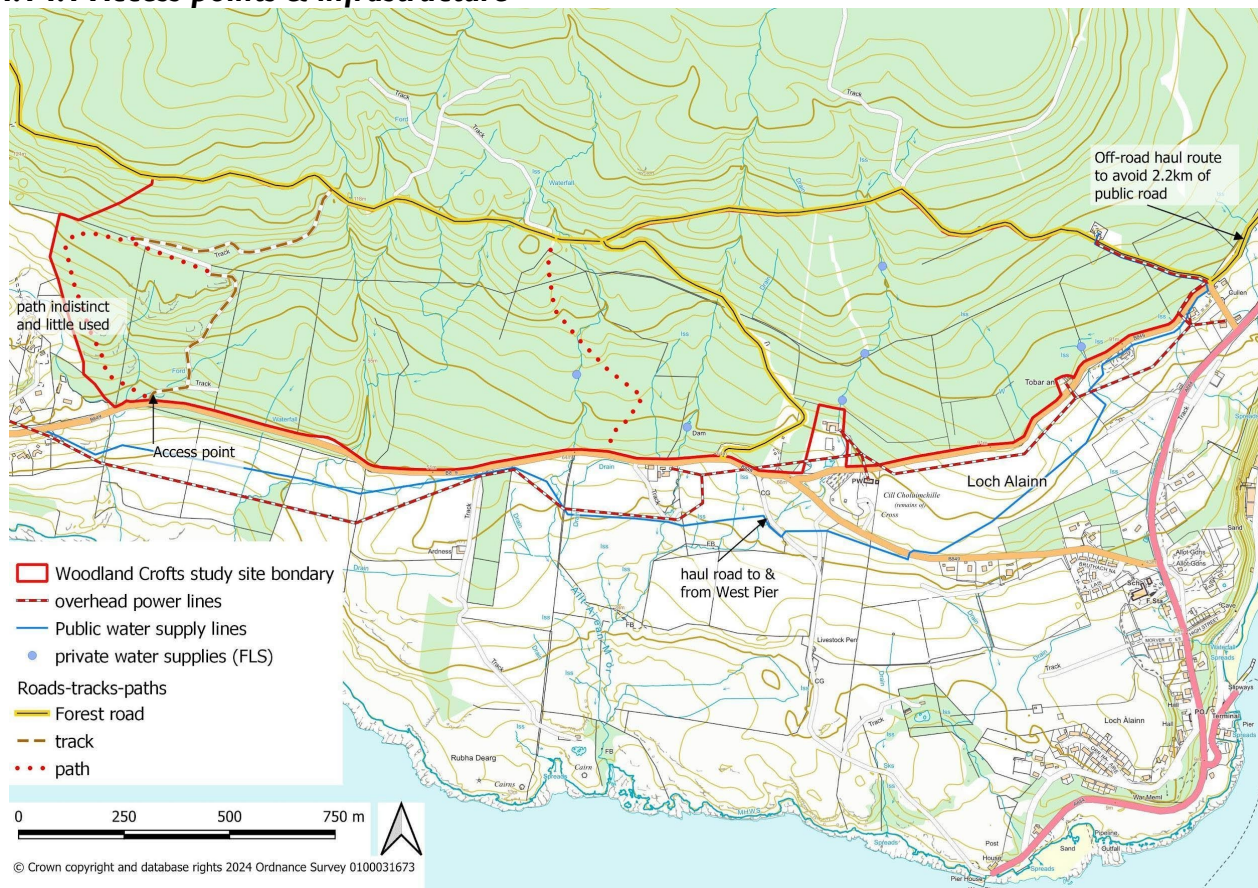
4.13 Fencing

There are significant lengths of now redundant deer fencing in the community forest area that were, presumably, used to safeguard earlier tree planting. Many of these fences are in poor condition, but it may be possible to re-instate some sections if they are required in the future. Redundant fences should be removed, as should redundant tree guards, of which there are some still on site.

The only boundary that needs to be stock-proof is the western edge of the block; approximately 505m (map measure).

4.14 Access for timber harvesting

4.14.1 Access points & infrastructure



Map 9: Proposed Community Forest current access infrastructure

The study area is well serviced by forest roads. The access point (Achabeag East) 1.4km West of the central haul route would need some work to make it suitable for timber lorries. There is no proposal within the FLS land management plan to upgrade this access point and due to the width and condition of the B849 there may well be strong opposition locally as well as from The Highland Council to bring timber out from this access point.

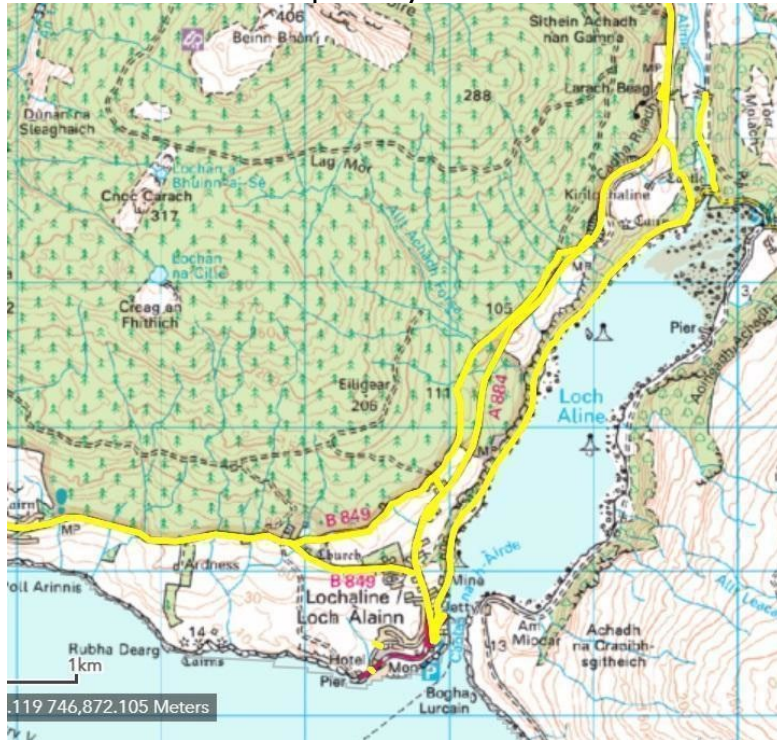
The forest roads along the northern boundary of the wood and through the middle are strategic roads that move timber from elsewhere in Fiunary Forest to the West Pier. There are also agreements with neighbouring, private forests to bring their timber to the West Pier and the public road network via these roads rather than along sections of the public road.

4.14.2 Timber Transport Routes

To export timber out of the community requires the movement of timber lorries along public roads. Not all of these roads are strong enough to take large volumes of timber without significant deterioration. The Timber Transport Forum has worked with local authorities to identify which

roads are suitable for timber transport, those that are unsuitable and those where consultation will be required to minimise impacts.

All of the public roads in Morvern, as far as the Trunk Road in the Great Glen (accessed via the Corran Ferry), are roads that require consultation with The Highland Council when preparing woodland and harvesting plans. Timber can also be shipped out of Lochaline via the ferry to Mull, or the West Pier that is privately owned.



Map 10: Agreed timber transport routes around Lochaline¹⁶

Roads marked with yellow shading are recognised as key to timber extraction but which are not up to Agreed Route standard. Consultation with Local Authority is required and it may be necessary to agree limits of timing, allowable tonnage etc. before the route can be used. B-roads and minor roads are classified as Consultation Routes by default unless covered by one of the other TTG classifications below.

4.15 Access for public recreation

4.15.1 Car Parking

There is no specific car-parking provision for public access into the study area. It is possible to park in the three road or track bell-mouths (Knock, West of Keil and Achabeag East - cmpt 9766), but care has to be taken not to restrict access for timber lorries or works vehicles. It is also possible to park in the overflow car park for the church opposite Kiel House.

4.15.2 Paths

The forest roads are the principal means for members of the public to access the woodland.

The core path in the centre of the wood; cmpts 9751-9767 is not easy to find, if it exists at all. It is not certain that Forestry and Land Scotland will reinstate this path once harvesting of the area around the path is complete in 2025.

¹⁶

<https://timbertf.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=4a23d4910e604b71872956441113c83c>

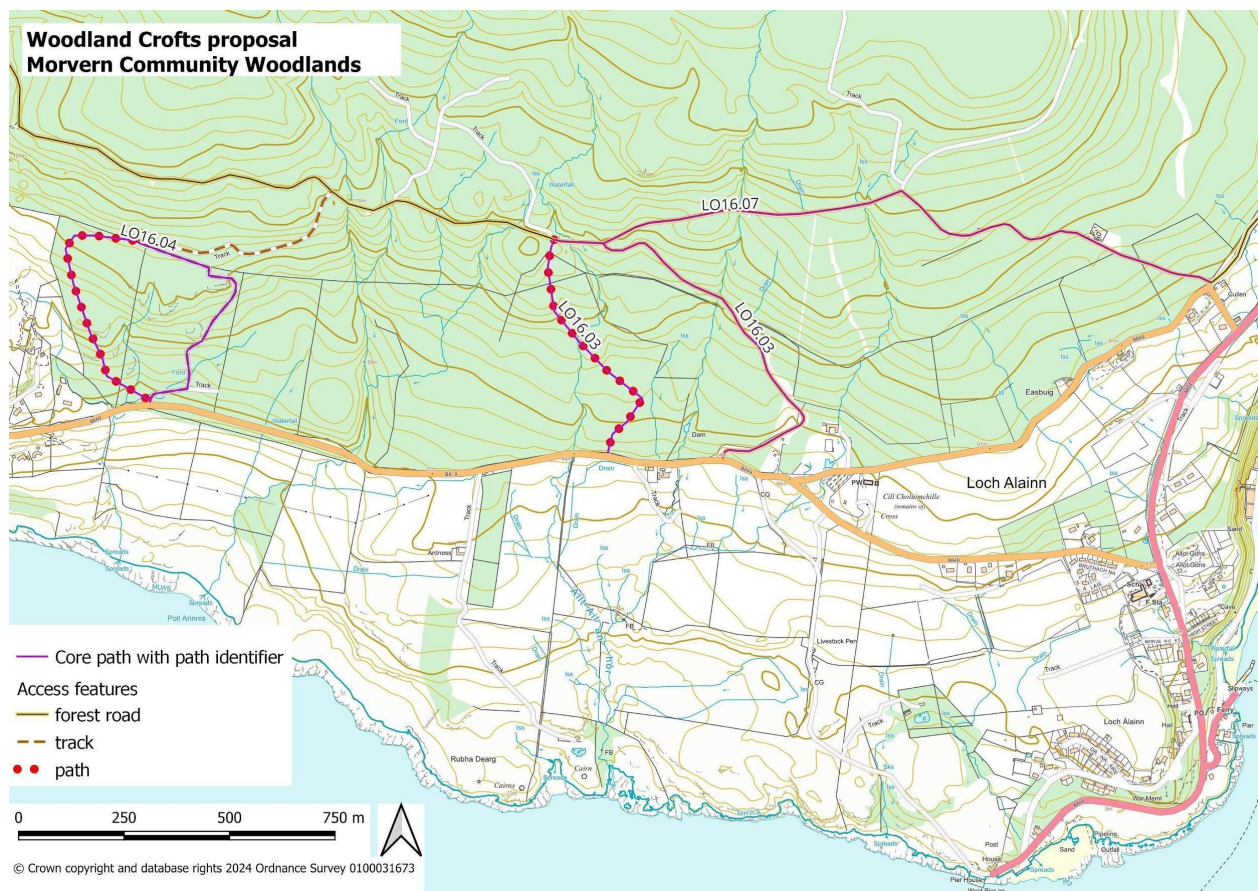
The path that follows the old track through cmpt 9766A is reasonably well used, but the western section of this path close to the edge of the wood is now little used and difficult to access in places due to wet terrain. Desire lines lead into the spruce in cmpt 9766B from the end of the old track, but it is difficult to determine where they lead to.

There are clear signs of pony riding along the upper track in cmpt 9768 and these signs lead East/West above the old dyke to the West of the study area.

A path, marked with green paint dots and flashes, runs up through the spruce stand in cmpt 9750A.

4.15.3 Core paths

Three core paths are identified in the Morvern Land Management Plan and Highland Council Access Strategy.



Map 11: Core Paths, with reference numbers

LO16.03 Where it is not on the road does not seem to exist.

LO16.04 Only seems to exist where it follows the line of the old track.

LO16.07 Is along what is sometimes a busy forest road

4.16 Landscape character & value

The South West edge of Morvern that includes Lochaline is described as having a stepped cliffs and terraces landscape character as a result of the irregular layering and erosion of basalt sheets.¹⁷ Overlying this are some extensive forestry plantations (that in the case of the study area, hide the rock outcrops) and the coastal strip of agricultural land with regular field boundaries. Gradients are relatively modest, but the interaction with the sea is abrupt, with many miles of rocky coastline. The fjord landscape (Sound of Mull and Loch Alinn) adds to the interplay of land and sea. Some

¹⁷ <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/LCA/LCT%20246%20-%20Stepped%20Cliffs%20and%20Terraces%20-%20Final%20pdf.pdf>

prominent headlands are made more so by the presence of castle ruins. Settlements are rarely condensed, e.g. Lochaline, and more generally houses and farms are scattered along the coastal margins below what is otherwise forest or moorland.

4.17 Local Communities and neighbouring land-use

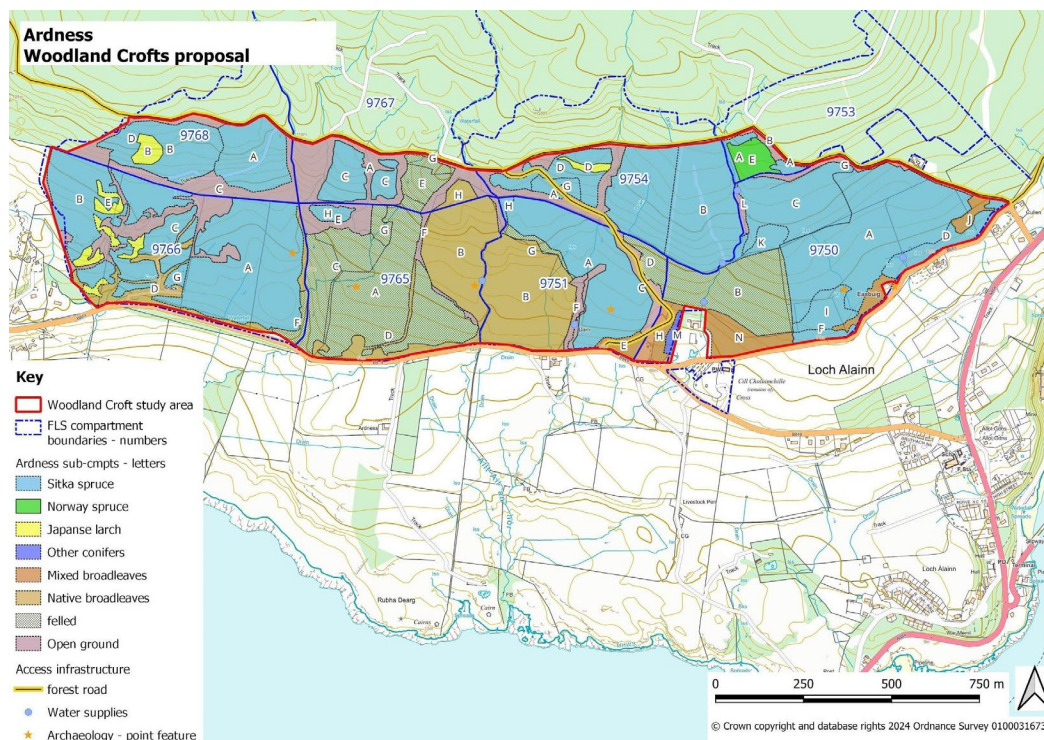
Lochaline (population 200) and scattered nearby homes, farms and holiday lets. The most significant estate nearby is Ardtornish.

The B849 Drimnin/Lochaline road forms the southern boundary to the study area and South of that the land is predominantly used for livestock grazing, with a scattering of houses and a plantation shelterbelt. West of the church this land is owned by Ardtornish Estate and to the East by the Lochaline community as 'Knock Park'. To the West of the study area, the woodland adjoins grazing land and the new residential developments of Achabeg East. To the North and East, the study area is contiguous with Fiunary Forest.

4.18 Forest cover

4.18.1 Species

With recent Statutory Plant Health Notice (SPHN) felling of larch and associated mature spruce approximately 22% of the area will be classed as felled by the end of 2024. The survey does not account for the prolific amount of Sitka spruce natural regeneration in open ground, felled areas left fallow for too long and areas planted with broadleaves.



Map 12: Lochaline Community Forest species & compartments (2024). Compartment boundaries are taken straight from FLS data without correction to the project boundary.

Species	Area (ha)	%
Sitka spruce	71.60	53
Larch (mainly Japanese larch)	1.96	2
Sitka spruce/Norway spruce	1.09	1
Other conifers	0.29	0
Felled	22.56	17
Native broadleaves (planted oak, wych elm, ash, aspen, & natural regeneration birch, willow, hazel)	16.55	12
Open ground with mixed broadleaves	4.54	3
Open ground with native broadleaves & spruce regeneration	16.51	12
Totals	135.10	100

Table 1: Species by area (hectares), 2024

4.18.2 Age class

Species/Species group	Est year (approx. year of planting)	Age (Years)	Woodland structure	Area (ha)	%
Conifers	2025 - Felled awaiting re-planting	0	bare	23	24
Conifers	2015 - 2024	1 - 10	Newly planted	8	8
Conifers	2000 - 2014	11 - 25	Thicket	12	12
Conifers	1990 - 1999	26 - 34	Pole-stage/early maturity	14	14
Conifers	1975 - 1989	35 - 49	Mature	39	40
Conifers	Pre 1975	50 plus	Over-mature	2	2
Total				98	100

Table 2: Area (hectares) of the productive conifer area by age-class/woodland structure

The area of planted broadleaves in the centre of the study area (12.8 ha, planted in 2007) is in thicket stage but with significant Sitka spruce natural regeneration and open ground due to the recent die-back in the ash.

4.18.3 Yield Class¹⁸

From the 2024 FLS forest data, the yield classes (YC) by area for Sitka spruce were as follows:

Yield Class	Area (ha)	%
8	0.85	2
10	6.29	9
12	5.23	7
14	3.45	5
16	12.21	17
18	13.30	19
20	22.01	31
no assessment	7.58	10
	70.92	100

Table 3: Area of the predominant conifer species (Sitka spruce) by Yield class

¹⁸ Yield class is an index of the potential productivity of even-aged stands of trees. It is based on the maximum mean annual increment of cumulative timber volume achieved by a given tree species growing on a given site. It is measured in units of cubic metres per hectare per year (m³/ha/year) and conventionally expressed in increments of 2. The range of values found in GB is from 2 to 30.

It reflects a diversity of sites, but generally, overall, quite fertile. All of the higher yield classes were in the sub-compartments lower down the slope. There are some sub-compartments with lower yield classes that might reflect thinner soils, or waterlogged/peaty sites. There were signs of yellowing in some of the spruce planted in 2021 in 9751A, but poor establishment might be as much due to competition from brambles and willowherb as anything else.

4.18.4 Standing Volumes

Species – growth stage	Over-bark volume (m3)
Sitka spruce – pole / 1 st thinning stage	11,000 to 12,000
Sitka spruce - mature	6,000 to 6,500
Sitka spruce – over-mature	900 to 1,000
Japanese larch	400 to 450

Table 4: Estimated volume and tonnage of the key productive areas of woodland;
NB: areas of commercial conifer

4.18.5 Timber breakout & quality

The value of the standing merchantable timber reflects the current age and stage of the crops, and this section deals mostly with standing pole-stage or mature Sitka spruce volumes and value.

The timber volumes for Compartments and Sub-compartments have been calculated using the Forest Research PC Model Forest Yield¹⁹, which provides the user with estimates of various aspects of tree growth, for a range of tree species, yield classes and management prescriptions. The Volumes and Product Assortment (different types of processed timber, e.g. small roundwood for chipwood or biomass) are calculated using the indicative yield classes ascribed to each species in different sub compartments (see previous explanation for yield class, footnote 16) from the Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) Sub-compartment database. The Forest Yield data was compared with sub-compartment volume data from the FLS database and if there was no significant difference between the Forest Yield data and FLS data, the Forest Yield model volumes were used. This simplified the estimation of different processed timber products, which the FR model provides for different yield classes, tree spacings, crop thinning regimes and tree species ages.

There are a couple of caveats with the use of Forest Yield. The first being that the model uses selected ages, i.e. 41 years, 44 years, 48 years (not continuous year on year data such as 1,2,3,4, etc.), and the ages may not coincide with the actual age of the crop, for example in Sub Cpt 9750A whose Sitka crop will be 43 in 2025, 44 was chosen.

Secondly, the volume assortment in Forest Yield has slightly differing diameter classes, shown in table 4.17.6 below, to those used by FLS and the FR Timber Index. The higher diameter spec for bars/pallets and for sawlogs in Forest Yield may decrease the volume of sawlogs and increase volumes of bars/pallet wood, which being lower priced per cubic meter will slightly depress the calculated values – sawlogs having the highest value (although not by much for FLS roadside prices).

4.18.6 Comparison of Forest Yield products and FLS product specifications

Forest Yield	FLS Roadside volumes (m3OBS)
Small roundwood 7cm-14cm	Small roundwood 7cm - 14cm
Bars / pallet 14cm-18cm	Bars / Pallet 14cm-16cm
Sawlogs 18+cm	Sawlogs 16+cm

Table 5: Comparison of product break-out specifications between Forest Yield and FLS.

¹⁹ [Forest Yield - Forest Research](#)

Standing timber quality within the study area is mixed and is predominantly coniferous, dominated by Sitka spruce with a very small area (less than 2ha) of pole-stage/maturing Japanese larch. The area with the highest volumes of mature timber is in the east of the wood – in Cpt 9750 (Sub Cpts. A, C & I), with Sitka spruce aged 43 years old, and an estimated standing volume of 7,611 m³.

The other section of forest with high volumes of merchantable, or close to merchantable timber, is at the western end. In Cpt 9766, Sub-cpts A & B have an estimated 8736 m³ of standing timber, categorised as pole stage timber by FLS, aged 37 years. These sub-cpts may not be due for felling (under FLS management) for some 10-20 years.

Felling dates for the largest sub-cpt areas of mature timber in 9750 (A & C) are 2036 and 2037 respectively, when the crops will be 54 / 55 years old. This is the age at which the trees will have reached their Mean Maximum Annual Increment (MMAI), after which their rate of annual growth slows.

The valuation of the timber has been derived using three data sets. FLS data on standing sales – range from February 2024 to 13th November 2024, and FLS data on roadside sales, again 21st February 2024 to 13th November 2024.

Reference was also made to the UK Timber Prices Indices²⁰ to September 2024, however the UK price index, as the name suggests, covers England, Wales, Scotland, and reflects sales by Forestry England, Forestry and Land Scotland and Natural Resources Wales. The latter Price Index has higher values for standing coniferous sales and roadside product sales than the FLS data alone.

Table 6: Estimate of timber volumes and values for the community forest site. Volumes based on FR Forest Yield Model. Value based on FLS Standing Sale Average Price, November 13th, 2024.						
Cpt.	Sub Cpt.	TOTAL VOL YIELD (85% of area) Cubic metres m³	Total Volume Small Roundwood 7-14cm	Total Volume Bars/Pallet 14-18cm	Total Volume of Sawlogs 18+cm	Standing Sale Price £27.54 13th Nov 2024
9750	A	4446.86	157.8	581.7	3697.50	£122,466.5
9750	C	1687.68	96.9	286.7	1304.11	£46,478.57
9750	F	947.65	8.8	51.3	887.54	£26,098.23
9750	I	395.89	35.6	86.1	274.25	£10,902.74
9750	K	130.50	56.4	48.4	38.29	£5,480.46
9751	H	52.16	0.3	2.1	49.73	£1,436.4
9753	A	67.24	31.5	18.4	17.26	£1,851.65
9753	A	44.18	20.7	12.1	11.34	£1,216.80
9754	A	646.43	263.9	179.8	206.55	£17,802.54
9754	A	86.19	35.2	24.0	27.54	£2,373.67
9754	B	874.31	518.6	171.1	53.47	£24,078.50
9754	D	374.71	122.6	126.1	127.82	£10,319.62
9754	D	40.375	2.98	7.9	29.8	£1,111.93
9766	A	4890.76	731.9	1102.1	3056.73	£134,691.64
9766	B	3845.36	691.1	919.1	2235.16	£105,901.15
9766	E	372.11	93.28	98.3	180.5	£10,247.99

²⁰ [Timber Price Indices - Forest Research](#)

9766	G	186.59	11.4	27.8	147.32	£5,138.74
9768	A	465.43	286.4	116.4	62.65	£12,817.83
Totals	Vol.	19554.41m3	3165.4m3	3859.3m3	12407.5m3	Value £540,415.0

The valuation of Standing Timber in the study area, using the FLS, November 2024 Standing Sales price of £27.54, produces a total value of some £540,415 (see Table 6 above), which is some £120,000 lower in value than a valuation using the FR Price Index price of £33.77 for Sept. 2024. Table 7 below details the estimated roadside value per log category for each sub-cmpt. Roadside value includes felling and extraction costs.

Table 7: Estimate of timber value, November 2024, from the proposed community forest (Derived from Forestry and Land Scotland data). Timber price based on roadside sale.					
Cpt.	Sub Cpt.	Value small roundwood @ £48.63	Value bars/pallet @ £47.68 (Sept 24 Av. Price.)	Value all sawlogs @ £50.10	Total Sub Cpt Value
9750	A	£7,671.87	£27,737.36	£185,244.75	£220,653.98
9750	C	£4,712.25	£13,668.07	£65,336.04	£83,716.35
9750	F	£429.89	£2,444.65	£44,465.55	£47,340.09
9750	I	£1,729.89	£4,103.46	£13,740.05	£19,573.40
9750	K	£2,740.54	£2,308.07	£1,918.45	£6,967.07
9751	H	£16.12	£100.10	£2,491.22	£2,607.45
9753	A	£1,533.55	£879.46	£864.48	£3,277.48
9753	A	£1,007.76	£577.93	£568.08	£2,153.77
9754	A	£12,834.67	£8,571.67	£10,348.16	£31,754.50
9754	A	£1,711.29	£1,142.89	£1,379.75	£4,233.93
9754	B	£25,220.03	£8,157.48	£2,678.60	£36,056.10
9754	D	£5,960.58	£6,011.11	£6,403.93	£18,375.62
9754	D	£144.67	£374.88	£1,490.48	£2,010.03
9766	A	£35,591.93	£52,550.23	£153,142.05	£241,284.21
9766	B	£33,609.90	£43,820.90	£111,981.52	£189,412.31
9766	E	£4,536.16	£4,686.66	£9,045.05	£18,267.87
9766	G	£555.55	£1,327.70	£7,380.83	£9,264.08
9768	A	£13,928.41	£5,547.88	£3,138.94	£22,615.23
Total	Values	£153,935.06	£184,010.49	£621,617.93	£959,563.48

Comparing the FLS roadside timber product prices (Table 7 above) with the FR Price Index roadside product prices (Table 8 below), there is a difference of some £819,161 between using the national Great Britain roadside prices, achieved by the different state bodies, and using the FLS, Scotland only roadside prices. This is because timber prices vary widely across the UK depending on proximity to processing facilities, demand for building/fencing/chipboard, etc., foreign currency exchange and the amount of timber coming to market. One factor that can affect timber pricing is the amount of storm damaged timber that comes onto the market after one of the increasing numbers of winter storms²¹.

²¹ [Storm Darragh 'to affect harvesting operations for years' | Forestry Journal](#)

Table 8: Estimate of timber value, November 2024, from the community forest area. (Derived from FR Timber Index for UK.) Timber price based on roadside sale.						
FR Timber Index prices standing Sept. 2024 £33.77	FR Timber Index Small roundwood @ £50.83	Midpoint between SRW and Sawlog prices @ £55.39	FR Timber Index Sawlogs @ £59.94	Total Roadside Value FR Timber Index Great Britain	Cpmt	Scpt
£150,170.46	£8,018.94	£32,222.58	£221,628.15	£412,040.13	9750	A
£56,992.78	£4,925.43	£15,878.24	£78,168.50	£155,964.95	9750	C
£32,002.07	£449.34	£2,839.96	£53,198.91	£88,490.27	9750	F
£13,369.12	£1,808.15	£4,767.00	£16,438.69	£36,382.97	9750	I
£4,407.04	£2,864.52	£2,681.29	£2,295.25	£12,248.11	9750	K
£1,761.31	£16.85	£116.29	£2,980.52	£4,874.97	9751	H
£2,270.53	£1,602.92	£1,021.67	£1,034.26	£5,929.38	9753	A
£1,492.06	£1,053.35	£671.38	£679.66	£3,896.45	9753	A
£21,829.77	£13,415.31	£9,957.74	£12,380.61	£57,583.42	9754	A
£2,910.64	£1,788.71	£1,327.70	£1,650.75	£7,677.79	9754	A
£29,525.45	£26,360.97	£9,476.56	£3,204.69	£68,567.68	9754	B
£12,654.09	£6,230.23	£6,983.13	£7,661.71	£33,529.16	9754	D
£1,363.46	£151.22	£435.50	£1,783.22	£3,733.40	9754	D
£165,161.10	£37,202.10	£61,047.76	£183,220.25	£446,631.20	9766	A
£129,857.72	£35,130.39	£50,906.87	£133,975.49	£349,870.48	9766	B
£12,566.26	£4,741.37	£5,444.50	£10,821.57	£33,573.70	9766	E
£6,301.21	£580.68	£1,542.39	£8,830.48	£17,254.76	9766	G
£15,717.44	£14,558.53	£6,444.99	£3,755.45	£40,476.40	9768	A
£660,352.51	£160,899.01	£213,765.55	£743,708.16	£1,778,725.23	Total	Value

The options for realising income for the community (as opposed to individual woodland croft-holders) from the Community Forest area will depend on a number of factors, such as the location of future woodland crofts, the ability of the community to purchase the total area identified for this study, and whether timber prices are favourable, i.e. timing of felling may be linked to a desired standing sale price.

4.19 Ongoing Obligations

Any land purchased as felled woodland will need to be replanted unless exemption is obtained through planning permission. Woodland management across the area, whether crofted or not, would need to comply with the UK Forestry Standard.

Boundary fences, where they exist and are needed, will need to be maintained 50/50 with the neighbour.

Existing water supplies will need to be protected, as per UKFS and Forest and Water Guidelines.

Recent clear-felling by FLS has been initiated by the identification of *Phytophthora ramorum* and the infected larch has been felled along with adjacent stands of spruce in order to help justify the felling and extraction from an economic perspective. There is a high risk of larch dieback being found in any of the remaining larch, and future owners of the wood will be required to fell the larch under statutory plant health notices (SPHN) if larch dieback is identified in these stands.

5 Summary of woodland management opportunities & constraints for Lochaline Community Forest

In general the study area might work well as a site to be subdivided into woodland crofts. It is South facing and relatively fertile. Gradients are not steep and new access points can relatively easily be created off the single-track Lochaline-Drimnin road, or off the existing forest roads. Services (water and electricity) are relatively close. Schools and services in Lochaline are also relatively close-by. For a community forest the area has potential, with a diverse range of species and age-classes and identified core paths. More could be done to increase woodland diversity and improve recreational opportunities. Some stands are at the stage where low-impact intervention could retain them for longer but others are ready for clear-felling. The high value of standing timber in some of the areas may make these areas unaffordable or impractical for community ownership until they have been felled. There are opportunities to make the cultural features of the area more accessible. The need to ensure no impact on private water supplies drawn from the site and the cost of installing services are the main constraints for the woodland croft objectives.

5.1 Summary of opportunities and constraints for woodland management options in relation to key headings

Feature	Constraint	Opportunity
Soils	Some gleyed soils where drainage is restricted and water tables are high. Some thin soils close to exposed rock. Waste water management for development sites might require more expensive solutions if standard soak-aways can not be created due to the close proximity of bedrock.	Generally fertile, free draining, historically used for agriculture below the 'head dyke'
Topography	Localised small cliffs and steep burn gullies. The Highland Council planning requirements for forest roads linking to public roads may mean that gradients adjacent to the B849 at some locations are too steep.	Moderate slopes with few constraints; south facing aspects. 'Shelf' topography can help hide views of developments from nearby locations, e.g. from the B849. Steep-sided gullies are ideal locations for hosting native woodland and associated moss and lichen specialities.
Windblow risk	Exposed to prevailing SW winds; thin and wet soils increase windthrow risk; makes continuous cover silviculture more risky; reduces the range of species that will grow well, productively, e.g. leader damage to Douglas fir. The presence of Fomes butt-rot will increase the risk of windblow. Key-holing woodland crofts buildings into mature spruce stands would be high risk.	Few signs of historic storm damage. If trees are felled before vulnerable top-heights are reached, with regular thinning interventions, and if species and age-class diversity is improved there may be opportunities for alternatives to clear-fell. Low-impact management for local supplies of timber and wood fuel could delay the need to clear-fell some stands.
Landscape connectivity	Southern edge of the Morvern mass of productive conifer plantations. Few connections with other native woodland and 'interaction' with the lower lying agricultural land.	To introduce more species and age-class diversity, including open ground, perhaps exposing some of the rock outcrops. To work with neighbours to better connect to farmland and to woodland elements below the B849.
Tree species mix	Silviculture has focussed on Sitka spruce, elements of native woodland are being 'swamped' by SS regeneration.	Norway spruce has also been planted in small areas. Birch and oak are growing well where they have established.
Archaeology	Features are widespread and occupy some of the best locations suited for woodland croft development	Incorporate old field boundaries and enclosure walls into the woodland croft design and layout. Croft management

Feature	Constraint	Opportunity
		could remove vegetation that otherwise obscures archaeology.
Tree diseases	Larch, ash and potentially elm diseases will restrict species options that are otherwise very suited to the local native woodland or croft use.	Increasing species diversity might reduce the risk and incidence of new or existing diseases.
Fauna	Deer will require management, either by fencing or by shooting. The presence of pine marten and potentially wildcat will add to the cost of woodland crofts keeping chickens. Concern for red squirrel conservation may preclude woodland crofts from keeping domestic cats.	Access to venison can add to crofting viability. Wildlife friendly gardening and crofting can support wildlife through pond creation, wild-flowers and supplementary bird and squirrel feeders.
Infrastructure	New access points and tracks will be required for forest crofts. The existing forest roads can be busy at times with timber haulage traffic which makes them less attractive for use by the public or residential croft access.	Forest road network installed and sufficient for current management and to extract timber.
Public access	The investment in paths for public access has not been maintained. Forest roads can be busy with timber traffic.	Land form and archaeology, plus the proximity to Lochaline, makes the area potentially attractive for woodland walks and bike trails.
Power lines and water supplies	Some of the neighbouring houses have private water supplies from burns/drains/springs in the wood and this may restrict options on croft activity. Woodland crofts can not assume to be able to be 'off-grid' and take additional water from these water sources.	Electricity and water mains are close to the southern edge of the wood and don't impinge on woodland management. Catchment areas of the water supplies could be managed in partnership with the supply owners and become focus areas for native woodland restoration.
Connectivity to timber markets	By road via a ferry to Fort William. Some restrictions on the use of West Pier.	Large volumes are being moved regularly out of the wider Morvern block, so timber transport is well established and markets for spruce are not that restricted. Currently there is a small sawmill and small firewood enterprise operating near Lochaline. The owners have expressed a willingness to work with the community forest project.
Mature conifer stands	High purchase cost of these areas, with landscape requirements restricting the timing of felling until adjacent felled areas have re-established, recovering the purchase cost won't be immediate.	Further thinning of the stands might be cost effective and help off-set some of the purchase costs in the short-term.

5.2 Summary of Issues raised arising from initial consultation

Issue	Comment
Access to affordable homes	Enables young people to stay in the area and contribute to the life of the community.
Opportunity to live more sustainably off the land	Developing a lifestyle that has a reduced environmental footprint

Issue	Comment
Opportunity to make environmental improvements for wildlife	If livelihoods can be generated on or off the croft area then there may be more opportunities to turn more of the other parts of the woodland to native woodland. On the croft opportunities can be taken to introduce diversity for wildlife, e.g. pond creation, orchard planting.
Aesthetic/landscape impact	Poorly cared for crofts can look very untidy.
Privacy	Not wanting to be overlooked by neighbours.
Safeguarding water supplies	Maintaining access to hill water, untreated by chlorine is important, even if it does involve some management effort and it can be disrupted by forestry operations, even quite remote from the intake. Livestock might add to pollution.

5.3 Summary of Issues Raised from more detailed consultation

MCW had detailed discussions with immediate neighbours to the woodland and those drawing water from the site. A drop-in consultation meeting was held on 25th March 2025 and attended by 21 people from the local community.

Issue	Comment
Protection of water supplies	Strong preference for FLS to retain management of areas above sensitive water catchments, e.g. Tobar An Easbuig. Other catchments remain outside woodland croft lease areas or are leased/sold to the water users, or there is a management agreement put in place for the water supply catchments. Public access paths would ideally not cross water supply burns or pass close to intakes.
Establish an exemplar for native woodland restoration.	Consolidation on the establishment of native broadleaves in the centre of the Community Forest, in conjunction with expanding community facilities (e.g. paths, shelter/picnic area), and in an area where the gradients off the B849 might restrict access creation for woodland crofts.
Rationalise boundaries around Kiel House.	The sale provides an opportunity to rationalise the Kiel House property boundary. Being to the homeowners' advantage, any agreement should be achieved with a proportional contribution to costs and land prices.
Clarity on management plans and objectives	Any commitment to deliver public and environmental benefits within the master plan are excluded from the woodland croft tenancies, so that they are free to develop their own plans for the areas they are responsible for, within the framework of high-level conditions in relation to a woodland croft tenancy and re-stocking conditions.
Insufficient provision of woodland croft sites	The proposal to establish 6 croft sites in the first phase does not go close to meeting local demand for woodland crofts and consideration needs to be given to establishing at least 8 woodland crofts, and preferably 10.
Public access and recreation provision	There was strong support for an off-road multi-trail route between Lochaline and Achabeag, and that this should run close to the B849. Path developments should not be within the water catchment areas.
Scale of community purchase	100 or 135 hectares is a large area to administer and manage for a community group.
Croft share	Might it be possible for more than one individual or family to rent a croft area?
Public water supply to Achabeag	Most of this supply line has not yet been adopted by Scottish Water. Achabeag residents comment that the supply is weak and may not be suitable for additional connections.

6 Woodland Management with Woodland Crofts – Options Appraisal

This section considers the options for subdividing Lochaline Community Forest into areas that will be managed as woodland crofts and areas that will be managed as community woodland, possibly with an area let out as a woodlot, to collectively deliver the desired range of community benefits. It also considers options for community facilities within the woodland adjacent to the woodland croft sites and it considers governance and tenure options for the site. A key consideration is also the option for phased purchase, considering that some of the woodland still holds substantial timber value and it may be strategically practical to purchase these areas once they have been felled by FLS.

6.1 Proposed Sub-division of Lochaline Community Forest

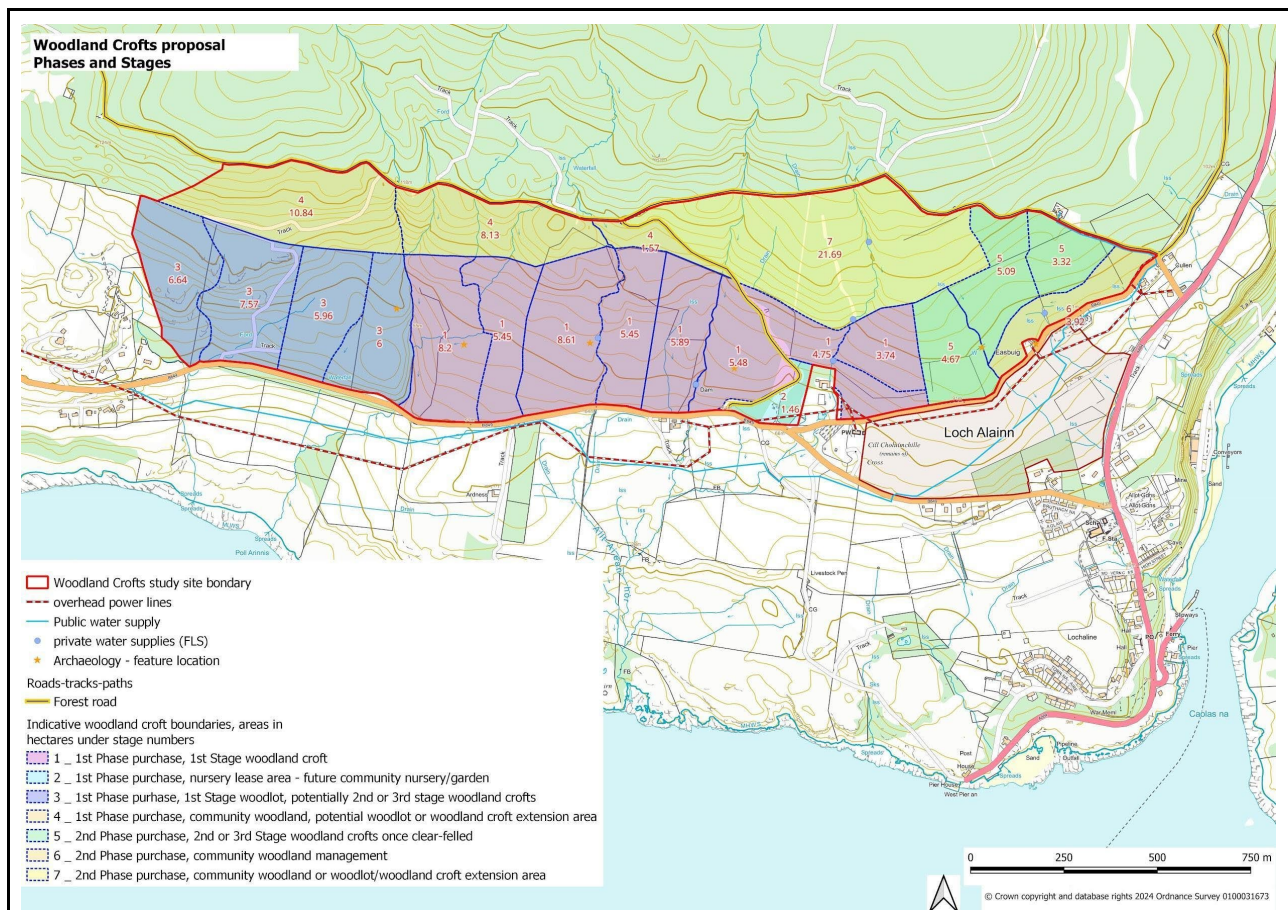
Woodland crofts will be a means of retaining people, especially young people, within the community or attracting new people to the area. Woodland crofts will provide affordable land for supplementing other income by running an enterprise from or on the land, as well as using the woodland for subsistence food and fuel growing. They will provide affordable land for building a home on. A high proportion of the woodland will also be managed for wider public benefit, delivering biodiversity, amenity and recreational aspirations.

The study area was chosen as a potential community forest and site for woodland crofts for the following reasons:

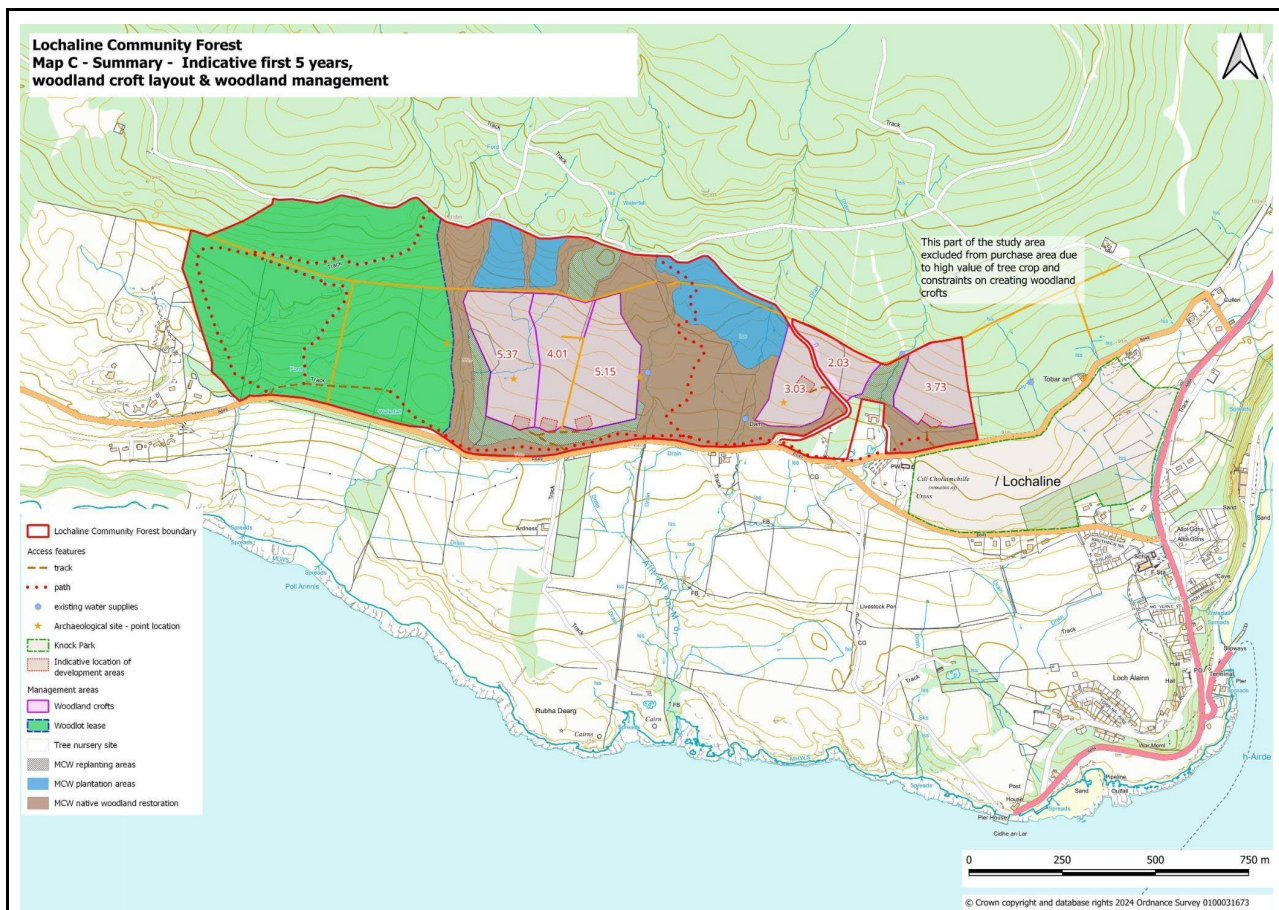
- It could be separated from the rest of the FLS Morvern land management area without impinging on management of the rest of the forest,
- It is South facing,
- It has been used for agriculture in the past and
- It is relatively close to services and relatively close to Lochaline.
- It is big enough for just over half the area to be allocated as woodland crofts, each of about 3 to 8 hectares in size.
- The remaining woodland area might be managed collectively by MCW, some of it could be leased as a woodlot and the crofting tenants would be actively involved in the management of the whole wood to deliver community benefits as well as running the crofts to sustain their livelihoods.

The following map illustrates how the woodland could be divided into woodland crofts, woodlots or areas for community benefit. The phasing suggests purchasing the area in two phases to spread the cost and development of the project. Stages are a suggestion for spreading the development of woodland crofts and perhaps using the western area for a woodlot before it might then be leased as a woodland croft.

This plan has been superseded since further consultation, to better safe-guard private water supplies and clearly identify management responsibilities for delivering public access and native woodland restoration objectives. Some potential croft sites are also restricted by the specific gradient requirements for connecting new access tracks to public roads. FLS and SLF are also advising that given the constraints of funding then the application should focus on just the area that is required to initiate the project this year, so there will be no phasing of the purchase area.



Map 13: Indicative layout of woodland crofts following two phases of woodland purchase. This is an earlier consideration and following further consultation it was agreed that woodland croft areas would be more clearly defined and that their management areas would not include water supply catchments or the routes for core paths. There would be no phasing of woodland purchase.



Map 14: Indicative map of croft, woodlot and MCW managed areas within a Lochaline Community Forest purchase. The woodlot area includes mature timber to provide a more accessible timber resource for the community. Paths, water supply catchments and core native woodland areas are managed directly by the community. The number of crofts in this map does not meet the current demand for woodland crofts. The restriction on further subdivisions is the Crofting Commission recommendation that 3ha is a minimum size for a croft.

6.2 Governance & Management systems

All tenure options need to be considered; whether to lease the land from FLS or to purchase outright. Then for MCW to retain ownership of the whole area and lease woodland croft sites, or sell the woodland crofts with conditions attached.

6.2.1 Tenure

Leasing the woodland from FLS and sub-letting to woodland croft tenants is not a model that is likely to work for any party. As crofts can only be created by the landowner, this approach would require FLS to create the crofts themselves before leasing the woodland (and the landlord responsibilities) to MCW. Woodland crofts are not yet a tried and tested enterprise model, so it might take time to establish a legal model that will give all parties a sense of clarity and confidence in what happens. Having FLS involved in decisions about future development of the woodland might delay delivery of local objectives.

Greater clarity for MCW and woodland croft tenants will be achieved by MCW owning the woodland. All control would then be in the hands of locally resident participants.

6.2.2 Governance

Post-acquisition responsibility for management of the woodland will be vested in the Board of MCW, which has well-established and appropriate management and governance systems. Decisions

are made collectively, with individual Board members leading on specific areas. Annual meetings are open to the wider community. MCW are public facing and the wider community feel empowered to feed back on the management of the woods at any time. Through the process of considering woodland crofts in more detail MCW have established a woodland crofts steering group that includes representatives of the group of potential woodland croft tenants and others who have skills to advise on the development of the project.

Each woodland croft will be responsible for the management of their own croft woodland. Crofters do not need to live on the croft (only within 32km) though the benefits may be maximised from doing so, but they do need to actively manage the croft.

Potentially any area not allocated as a woodland croft could be jointly managed by the group of crofting families, and others living locally, as a common woodlot. MCW might facilitate the croft occupiers to work together as a woodland crofts committee. Alternatively, areas not allocated as part of a woodland croft will be managed by MCW, with or without input from the crofting families, or leased to other community members. A specific woodlot lease would enable an individual or group to manage the felling and planting in that area at a scale that suits them and MCW's objectives for the area. A long-term lease agreement would be based on potential timber yield and commitments to securing regeneration.

MCW will secure suitable public and employers liability insurances and consider appropriate insurance to cover against storm or fire damage for areas of the community forest retained in their responsibility. MCW is already familiar with the annual recurring costs associated with land management and governance systems, such as insurance and annual accounts inspection, as well as office costs, consumables and sundry expenses.

MCW is a member of the Community Woodlands Association (CWA) which provides advice, assistance and information to community woodland groups across Scotland. CWA organises training and networking events on a range of topics for member community groups, and through CWA's membership of the Scottish Community Alliance, MCW is eligible for the Community Learning Exchange, which supports community groups to visit their peers.

MCW will establish procedures and systems to manage on-going responsibilities, such as maintaining boundary fences, planning conditions and the administration of grants received.

It would be appropriate to recruit part-time staff for at least the first 5 to 10 years in order to research, develop and implement the detail of the community woodland plan, other development projects using the woods and oversee the allocation & administration of woodland crofts and the woodlot. The critical skills for a community forester would be those of engaging and working with people and project partners, understanding community dynamics and community development projects as well as a good grounding in natural resource management. If necessary additional forest management skills could be bought in or sought on an advisory basis, perhaps in part from local forestry consultants and CWA staff. There would be a requirement to raise funds as required to support all aspects of delivering a masterplan for the community forest. Administration of tenancy agreements and income is also a role for a paid staff member rather than a volunteer.

6.2.3 Woodland Croft Tenure

Crofting originated as a leasehold system of tenure, but since a right to buy was introduced in 1976 crofters can now be either tenants or owner-occupier crofters. Currently, the majority (a little over 70%) of crofters are still tenants, with the remainder owner-occupiers. Previously, there were significant differences in the obligations which applied to each, but more recent legislation has served

to equalise the position such that owner-occupiers are generally subject to the same responsibilities as tenants regarding residency and management of the croft.

MCW could consider either letting woodland crofts or selling them as owner-occupied crofts, depending on a variety of factors. However, whichever is chosen, community landowners are likely to want to be able to influence the occupation and use of the croft, in order to avoid many of the problems which have undermined crofting more generally. These include absenteeism, neglect of crofts and speculation on croft land. The Scottish Land Fund also restricts any selling-on of land bought with SLF support to 20% of the area.

In these regards, letting the woodland crofts is the desired way forward. Although croft tenants have strong rights, it is now possible to withhold or modify some of these from new tenancies, including the right to buy and the right to assign, without needing approval from the Crofting Commission or the Scottish Land Court. This means that if a tenancy is surrendered the community can re-allocate it to someone else who meets their criteria, and the public and community investment in the croft is protected. A tenancy is also likely to be more affordable, although payment of an 'entry fee' is typical.

Owner-occupied crofts require a different approach to retaining community control of occupancy. The method used in affordable housing is to apply a Rural Housing Burden²² (RHB) to the house or plot, and it is believed that this approach can also be applied to the whole of the croft, as is being developed for new crofts in Lower Ardoch Forest in Glengarry. The RHB is a title condition giving the rural housing body²³ in whose favour it is a right of pre-emption, meaning that they can buy the property on the event of its resale. Importantly, the RHB can include terms relating to price, which both allows for the introduction of an initial discount on market value, and the maintenance of that discount, preserving affordability.

Generally speaking, a croft tenancy will be the more affordable option of the two and therefore likely to be more accessible to local budgets. It is also the simpler model. Meanwhile even when a discount is offered, the owner-occupied croft will require a purchaser to have a degree of capital behind them and may thus be more appropriate to 'external' applicants. From the community perspective, the tenancy will provide a smaller, but annual, income, whilst sale of a croft to an owner-occupier will provide a one-off lump sum which may be useful to generate match-funding for the project.

6.2.4 Woodlot Tenure

A woodlot is leased based on an agreed management plan that clearly lays out who is responsible for what element of the plan. If an allowable cut of thinning spruce is agreed, the woodlot lease might be only for a 5-year period. If the woodland plan is for an annual allowable cut, establishment of regeneration and implementation of an environmental plan, then the lease might be for a 20 year period, or longer. The lease might specify works to improve access, or to at least maintain the drainage beside access routes. Products might focus on firewood or a combination of firewood and sawlogs. Working methods might be specified or left open to the wood-lotter, so long as the wood-lotter is suitably trained and insured.

²² [Rural Housing Burden - Communities Housing Trust \(chtrust.co.uk\)](http://chtrust.co.uk)

²³ A Rural Housing Burden can only be in favour of a rural housing body designated by the Scottish Government; if a community landowner does not have or wish to gain this status, it is possible to nominate an existing rural housing body to fulfil this function (with their agreement)

6.2.5 Forest planning

Woodland plans are internal and outward facing documents that assist woodland managers/owners with financial and operational planning and provide those with an interest in the area (stakeholders) a statement of intent on what will happen in the woodland over a given period. Stakeholders might include Scottish Forestry, other Government agencies and local community members and community groups.

A woodland plan approved by Scottish Forestry is a prerequisite for grant applications and approved plans can also include a felling licence for the period of the plan.

To be eligible for government grants delivered through the Scotland Rural Development Programme, that includes forestry grants, MCW will need to register the land that they retain management control over to their Business Reference Number with Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Division; potentially each woodland croft will also need to register as a business and register each croft with its own 'field' number.

Each croft will need their own woodland plan to satisfy Scottish Forestry that woodland cover will be retained. The agreed plan for a woodlot could be incorporated into the overall plan for the woodland.

A woodland plan is a 20-year strategic management plan that brings together the management objectives, the environmental, economic, and social functions and the silvicultural prescriptions into a comprehensive plan to deliver long term benefits through sustainable forest management. It will contain detailed proposals for the initial 10-year period, with a further 10 years in outline, and will include an overarching vision for how the forest will look after that 20-year period. Scottish Forestry options on planning are that, in order to apply for forestry grants, a woodland plan is required. For areas over 100ha a 'long-term forest plan' is required. Otherwise a simpler woodland plan, with or without thinning, can be prepared and approved. Long-term forest plans can also be prepared for woodlands under 100ha, but it is not a regulatory requirement. Scottish Forestry regulations also require that all tree removal that fells more than 5m³ of timber in any annual quarter has to be licenced. An approved woodland plan with thinning, or an approved long-term forest plan, includes a felling licence. Other approved plans still require any tree felling to be additionally licenced. Tree removal that is approved by Planning Permission does not need a separate SF Felling licence. Felling licences, if they are not for thinning only, require a replanting plan.

Stakeholder consultation (scoping) is an integral part of the forest planning process. Stakeholders include local community bodies, neighbours, government agencies where they have an interest in the site, Local Authorities, and local special interest groups involved in history, access or wildlife will also value early input to the forest plan process.

Consultation can be carried out in a variety of ways, with responses solicited by letter/email, questionnaire, during a public meeting in a neutral venue or at a meeting on site. Stakeholders are invited to comment on and also to provide additional information about a site in response to a draft concept plan with associated map, or maps that illustrate the opportunities and constraints for forest management.

All forest management in the UK must comply with the requirements of the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS)²⁴ and all forest operations must comply with specific guidance on e.g. watercourses, archaeology and protected species.

²⁴ The UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) is the reference standard for sustainable forest management across the UK; it is intended to ensure that international agreements and conventions on areas such as sustainable

6.3 Woodland Crofts & Development

6.3.1 Woodland Croft Homes

A key consideration in deciding which tenure option(s) to progress is croft housing. The opportunity to live on the croft is a key benefit for the crofter, and the provision of housing on crofts has undoubtedly been an important contributor to the retention of population, sustaining communities. As such both crofter and community landowner will want to see croft housing provided in some way.

Such housing can be delivered in a number of different ways. The 'traditional' model on a tenanted croft was either for the landlord to provide the house as 'landlord's fixed equipment', or for the tenant to build their own house, as a tenant's improvement (an 'improvement' meaning the house is an integral part of the croft like other infrastructure and cannot be separated from it). In recent times neither route has been employed very often, largely due to the difficulty of raising finance.

On an owner-occupied croft, responsibility for financing and building the house falls to the crofter. This is much simpler for the community, but can still be a challenge for the crofter in terms of raising finance. (Banks don't like to lend on investments where there are underlying restrictions on open market value, or competing stakeholders. So, securing mortgages for homes on land that is tenanted, or where there is shared equity or rural housing burdens is difficult, if not currently impossible)

Both tenants and owner-occupier crofters are potentially eligible for the Croft House Grant²⁵ (CHG). However, even if secured, this does not cover the full costs of construction so crofters will require to source additional finance. If they do not have their own savings, commercial finance may be hard to raise as lenders will generally not fund against land under crofting tenure²⁶. The typical solution is to build on non-croft land, either by de-crofting the plot or using land which is not part of the croft.

In relation to use of the RHB, whether on the whole croft or just a house plot, it is important to note that any constraint on the title – such as a RHB - limits the availability of funding to perhaps just 2 or 3 lenders, and where the RHB or other agreements serve to tie the house to the croft this may restrict options further. MCW remains open to alternative models of croft house provision and they recognise that community groups across Scotland are pioneering new approaches to affordable homes in rural areas. For example a partnership with Morvern Community Development Company (MCDC) could facilitate the building of woodland croft homes, perhaps using a pre-emption scheme as trialled by the Knoydart Foundation. MCDC have already built and manage affordable housing locally and are currently funding an approved plan for affordable homes in Lochaline, all of which will be within walking distance of the woodland crofts.

In particular, providing housing as landlord's fixed equipment is a particularly simple and powerful way to deliver the required safeguards over occupancy and use. For example, a simple A-frame cabin funded by MCW as landlord's fixed equipment might serve as living space for a few years while a self-build home is realised by the crofter. The cabin might then be used as holiday accommodation or spare rooms once a new home is in place. Well designed and built cabins would reduce the need

forest management, climate change, biodiversity and the protection of water resources are applied in the UK.

²⁵ [Croft House Grant \(ruralpayments.org\)](https://ruralpayments.org/)

²⁶ [News | HSPC](#)

to install caravans as temporary accommodation, which is an aesthetic concern expressed in community consultation. That this approach should currently be unfunded, despite the clear public benefits, is the subject of a report²⁷ to the Scottish Land Commission produced by the WCP/CHT which aims to raise the profile of the issue and ultimately secure funding for the model. In addition, the delivery of housing by owner-occupier crofters on a croft subject to a whole-croft RHB is being developed in Glengarry and lessons from this should be available in coming months.

6.3.2 Woodland Croft Registration Process

The process of creating a new woodland croft is straightforward and involves application to the Crofting Commission by the owner of the land. The application form is relatively simple and asks, amongst other things, for the reason the croft is being created and what 'socio-economic or public interest benefits' are anticipated to arise as a result. It also asks whether the croft will be let according to the 'statutory conditions' listed in the crofting acts; if these have been varied then prior approval from the Land Court may be required, although some changes (such as withholding right to buy) can simply be notified to the Commission (who in any event will require a copy of any proposal to vary the conditions of let).

A map of the proposed holding is required, which is perhaps the most demanding part of the process as it must be drawn to sufficiently high standards that it can form the basis of the registration of the croft by Registers of Scotland (a process which happens in parallel to the croft creation). Once the croft is approved, it can be let to a tenant or sold to an owner-occupier depending on the new landlord's intentions. The former case will involve another application to the Commission, to approve the lease to the tenant who should have been chosen (for community-owned crofts) through an open application process. Once signed, the lease must be registered with Registers of Scotland within 3 months. Sale to an owner-occupier involves the normal conveyancing process, but the incoming crofter must notify the Commission that they are the new owner-occupier. The restrictions on occupancy and use that may form part of the lease in the case of a tenanted croft, in the latter case will be required to be included in the RHB and associated personal bond, to protect the community interest.

Public notification is an important part of the process with most applications requiring to be publicly advertised to allow the wider crofting community the opportunity to comment.

6.3.3 Woodland Croft Access and Servicing

Servicing the woodland crofts with electricity and water will be one of the highest single costs for the woodland crofts project. Given the sensitivities of taking access off the haul roads and the planning challenges if the woodland crofts might want to be 'off-grid' it is proposed that woodland croft homes and other developments are kept closer to the B849.

All new access points onto the B849 would need asphalt bell-mouths/aprons and bin stores and they would need to meet other planning requirements in relation to sightlines as determined by The Highland Council. Access road connection for developments of up to four houses will be guided by Highland Council "Access to Single Houses and Small Housing Developments" guidance. This states that the first 5m of the access road should be a gentle slope from the public road after which it should normally be no greater than 1-in-10 which impacts the potential positions for new access points off the B849.

²⁷ [Land Lines: Benefits of and Barriers to Affordable Tenanted Croft Housing](#)

Consideration for any dwelling in a rural situation needs to consider pick-up/drop-off and access for students getting to and from school, especially in dark, winter months. It is another reason that croft development is best made close to the B849.

Any sections of private access track serving more than four dwellings will need to be of a council adopted standard (i.e. tarmac'd with footpath) therefore the location and quantity of dwellings will dictate the extent of adopted road required.

Connecting to power and water will also need wayleave agreements with Ardtornish Estate that owns fields across which the supplies would need to pass. There is still insufficient clarity on when the Ardtornish water supply to Achabeag will be adopted by Scottish Water, so it is assumed that any piped supply will need to come from a connection closer to the public supply nearer to Lochaline.

Telephone/Broadband service connections could come from BT Open reach services running under the B849.

Off-grid options for woodland crofts may be possible. Mobile broadband for communications rather than a physical connection being an easy option. Generating electricity from roof-top solar, with battery storage, or small wind-turbines might be practical. Small wind turbines might be more of a challenge to get approval in Planning Applications, in part due to the need for additional woodland removal in what is currently a woodland site. Rainwater collection and water storage suitable for a family home can also be a challenge due to the cost of installing sufficient capacity to meet planning requirements.

Waste water will need to be treated by an approved septic or biodigester system. Installing suitable soak-aways will be limited by the proximity of bed-rock and allowance needs to be then made for treated waste water to feed into burns of sufficient capacity - obviously down-stream from any existing water supply abstraction. Outfall pipe connections from soakways to watercourses crossing third party land will require wayleave agreements or similar with landowners.

6.3.4 Local Planning Considerations

The Highland Council is the planning authority for Morvern. There is limited experience of working with woodland croft proposals, but they are treated like all other developments in relation to appropriate design, build and tree protection. A proposal for Woodland Crofts at Invergarry is currently under consideration and this is being used to inform planning requirements for woodland crofts in Morvern. Highland Council Supplementary Guidance requires that a planning application for a new woodland crofts township is supported by a forest plan covering the whole area, and a business plan for the woodland crofts project.

What is more of an unknown is how the woodland croft project is considered as a development and the provision of affordable homes. Any development of four or more homes requires a 25% allocation for affordable homes. Despite the principle that woodland crofts will be affordable for young families and new entrants it is still possible that for the development of 7 or 8 woodland crofts, 2 affordable units will need to be delivered by an approved social housing body and so consideration needs to be given to designing these in when it comes to providing more detailed master plan. MCW is not registered as a social housing body and plots for affordable housing would need to be sold to build affordable homes.

Consideration then also needs to be given to the tipping point at which the number of domestic units on a site requires adoption of the access road, asphalt surfacing, fire hydrants and street lights, etc.

Pre-planning advice will need to be sought, especially if there is to be any future development in the area overlying the sand mine workings. It is not thought that this will be too significant given the depth of basalt under which the sand is being extracted. It may have more of an impact on the accessibility of mortgage finance.

6.3.5 Planning Policy

Reference to national Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) (2023) will be necessary. The area is within the West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan (WHI-LDP 2019). The Highland Wide Local Development Plan (HW-LDP 2012) will also be relevant.

The site lies within a rural area and is designated as a 'Fragile Area'. National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) offers support for new homes that would support and sustain existing fragile communities, support identified local housing outcomes and would be suitable in terms of location, access and environmental impacts.

NPF4 Policy 6: Forestry, Woodland and Trees will be a consideration. It seeks to identify and protect woodland and generally presumes against development that would adversely impact native woodland, hedgerows or individual trees of high biodiversity value. Where woodland is removed, compensatory planting is typically expected to be delivered. New planting planned to be carried out elsewhere on or off site should be considered acceptable as compensatory planting for developments within the woodland. As noted elsewhere open space is a necessary and desirable element of a woodland and up to 20% is allowed under forestry regulations which should provide some tolerance.

The Planning Officer's Report of Handling in support of the successful recent MCDC Planning Application for ten new homes in Lochaline stated '*Housing to meet identified local or regional needs and where a proposal meets the needs of a democratically formed community aim and is judged to be in the net public interest, woodland removal is likely to be acceptable under*' [Scottish Government's policy on the Control of Woodland Removal] COWR policy'. In that instance off site compensatory planting was a requirement to justify the removal of trees on the site. It may be possible to argue that the woodland crofts are a compatible use and therefore no compensation is required. However we're not aware of a precedent for this. Further research and advice from the local authority on their position will be required and sought at Pre-Application stage.

NPF4: Policy 3 on Biodiversity states: '*Proposals for local development will include appropriate measures to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity, in accordance with national and local guidance. Measures should be proportionate to the nature and scale of development.*' under this policy demonstration of a net biodiversity gain or enhancement on development sites is required. Again it should be possible to argue that on or off site planting is considered compensatory for any biodiversity loss and providing the required enhancement to the existing situation. Demonstrating appropriate proposals for long term management of these measures will be important.

Initial, informal discussion with Planning Officers confirmed that it will be important to justify the need for croft houses with particular reference to Policy 48 of the Highland Wide Local Development Plan: New/ Extended Crofting Townships. It states:

- *The Council wishes to support the creation of new crofting townships and significant extensions to existing ones (with associated housing) where circumstances allow.*
- *Proposals should demonstrate a wider public interest - i.e. significant benefits to the community of both crofters and non-crofters. This could be achieved through various means, including: a significant enhancement of the extent and coherence of the green network in the area through habitat*

creation/management and/or recreation/access provision of paths, provision of affordable housing which is secured for the longer term, and establishing the land in community ownership and providing tenancies.

The West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan (WHI-LDP 2019) identifies Placemaking Priorities for Lochaline which include:

- *Safeguard better agricultural land to the north and west of the settlement and retain and enhance green networks around the village margins.*

Other applicable Planning Policy for the new homes will include:

- Highland Wide Local Development Plan:
 - Policy 36: Development in the Wider Countryside
 - Policy 57: Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage
- NPF4: Policy 17 Rural Homes.
 - *Development proposals for new homes in rural areas will be supported where the development is suitably scaled, sited and designed to be in keeping with the character of the area and the development:*
 - *is demonstrated to be necessary to support the sustainable management of a viable rural business or croft, and there is an essential need for a worker (including those taking majority control of a farm business) to live permanently at or near their place of work;*
 - *Development proposals for new homes in rural areas will consider how the development will contribute towards local living and take into account identified local housing needs (including affordable housing), economic considerations and the transport needs of the development as appropriate for the rural location*
 - *Development proposals for new homes in remote rural areas will be supported where the proposal: ...*
 - *i. supports and sustains existing fragile communities; ...*
- Policy 29.
 - *a) Development proposals that contribute to the viability, sustainability and diversity of rural communities and local rural economy will be supported, including:*
 - *i. farms, crofts, woodland crofts or other land use businesses, where use of good quality land for development is minimised and business viability is not adversely affected;*

Other Planning considerations will include:

- Developer contributions (financial contributions towards local community infrastructure such as schools or transport networks)
- Heritage. Minimising impact on archaeological features. It will be difficult to negate impact on some existing archaeological features however this should not preclude development in the areas identified. Key features have been avoided through reference to online heritage records. Where viable existing land features (e.g. dykes) and extant plot boundaries have been considered to define crofts.
- Bats. Some areas of woodland removal may require bat surveys to be carried out prior to commencement.

6.4 Woodland Management Options

Woodland management within the croft areas will be determined by the objectives and capacity of the woodland crofts, but restrictions or requirements may be placed on the crofts through varying the conditions of the lease. For example, if a woodland croft area includes a riparian area the requirement may be to manage this area as native woodland. Outside the woodland croft areas, the objectives will be set by MCW. Management objectives will be influenced by the site and practical constraints, along with obligations under UKFS and planning conditions applied when

The soils on the site are more than capable of growing a range of species and long-rotation productive broadleaves for timber, or shorter rotation birch firewood would be as appropriate as continuing the growing of Sitka spruce as a high volume conifer crop. Delivering greater community benefit, in terms of recreational amenity, in a woodland so close to the community would push the direction of travel for the woodland towards broadleaves, or at least a greater diversity of conifers. Larch might currently be the 'bread and butter' of the local sawmill, but with *Phytophthora ramorum* now established in the area, this is a finite resource and the next best alternatives to grow as a timber supply for the local sawmill enterprise would be Douglas fir, Western red cedar and oak. Firewood supplies might be better met by growing medium rotations of birch rather than spruce on shorter rotations because birch has more calorific value per cubic metre.



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will probably need to be sold to local markets, e.g. as firewood or for local milling. If larger volumes can be harvested and brought to roadside, they could be added to existing timber sale contracts, or sold separately to markets off Morvern.

If contractors need to be brought in to carry out felling contractors, volumes felled have to be sufficient to justify the costs of bringing contractors and equipment to site.

Felling or clearing of storm damaged woodland might also best be done by contractors with harvesting machines because of the safety considerations in dealing with a tangle of blown trees.

Some areas of the community forest lend themselves to clear-felling and replanting in the short term, because of the age and height of trees. It won't be possible to thin them further due to the risk of wind-blow. Replanting could then be with species other than Sitka spruce which better meet the community's ambitions for the wood.

It would be possible, with mobile sawmills, to process logs on site to produce the timber required for buildings on woodland croft sites. It's not common, but there are a few examples in Scotland where planners have approved homes built with fresh (unseasoned) logs or sawn timber.

6.4.2 Species mix and natural reserves

The UKFS set some minimum requirements with respect to the mix of species and management for biodiversity. The UKFS requires that managers maintain or establish a diverse composition within the forest management unit; where only one species is suited to a site and management objectives, a maximum of 65% may be allocated to a single species, and where more than one species is suited to a site and matches the management objectives, opportunities must be taken to further diversify the above species composition.²⁸

Open ground is considered important and necessary within a woodland and it would include roads and hard-standing for management purposes (perhaps classed as 'other land'). It also includes glades or managed open ground around archaeology sites or for conservation habitat. Generally speaking open ground should not exceed 20% of a woodland management area. Currently the community forest includes approximately 20 ha of mapped open ground (15% of the total area), although much of this is becoming established woodland with natural regeneration of Sitka spruce and other tree species.

'Natural reserves' is a term used to refer to areas that are minimally managed; no trees are harvested and the area is left to nature, apart from on-going management of herbivores and the removal of invasive non-native species. Deadwood accumulation is a key conservation contribution of natural reserves. Riparian areas and wet flushes where forest machines would damage the soil, areas that are already a focus for native woodland species, and areas where high humidity supports a diversity of fungi are obvious locations to identify as 'natural reserves'. Natural reserves can also refer to individual mature trees, such as oak, beech and ash that have wide branching habits, crown deadwood, holes and rot pockets. From a conservation and visual amenity perspective, these trees can add significant value and their management can include removing conifer regeneration from around them so that they do not decline due to over-shading, and the identification of replacements so that there is a continuity of ancient trees within the woods.

²⁸ UKFS v5, Good practice 21 page13:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/651670336a423b0014f4c5c0/Revised_UK_Forestry_Standard_-_effective_October_2024.pdf

There are no significant elements of the community forest that clash with the general appreciation of landscape aesthetics, but there are options in management to maintain the recreational and landscape amenity values of the woodland, e.g. by not clear-felling and by retaining significant, mature trees along with the diversity and mix of broadleaves and conifers.

The replacement of trees as they are thinned or felled by natural regeneration will be constrained: Sitka spruce is tolerant of higher deer numbers than most other species and it is tolerant of fairly low light levels, so it is the species that will regenerate most commonly. Spruce regeneration will need to be physically removed where it is not wanted. Under a spruce canopy, a suitable alternative for planting might be Douglas fir, but it is much more vulnerable to deer browsing, as is both Norway spruce and western red cedar.

Deadwood can seem untidy, but both standing dead trees and fallen dead wood, both big and small, can contribute significantly to a diverse ecosystem, providing habitat for fungi that in turn are fed on by invertebrates, which are then food for birds, etc. In healthy native woodland ecosystems as much as 40% of the above ground biomass might be deadwood. In timber plantations this proportion might be from 5% to 15%.

6.4.3 Native woodland, environment & landscape improvements

Woodland management can be adapted to meet a range of objectives. The community forest already has a component of native tree species. The area is not recorded as an ancient woodland site and there is no obligation to expand the native woodland element. There are opportunities though to maintain the existing native woodland elements; by removing beech and spruce regeneration from those areas, or to manage them as mixed woodlands, favouring native species by thinning. Selective felling of some of the non-native conifers and the control of deer would allow the area of native woodland to expand and include a greater proportion of species such as birch, oak, aspen, hazel and holly. Particular emphasis might be given to burnsites and gullies, or where wet ground conditions restrict rooting depth, close to properties and where people go for recreation.

A future focus on birch might be appropriate for the production of firewood that will be better quality, although slower grown, than Sitka spruce. A longer term vision would be to plant and tend oak in order to produce high value logs for milling. Other hardwoods that might be suitable for firewood production would be sycamore and any disease resistant strains of ash and elm. Scots pine is the only timber producing native conifer species in Britain and it would be suited to the higher areas of Morvern where the soils tend towards peaty podzols rather than upland brown-earths. It is also a species that would help support the red squirrel population, as it produces edible seed through the winter when most other conifers shed theirs in the autumn.

A priority might be to remove invasive, non-native species to reduce the risk of these species further colonising the woodland. A principal species of concern in the area is Himalayan honeysuckle, but *Cotoneaster* species have also been spreading gradually over many years. *Fuchsia* and *Crocodylia* might also be removed from the limited locations where they are present.

MCW may wish to collaborate with the community of woodland crofts to deliver more outcomes for native woodland under the banner of the Alliance for Scotland's rainforests and Lochaline Community Forest could serve as a significant stepping stone for native woodland species along this Southern edge of the peninsula.

6.4.4 Deer & Wildlife Management

The principal wildlife management considerations with respect to growing trees are deer and large pine weevil (*Hylobius abietis*), but management might also want to focus on increasing wildlife diversity in the area.

Deer cause significant problems in re-establishing woodland. For the community forest and the woodland crofts, limiting damage by deer to a sustainable level is going to be an annual expense, whatever method is used. Deer are established in the Morvern plantations and use the cover of the spruce for shelter during the day and use the clearings, felled sites and adjacent fields for feeding at night. FLS staff will be controlling deer numbers by shooting as best they can, but it will be necessary to either shoot or fence deer off the croft areas and any other regeneration areas in the community forest.

Chemical or physical repellents that discourage browsing of tree shoots are still being developed but require at least annual maintenance and re-application, but may be worth trialling with access to a large number of volunteers. If damage limitation is going to be by culling deer numbers, then opportunities for shooting need to be created by maintaining sight-lines into clearings. This may involve collaboration with FLS and other neighbouring land owners. It may involve creating or maintaining glades in the woodland where deer can be attracted to good forage and shot. A benefit of reducing deer numbers while not entirely excluding them from a wood means that a more natural balance of vegetation, from trees to small herbs, is achieved. It may be that one or more of the crofters might want to obtain a gun licence and training²⁹ to assist with the deer control. Culled deer could be temporarily stored in the FLS deer larder at Knock before being sold locally, or sold with other deer culled by FLS.

One option for fencing would be to wrap the Community Forest in a deer fence and costs would need to include suitable gates or grids at all the access points into the wood. Deer fences constrain public access to points where, ideally, self-closing gates can be installed. The alternative is to fence each of the croft garden sites and woodland regeneration areas, as required, with deer control focussed on unfenced areas. This may require a total length of fencing greater than a single perimeter fence, but they may be easier to manage and maintain deer-proof.

Large pine weevils are one of the main problems to be managed after clear-felling. The insect larvae grow in dead tree stumps but the adults feed on the cambium of tree twigs and young trees. In high numbers they will girdle and kill large numbers of transplanted trees. The options on management are to wait 4 or 5 years after felling for the stumps to become unsuitable for the weevil larvae and for the population to drop, or to chemically spray the transplants so that the weevils die if they eat the bark of the treated trees. Waiting 4 or 5 years means that weeds will have re-established into the felled area and more weeding around planted trees will be required. If an adjacent area is felled within 4 or 5 years then weevil numbers can build up in these areas and travel to feed in any recent adjacent planting. So the timing gap between clear-fells of any woodland, probably within a 1km radius, would need to be about 10 years to allow planted trees to have grown big enough to be tolerant of some weevil damage. Weevils are less of a problem in silvicultural systems that produce fewer stumps, e.g. alternative systems to clear-fell.

While there are no bodies of standing water on site apart from the small pool that stores water for the Struthan House water supply, there are boggy areas that deer have used for wallows, and these could be opened up to create small wildlife ponds, as desired by woodland crofts.

²⁹ <https://bds.org.uk/courses-training/recommended-deer-management-qualifications/>

6.4.5 Deer fencing options

A perimeter fence would need to include gates or cattle grids for each of the vehicle access points and self-closing pedestrian gates for every other gateway. It is unlikely that FLS would agree to the fence crossing the haul road without cattle grids and the wear and tear on cattle grids by timber lorries is high. Agricultural crofting grants could help fund fencing costs around crofts and contribute to the total bill. Forestry grants might contribute to some of the fencing costs through habitats and species for native woodland restoration, but it would be proportional to the area of native woodland being protected.

The perimeter of lots 1 to 4 of the sale area totals 6390m. This could be reduced by excluding the tree nursery site or including Kiel House. At a basic cost of £20 per metre fencing costs would be at least £127,800.

The alternative is to fence around vulnerable woodland areas and woodland crofts only. A central block North of Ardness and Struhan would enclose an area of some 31.5ha with a perimeter of 2640m, and North of Kiel House 1430m would be needed to enclose the woodland crofts there. There would be no need for cattle grids. A gate suitable for quad bikes would be needed for each woodland croft and pedestrian gates for the core path as well. The residents of Kiel House would need pedestrian gates so that they could access their water supply. The total cost might be in the region of £52,000 with croft and forestry grants meeting £37,500. The balance to find from elsewhere would be £14,500. The wrap-around fence would save the woodland crofts about 600m in fencing (2 sides, either side of the central native woodland area) or £11,100.

Each woodland croft may still need internal stock fencing to define their boundary and contain livestock, but this could be simple line wire fencing, so fairly low cost.

Deer fence costs are estimated at £18 to 20/m including VAT. FGS grant rate is £9.50/m. Croft grant is £16.67/m.

Standard steel vehicle gates range from £200 to £350 each, depending on the width. FGS grant rate is £215. Croft grant rate is £226.53.

Steel self-closing gates cost £840 each. FGS grant rate is £350.

An approximate cost to install a cattle grid might be in the region of £4000; significantly more if it requires a pre-cast concrete base.

7 Community Engagement – Options Appraisal

7.1 Recreation

Community acquisition provides an opportunity for investment, development and suitable promotion of an enhanced range of recreational facilities, encouraging substantially greater use of the forest, for both informal visitors and those participating in organised events and greater satisfaction from those using the routes. How this works alongside woodland crofts has to be carefully thought out. Woodland crofts will have areas where the crofters don't want the public to go, but woodland crofts may be able to initiate and commercialise some activities.

There is currently limited car-parking and minimal way-marking or promotion of facilities, and consequently the woods are, on the whole, used by locals only.

Monetising the provision of public recreation is difficult: Part 1 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 provides for free, responsible access on foot, horseback and cycle, and whilst it is possible to charge for car parking, introducing such charges where not applied previously has proved challenging and controversial.

In practice the likely scale of any developments will be constrained by the availability of funding, primarily from grants, although some income may be available from timber harvesting. Use of volunteers and winning stone onsite can reduce costs to some extent.

Grant aid for capital items related to path works and other recreation infrastructure (way-marking, interpretation, furniture etc) may be available through the Improving Public Access element of the Agri-Environment Scheme. Other potential funders for a package of recreation works are identified in Appendix 2.

7.1.1 Path works and related infrastructure

An important part of this feasibility study is to identify opportunities to improve public access through the woodlands and to deliver public benefit that way. Objectives might be summarised under the following:

Improving accessibility: enhancing existing trails or establishing discrete all-ability or multi-user loops providing shorter, less-committing recreational routes where the terrain makes this achievable.

Improving connectivity: establishment of new trails to connect different paths or different parts of the community, or taking pedestrian or cycling traffic off busy, narrow public roads.

Accessing features of heritage interest or view-points: suggesting and way-marking to identified destinations within the forest.

Provision of benches and picnic tables will increase accessibility by providing rest points and should be built into any path works plan, especially for those paths closest to car-parks.

Additional recreation infrastructure and usage can increase complications when felling, requiring diversions or closure and reinstatement if paths are damaged during harvesting operations, although there are well-established protocols for managing access in such circumstances. There will be a need to monitor trail infrastructure, which may need to be closed for safety reasons e.g. after windblow: it may take time to gather the resources to clear the trails again. Given the ready establishment of tree regeneration and gorse, vegetation management will be required to keep more informal trails open.

Trail construction costs vary considerably, depending on the grade of trail and the ground conditions encountered. Costs can be reduced substantially if stone can be sourced from borrow-pits / quarries onsite, and/or through use of volunteer labour.

As developments at Knock Park are implemented, access into the community forest should reflect this, in terms of access points and then links to the wider forest network. An important consideration might be an off-road route between Achabeag and Lochaline, to get some of the bicycle and pedestrian traffic off the B849 for a small part of its length, and to facilitate off-road access between the woodland crofts and Lochaline.

7.1.2 Signage, interpretation and promotion

Post-acquisition, MCW would need to establish effective way-marking, both on existing trails and on any new provision. This is a relatively minor cost but needs to be kept up to date, refreshed and responsive to any on-going developments.

Static, onsite interpretation is commonly installed at recreation sites, displaying material to inform, welcome, orientate and direct users. Interpretation panels have value but can be expensive and if

not done well are a very passive way for visitors to interact with the site. On-site interpretation weathers quickly, so consideration should be given to options where the on-site presence is minimal but the content can be easily accessed on a leaflet or phone application.

When designing interpretation, it is important to identify good stories that will be engaging and can be installed in a way that is as interactive as possible. Some community woods have created themed trails based on the cultural/heritage use of the site.

Off-site (e.g. on-line) promotion of facilities will be an important component of driving up footfall, especially if the target audience is beyond the immediate Lochaline community area. Increasingly, potential visitors like to know what is available at a given destination and often will seek to print off or download a map to guide them on a phone or other device.

The stories and locations that might be worth highlighting are the old Achabeag township and 'Tigh An Easbuig'.

7.1.3 Mountain biking

Mountain biking and off-road cycling continue to grow in popularity, attracting a wide range of users from families to daredevils. The recent development of e-bikes is anticipated to widen participation. Many trails can evolve from casual, local development as riders open up informal routes, but as with other recreational facilities, mountain biking infrastructure requires significant investment if it is to be safe and accessible for the wider public.

It can be difficult to monetise the value of mountain biking when trails are open and accessible under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code: most projects are dependent on grants for establishment costs, whilst income to fund maintenance can be generated from car parking and leases for bike hire/repair and cafes.

Lochaline Community Forest will lend itself, in terms of off-road cycling, to the use of the forest road network and any trails built to take multi-use traffic (bikes or pedestrians). High rainfall and peaty soils do not otherwise allow for informal trails that will withstand high levels of mountain bike traffic without becoming very muddy and possibly eroded. The current demand for mountain bike trails in the Morvern area does seem to be relatively small compared with other areas of Scotland, but that is in part due to the lack of connected trails that provide distance, diversity and excitement for off-road cyclists. The investment required to create mountain bike specific trails may not be currently justified.

7.1.4 Woodland play park and/or gym

Community ownership could facilitate the development of a wide range of other recreation activities and infrastructure that benefit from the presence of woodland features and materials. These range from free play for children where they use the branches, logs and other site features to create their own dens or adventurous play experiences, to more specific playpark and exercise features such as rope webs and boardwalks. Any development requires careful thought about user numbers, practical limitations due to weather, midges, etc., proximity to populations and therefore demand.

Woodland play might be facilitated by one of the crofts if they decide to host Forest School-type activities during the holidays. During school times, facilities closer to the primary school, e.g. Knock Park, may be better suited for woodland play or learning activities.

There may be demand for simple exercise structures to be installed along a promoted hiking or running trail, but development of this may evolve over time, as and when demand develops.

7.1.5 Other sports

The community forest, on its own, with the priority for woodland crofts may not be appropriate for the promotion of other forest activities such as orienteering.

7.1.6 Adventure tourism

Without any long-distance path or cycle route promoted through Morvern, there is little demand for camping or stop-over points in Lochaline, other than anything that is easily accessible from the public roads. Individual croft plans may evolve to provide visitor accommodation facilities that would meet a range of needs.

7.1.7 Community Garden

Woodland clearings might be a suitable area for a community garden/allotment or community orchard. Fencing would be required to keep deer and hares out, although in a community orchard the trees could be individually protected with 1.5m tall, 1.2m diameter tree guards. Again, individual crofts may be the locations to facilitate shared gardening enterprises. Long-term, the tree nursery site currently being developed by RSPB could accommodate a community poly-tunnel for other crop production alongside the tree nursery enterprise.

7.1.8 Events

There is potential to host specific arts, cultural or sporting events in or adjacent to the forest. Consideration needs to be given to partner organisations to help host and run the event, how the events will be funded and how the events stimulate and sustain public engagement in forest activities.

Open days: Activities might include demonstrations of horse logging, using axe and cross-cut saw to process felled logs, bug hunts or nature trails, falconry, identifying and processing wild food, building bird and bat boxes, etc. Ideally these events would also engage a number of additional local volunteers, local groups, local companies and Forestry and Land Scotland staff.

Cultural events: such as open-air theatre or 'fireside' music sessions. Numbers of guests might be restricted by parking, the capacity under any shelter provided and what would feel safe to the organisers.

Seasonal events: such as a Christmas tree sale or Santa's Grotto event, perhaps in conjunction with other craft activities utilising forest materials.

Some of these activities might be suitably hosted by some of the woodland crofts, or they are better suited to the Knock games site.

7.1.9 Art installations

As community use of the community forest develops, it might lend itself as a venue for outdoor art; either ephemeral projects that use the natural resources or more permanent works that are inspired by the location; either developed through courses or by an artist 'in residence'. Art installations might be best suited to forest areas that are already well used by the public, unless they are developed as a new attraction. Options include a simple poetry trail³⁰ that uses new or existing poems or ballads of the local area, or they might originate from a workshop or event that picks up on some of the cultural heritage of the area.

7.2 Volunteering, skills, education

³⁰ E.g. <https://www.corbenicpoetrypath.com/>

There is significant potential to use the community forest for a range of volunteering, education and skills projects as it is relatively close to Lochaline Village and there will be a diversity of work that could be done by volunteers or used as training events.

Initiating and running these projects will generally require grant funding, supplemented by income from e.g. timber harvesting. Some potential funders are identified in Appendix 2.

7.2.1 Volunteering

Voluntary involvement is a key component of the sometimes intangible community development benefits arising from community asset ownership. Whilst some forest management operations require appropriately skilled and qualified professional contractors, many activities can be carried out by volunteers. Voluntary input will also be critical to deliver some of the recommended projects detailed in section 9 below.

Potential activities include:

- Environmental surveys and monitoring
- Tree planting and maintenance
- Removal of non-natives and invasive species
- Path construction and maintenance
- Tree nursery work
- Running events (Christmas tree and woodfuel sales, etc)

MCW has a strong track record of working with volunteers in its management of Achnaha Wood and going forward with the Lochaline Community Forest will build on this. Despite the demand for volunteers across a wide range of community organisations MCW have demonstrated that they can get work done with volunteers when needed. Their events are well managed, good 'craic' and rewarding for participants and the wider community.

Where funding and income can be secured to support the employment of a part time forester and/or administrator for Lochaline Community Forest, part of their role could be to support volunteering. This would include carrying out risk assessments, ensuring appropriate PPE is provided and providing adequate training and induction for the work.

7.2.2 Skills training

A few community woodland groups have developed their woods as venues for skills training, both in terms of developing woodland / land management skills or using the woodland as a venue for a much wider range of skills training. However, developing this to any significant extent, i.e. moving beyond ensuring volunteers are appropriately trained or occasional educational events to the point where it might become an income generating activity, has proved challenging, and requires significant investment in infrastructure, people and promotion.

In the short-term the appropriate focus for MCW might be to offer a venue for outdoor training opportunities. Course themes might include chainsaw training, path creation and maintenance, bike trail construction, building from logs, making spruce beer, deer & wildlife monitoring & management.

7.2.3 Education initiatives – forest school etc.

There are opportunities to use the site and adjoining woodland for education events. Development of this will require further liaison with schools or with mental health or special needs charities to identify their needs or aspirations to deliver sessions in a woodland environment. They may know of Forest School practitioners in the area looking for venues to deliver sessions.

Lochaline Community Forest is a modest walk from Lochaline Primary School, so the wood is favourably placed to be used as an educational site for learning about woodland biology, biodiversity or for woodland craft lessons. The woodlands might also be used appropriately by other groups, such as Scouts, after school clubs, Forest School practitioners hosting forest play activities during the school holidays, or wildlife clubs running weekend events for their members.

The site is 20 miles from Ardnamurchan High School in Strontian; a 40 minute drive or more. It may be suitable for one-off visits but not regular educational sessions. There are other community owned woods that are more convenient for High School activities.

7.2.4 Woodland Shelter

Woodland shelters, as already constructed in Achnaha Wood, will enhance the use of the community area for a range of community engagement events, from social gatherings to educational visits. Within Lochaline Community Forest such a venue will be significantly more accessible to Lochaline as compared with the facility at Achnaha.

7.3 Economic Activity

This section considers the options for MCW to generate income from leases as well as perhaps timber sales and renewable energy generation. It considers some of the options that might be suited to the woodland crofts. It also looks at the potential viability of the overall package, of MCW working alongside woodland crofts and a woodlot to ensure long-term viability for everyone.

Potential woodland croft tenants have already submitted draft proposals for their crofts. These, and plans for the wider area of the community forest will need more detailed business plans, including a more in-depth look at available grant funding.

The potential to generate an immediate income from timber sales depends on what is purchased by MCW, and whether the woodland purchase is phased so that the timber value is retained by Forestry and Land Scotland, and those areas with high timber values are only sold to MCW once the timber has been harvested. This might be a more practical option and the financial assessment may depend on how the standing timber value is accounted for in the sale valuation.

The range of income generating options suggested for the woodland crofts is diverse, from selling logs for firewood or milling, to growing craft materials such as willow or oak coppice, from providing visitor accommodation to selling agro-forestry products. All include an element of self-sufficiency in terms of food production or energy generation and all include the reality of home working and working off-site to generate additional income.

7.3.1 Land rents

MCW will generate its core income from renting most of the community forest as woodland crofts and as a woodlot.

There is limited experience with woodland crofts, but annual rents might be in the region of £100 to £200/ha/year for crofts without standing timber and perhaps less than £200/ha/yr if they have re-planting obligations. Higher rents may be justifiable where the crofts include timber that can be harvested. Rents may also reflect management requirements agreed with MCW and the provision of services or other costs that are met by MCW. In addition to annual rents, woodland croft tenants would be expected to pay an entry fee to cover the legal costs of establishing the crofts. Generally these are a single down-payment, but if they are set to cover servicing costs then there may be the option to make payments in more affordable instalments.

Woodlot rents might best be based on the potential output from the area of woodland. For example an area of un-thinned Sitka spruce, 36 years old might have a standing volume of 350 to 550m³ per hectare. This might be able to sustain a light thinning yield of 10 to 15m³/year, so a rent of around £350/year might be applied, if standing timber value is £25/m³. It depends on what the Woodlot team needs to do with respect to maintaining infrastructure or doing other non-economic work, such as clearing spruce regeneration from native woodland areas as part of their lease agreement.

The RSPB lease has been negotiated on a zero cash payment, but with some payment in kind through the supply of native tree transplants.

7.3.2 Timber sales

Whether the timber is being sold by MCW, the individual crofts or Woodlot, consideration needs to be given to what is currently growing on site. This is detailed in section 4.17.

Within the area to be purchased in a recommended Phase I area, sub-compartment 9766a (approximately 10ha) may need to be felled in 2030, yielding some 5,000m³ and £135,000. In 2035 9766b (9ha) may need to be felled, yielding approximately 4,000m³ and £106,000.

Along with this there will be opportunities to thin other stands such as 9768a.

Timber harvesting generally requires specialist equipment and training. Thinning of trees up to 30 or 40cm in diameter could be carried out by woodlot or woodland croft teams using chainsaws and small extraction machines, but larger trees, larger volumes and areas of wind-blow are best done by contractors with timber harvesters and forwarders. Contractors and most mills buying Sitka spruce are often only interested in contracts of several hundred or 1,000 tonnes and more. It can be difficult selling smaller volumes unless they can be fed into another contract that is running on Morvern.

Where timber sales are made to or through an agent, with harvesting costs met by the timber buyer, income generated from clearfelling needs to cover the costs of managing the sale and paying for establishment of a replacement tree crop or woodland. Forestry grants are available to help cover some of the costs of re-establishment.

Where timber is being produced in small volumes, it may be most appropriate to feed these into local firewood markets, or the Savary sawmill when it needs logs that the community forest can produce.

Firewood might be sold green, off the saw to allow the buyer to further process it and dry it. To sell air or kiln dried timber requires additional space for storing round logs before they are processed and stacked for drying. To sustain a firewood business, the space required, equipment and turn-over would need to be at least similar to the one running from Savary. Smaller set-ups might work to supply a few local customers who want an alternative to the Savary firewood merchant. Setting up a firewood enterprise that directly competes with the Savary supplier may not be wise if the output of timber from the community forest is going to depend on the Savary enterprise as a buyer.

With an existing sawmill enterprise in Savary (Lochaline) there may be little scope for the establishment of a sawmilling enterprise, but individual crofts may want to hire in the sawmill or purchase their own small mill to process wood for their own construction requirements.

Small volumes of logs could be sold to the Savary sawmill and crofts might like to plant and grow species that the mill would be interested in buying in the future.

Using wood products from the woodland crofts and community wood to produce biochar might be an option that could operate alongside community composting and any community garden or orchard project that might be developed. The cost of a biochar retort might only be justifiable where there is a strong local demand from the horticultural trade.

7.3.3 Venison

It may be possible for MCW to develop a venison business, either as a stand-alone operation or working in partnership with one of the woodland crofts or a local company. This could be established as an employment training project. It may be possible to utilise the larder owned by FLS at Knock, but it would require construction of a facility to butcher, package and store venison. It may include a smokery. It might be linked to the local restaurant. It would need an approved and tested water supply alongside relevant hygiene training for staff and certification.

7.3.4 Tree nursery

The community forest is not suitable terrain for establishing a large tree nursery to supply all the demand for transplants on Morvern and the local demand is probably too cyclical to provide a large or medium enterprise with a dependable market for transplants. However, RSPB are establishing a small nursery at Kiel to meet the expected demand for native species transplants for planting into native woodland restoration areas. This is on land currently rented from Forestry and Land Scotland, but the suggestion from both RSPB and FLS is that in time the nursery could become a community managed project and there may not be opposition to the nursery area being included in the community forest sale area provided the lease is transferred in full. The nursery will build the skills required for managing a nursery enterprise within the community and long-term it may consolidate as a valued part of rainforest restoration efforts in Morvern and the wider area.

7.3.5 Christmas trees

No work has been done as part of this study to understand the demand for Christmas trees on Morvern, but growing Christmas trees might be a worthwhile enterprise for one or more of the croft enterprises. Christmas tree sales could take place as weekend events or if combined with other activities. These could be popular and effective community engagement exercises, especially if coffee and cake are available, as well as income generating. In early years it may be worth considering buying in a batch of trees wholesale to test the concept, although there is an associated risk of trees not being sold.

Dedicated Christmas trees could be grown in specific plots. Nordmann fir is the most commonly used species for dedicated Christmas tree growing but it is relatively slow growing; Norway spruce and Scots pine grow quicker but fetch a lower price. Sitka spruce is generally not favoured as the needles are very sharp, although some suppliers have successfully sold large, heavily branched Sitka for use in municipal settings. Note that growing Christmas trees on a commercial scale within a specific area is an agricultural, rather than a forestry activity that utilises precision planting of trees, mechanical and chemical weed control, fertilising and physical and chemical ‘pruning’ to create trees that have the ‘right’ colour, shape and density of branches.

A second option might be to employ conifers destined for Christmas trees as “nurses” for broadleaves in restock areas, allowing them to provide shelter to help early establishment but removing them before they begin to impede growth of the broadleaves. Species such as silver fir and Norway spruce could be planted under broadleaves, such as oak, and tended when the oak are being pruned. Deer must be fenced out or limited in order to prevent leader damage to the trees, which will be more palatable than Sitka spruce.

7.3.6 Huts and cabins

Huts, pods or glamping modules might all be appropriate for a woodland croft enterprise and will contribute to the options of visitor accommodation near Lochaline. They would need to nestle into the woodland environment in order to reduce the area of woodland lost to development. It may be more of a realistic option for those woodland crofts that are not building their own personal accommodation on the croft.

Concern has been expressed that holiday accommodation is not an appropriate woodland croft activity, but so long as it is compatible with woodland management, it could be regarded as a legitimate enterprise. To ensure that existing enterprises in the area are not unduly disadvantaged, and to ensure distribution of benefits across the woodland crofts, it may be appropriate to restrict holiday accommodation on woodland crofts to either bed and breakfast or a maximum of 2 pods or small huts per woodland croft.

In recent years there has been substantial interest in hutting, encouraged by the Reforesting Scotland “Thousand Huts” campaign.³¹ The usual model is that individuals pay a ground rent to a landowner to build a simple hut for the use of their family and friends. This builds a long-term relationship between the tenant and the woodland. ‘Hutting’ is not being considered for community forest as it will probably be more appropriate for woodland crofts to offer holiday lets rather than long-term hut lease options.

Holiday cabin accommodation might vary in style from glamping pods to huts and chalets: each will appeal to a different audiences (individuals seeking remoteness, families, those looking for weekend retreats or even longer stays for e.g. artist in residence) and will have slightly different requirements for servicing, accessibility, etc.

All sites need to be relatively accessible, not just for guests so that they can come and go easily, but also for servicing and monitoring. Consideration needs to be given to views from the cabins but not views between cabins (sense of seclusion) and accessibility to forest paths and trails. Some installations can be ‘shoe-horned’ into existing woodland without significant impact.

7.3.7 Green burials

Green, or natural, burial is the interment of a person’s body in a manner that allows the body to recycle naturally, and has become an increasingly popular alternative to other contemporary Western burial methods in recent decades, as a response to both the environmental impact and the cost of conventional funeral care. There is no single definition of what constitutes a green burial, but key components are usually:

- The site serves a conservation purpose;
- Sustainable, fully biodegradable materials are used for the coffin or shroud;
- There is limited or no demarcation or personalisation of the grave.

Few community woodlands have moved into the provision of green burial sites and it is unlikely that Lochaline Community Forest will be suitable. Accessible land is required for woodland crofts, bedrock and the water table might not be far away, it may conflict with existing water supplies and digging burial sites into felled areas of woodland might require larger machines to remove root stumps, making the digging of lairs expensive. The local burial ground, while not particularly ‘green’, is an attractive location. With a focus on woodland crofts, green burials are not being considered further for this project.

³¹ <https://www.thousandhuts.org/>

7.3.8 Renewable Energy Generation

MCW, in partnership with Morvern Community Development Company, are considering the options for using appropriate sites in the community forest area and Knock Park for a solar panel array and battery storage. GreenCat Renewables have carried out a phase I assessment and their report is available as Appendix 5.

While the returns might be significant, the payback periods will be between 15 and 20 years, and the life-span of equipment might be 30 years. The risks are high in terms of being able to get planning permission, especially for a wind turbine. Also with respect to costs being significantly higher than forecast at this stage. If a solar array has sited within the community forest it would occupy the area that could be used for a woodland croft (while noting that seasonal grazing under the solar array would keep vegetation down) and compensatory woodland creation would probably be required to mitigate for loss of woodland.

The renewable energy generation option does not impact the basic feasibility of the community forest project, although it does build on the skills already embedded in the community through the BARR community hydro project and it creates another opportunity for cross-collaboration between community groups.

7.3.9 Tiny Homes

Alongside the demand for more conventional affordable homes there is also demand for access to land to site tiny homes. Many rural workers are on short-term contracts and while they don't aspire to living within a static caravan they might wish to live semi-permanently in a self, or co-built tiny home that fits the landscape aesthetic better than commercially built static caravans.

Either MCW or one or more of the woodland crofts might develop an area of serviced hard standing and compost toilet to host individual tiny homes. Land rent charges would apply. Hutting or caravan site planning legislation might apply but would need to be adapted to enable the tiny home to be used as a permanent dwelling.

7.3.10 Sale of House plots

Given that the woodland crofts will need to be serviced by access roads and probably electricity, broadband and water connections it may be appropriate to make space for affordable house plots that can be sold to a social housing body to deliver affordable homes for new, or long-term residents in the area. Arguably they could also be sold on the open market and this might make the delivery of the woodland crofts more affordable for MCW if rural development funding is limited.

The decision to make an allocation for house plots needs to be made at an early stage so that the option can be built into a master plan and illustrate that even with them there will be no net loss of woodland area and that planning permission in principle can be secured. The woodland croft steering group would best advise on the option as the additional homes will be close to woodland croft homes in order to make efficient use of access and servicing.

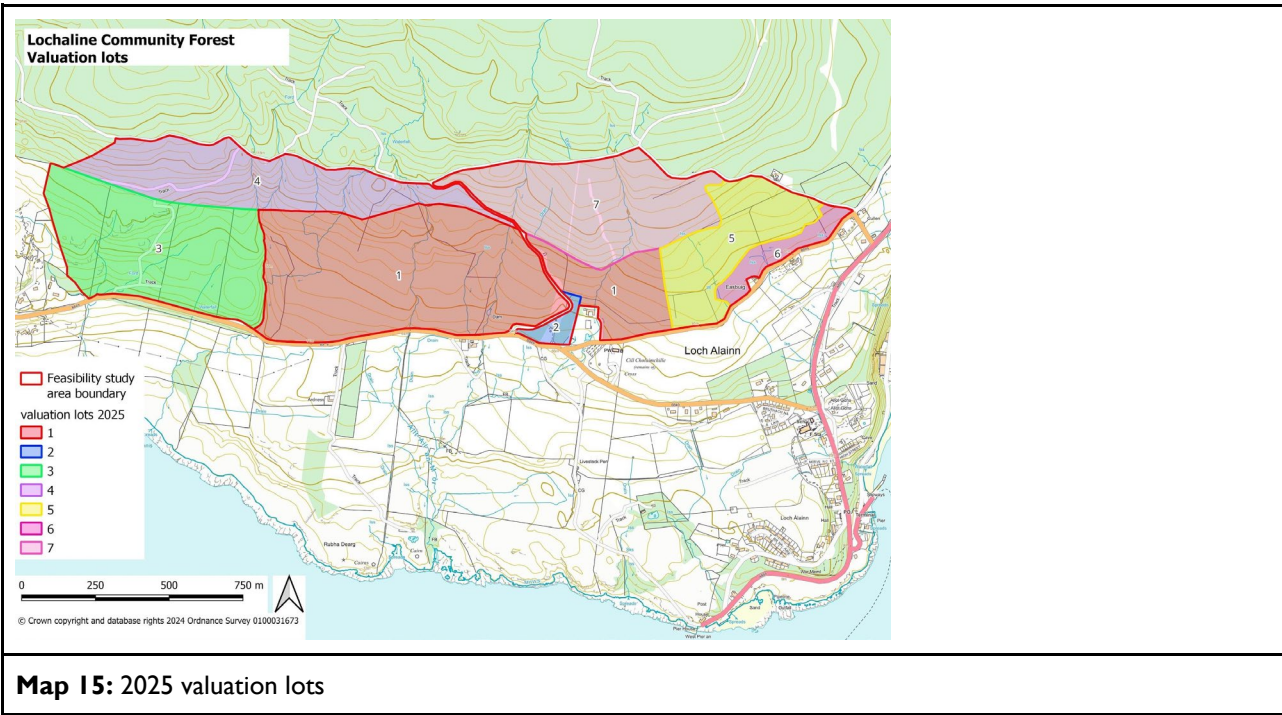
SLF and FLS allow the onward sale of land, up to 20% of the purchase area, so long as the sale supports agreed objectives and benefits the community. FLS might seek a claw-back on the purchase price if there is a significant uplift in the land value on the areas sold.

8 Acquisition & Financing – Options Appraisal

8.1 Valuation

To date, a desk-top valuation has been carried out by John Clegg & Co. This values the whole study area (130ha) at £1,044,291. This valuation has not included any physical/visual assessment of the

trees on site, basing the crop value on planting year and age-class, minimal assessment of aerial imagery and using standard models to estimate the standing value of timber. It is a forestry valuation and does not factor in any development potential or value. The valuation is broken down into 7 lots, reflecting standing crop values and facilitating community assessment of their purchase options.



Lot	Desc	£/ha	£
1	47.04ha, mainly young conifer stands, young native broadleaf planting and clear-felled areas.	2,594	122,018
2	1.18ha, tree nursery lease area, minimal standing timber value.	2,400	2,834
3	26.04ha, mature productive spruce, some open ground and larch.	14,150	368,462
4	19.00ha, immature spruce, open ground with small areas of felled and broadleaves.	6,008	114,135
5	12.67ha, mature productive Sitka spruce.	19,044	241,377
6	3.67ha, mature and over-mature Sitka spruce, some broadleaves.	10,675	39,178
7	20.48ha, younger productive Sitka spruce and open ground.	7,630	156,286

8.2 Area of Acquisition

The focus of community acquisition is on the area of plantation above Ardness/Lochaline, because of its site attributes and it could be transferred to community ownership without significant impact on FLS management of the wider Morvern holding.

It became clear at an early stage in the study that it makes practical sense for the forestry haul roads to remain in FLS ownership, as they are strategic for FLS and other woodlands in private ownership to get timber onto public roads or to Lochaline's West Pier. So long as the sale agreement of any adjacent land includes a right of access to use the forest roads and make a reasonable contribution to their upkeep, it would be more of a burden for MCW and more of a risk to FLS to include the roads within a sale to the community.

To purchase the whole of the study site would be a significant cost as it includes areas of mature, high value spruce timber. The high valuation makes an application to the limited funds available from the Scottish Land Fund more risky. The mature stands could be felled and sold to pay for some of the purchase, but they are not scheduled for felling for another 10 or more years, to allow time for the adjacent, recently felled areas time to regenerate.

Following community consultation and the need to take account of local opinion and values, along with the high cost of buying land with a high value timber crop on, it is concluded that there is no immediate value for including lots 5, 6 and 7 within a CATS application.

Assessment of a Community Asset Transfer bid is based in part on whether community management will deliver more public benefit than if the woodland was retained in FLS management. The Forestry & Land Scotland proposed management plan for their Morvern estate is to focus activity on diversifying the forest while maintaining a core of productive Sitka spruce stands. They acknowledge that the soils are relatively good in the study area and that this area might be suited to restocking with diverse conifers, especially Norway spruce, but also productive broadleaves.

Community management proposals and aspirations for a Lochaline Community Forest, with a combination of woodland crofts and woodlots alongside community management will deliver a range of social and environmental benefits that will be of more direct benefit to the local community than if the land is retained in FLS management, even with much broader delivery of national interest outcomes. Community management will focus on the delivery of public access infrastructure and high amenity value woodlands based on native species. Low-impact management of woodlots will add diversity to established plantations and produce more in the way of wood products for local use. Active management of woodland crofts will likewise produce more for local use and help sustain the livelihoods of those living within the local community.

Lot 1 is of immediate value to the community, both in terms of being suitable for woodland crofts and containing a significant area of planted native broadleaves that could be managed more actively to restore native woodland in this area and to make more of the core path identified in this area. Including the private water supplies will help to engage those utilising the water in the management of the woodland in the catchment of these supplies.

Lot 2 can be included in the sale as it won't affect the lease to RSPB (apart from changing the name of the landowner) and it creates a more direct link for the community to engage with this important part of the rainforest restoration efforts on Morvern. In the long-term, RSPB might be willing to let the community continue the project or adapt it as a community garden.

Lot 3 is a significant, maturing area of predominantly spruce with some larch and broadleaves and it will enable the community to develop local utilisation of the timber, both for construction on the woodland crofts and to meet more of the fuelwood demand in the area. Lot 3 also includes one of the more popular core path loops close to Lochaline that can be improved with direct involvement by the community.

Lot 4 is an important extension area to lots 1, 2 and 3. Its ownership by the community will enable sizable volumes of timber from lot 3 to be delivered to the forest road. It provides an option to lengthen some of the woodland crofts and give them access from the forest road, and/or to increase the number of crofts. It also includes young stands, that with careful management, could be managed on longer rotations to improve the amenity of the woodland. It also includes significant open ground that could be maintained in its current state, restored to native species, utilised for renewable energy generation, or planted to compensate for development by the community in woodland elsewhere.

To focus a community acquisition on Lots 1, 2, 3 and 4, an indicative purchase cost would be £607,450.

An asset transfer discount could be applied for, not so much on the basis of saving FLS money, but on MCW delivering community benefit. FLS is not spending much on the area as it is, but there might be some savings to FLS on the management of roadside trees and by the community contributing to deer control that would have a wider impact in adjacent areas of plantation. Community benefits of the project can be emphasised along the themes of enhancing local economic development, delivering more opportunities for green prescribing and enhanced environmental and recreation benefits.

An expected level of discount might be 20%, but could be as much as 30%.

8.3 Funding for acquisition

The primary funding source to support community land and asset acquisition in recent years has been the Scottish Land Fund (SLF), which supports urban and rural communities to become more resilient and sustainable through the ownership and management of land and land assets. Grants of between £5,000 and £1 million are available to fund the purchase of land or land assets. Applicants must demonstrate that their project will help their local community to:

- Achieve more sustainable economic, environmental and/or social development through ownership of land and buildings;
- Have a stronger role in and control over their own development and;
- Own well managed, financially sustainable land and buildings.

In the past, up to 95% of eligible project costs have been supported by SLF, with a minimum of 5% of funding coming from other sources. With the latest round of funding coming to a close, there is increased competition for limited funds and grants may well be capped at significantly less than 95%. Any request for a lower intervention rate may be looked on favourably. SLF can also provide some post-acquisition revenue funding, but it is our understanding that this too will be limited, as funds from this round of the SLF will need to be spent by 31 March 2026.

Potential alternative sources of funding include:

- Community fundraising and wider crowd funding;
- Charitable trusts;
- Renewable energy distributor funds (Both the community and Ardtornish Estate hydro schemes have community funds that can be applied to.)
- Funds (loans) secured against future income, e.g. from timber harvesting or the sale of affordable house plots.

There are several ways in which community forest acquisitions can potentially use anticipated future income from timber harvesting to leverage the purchase, options include:

- bank loan;
- advance sale of timber to a forest management company;
- loan or finance agreement from a forestry investment company;
- long term lease agreement over all or part of the forest with a forestry management company.

The options listed above operate over different timeframes: bank loans and advance sales would probably only cover the first 10 years, whereas a long-term lease agreement might extend to 99 years, i.e. covering not only the current crop but its successor. Of these options only a bank loan is realistic, given the anticipated use of the woodland by the community.

It might also be possible to structure a deal whereby part of the initial acquisition price is met by selling off parcels of land for housing or other development. Such arrangements need to be discussed in advance with the Scottish Land Fund, but there is precedence for this in the Saraig Loch Duich CATS application. This is illustrated in the plans prepared by Rural Design where they show woodland croft homes interspersed by affordable housing units ([LCF-Ardness woodland crofts x3](#)). These might be sold to Morvern Community Development Company (MCDC) to allocate or develop as low-cost housing for local occupation. Not only do the house plots help balance the cost of land purchase, it also helps justify the cost of installing access roads and services. However, it may not appeal to all potential Woodland Croft tenants who might wish to utilise potential development space as part of their woodland croft enterprise.

8.4 Funding for Development

To deliver the objectives of the community forest, grant funding will be required for installing paths and re-structuring the forest, where income from timber sales is insufficient to cover the costs. Some of the main possible funders are listed below. For further information about potential funders for community development see Appendix 2. Funding will also be required to support the installation of access and services to the woodland crofts and to pay staff costs until such time as income from rents and timber sales can meet operational costs.

It would be cost effective for MCW to apply for **Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS)** funding for:

- **Woodland Planning:** Excluding the woodland croft areas, but including the woodlot area, the total woodland plan area for the community forest might be 71ha. The one-off long-term forest plan grant would be worth £1775. There is no grant for simpler woodland plans, even with thinning, which is an option for areas less than 100ha.
- **Restructuring Regeneration:** £550/ha where felled areas need to be re-planted with a diversity of species.
- **Habitats and Species:** for removing conifers and non-native shrubs from native woodland areas, grant rates start at £50/ha for hand-pulling seedlings to £1,800/ha for felling and removing/mulching trees up to 6m tall
- Depending on the methods and costs of deer management it may be cost effective to apply for ‘**deer management plan**’ and ‘**reducing deer impact**’ and ‘**native woodland**’ grants. The risks are that the cost of making an application, reporting and claiming the grant, let alone doing the deer control, do not justify the income from the grant.
- Once suitable public access paths are in place, it may be justifiable to apply for **Public Access-Rural Woods** grant, but again the income is likely to be low in comparison to the costs involved in administering the grant. For a 3km of path network in the community forest the eligible grant might be £1,500/year.
- **Infrastructure funding** can be applied for to help make smaller, under-managed woods accessible for management. This could be applied to for improving the access from Achabeag East to service the Woodlot area, but its eligibility for the grant would need to be carefully presented as a means of supporting innovative and small-scale systems of managing the woodland and generating more community and environmental benefits. Similarly, to access the woodland crofts the FGS Infrastructure grant could be applied to on a similar basis; that the grant will support access to small-scale woodland areas that will be managed in more intimate, socially and environmentally beneficial ways.

Sustrans “Places for Everyone” might be able to assist with path works, especially an off-road link between Lochaline & Achabeag.

Paths for All is a suitable organisation to go to for advice. Their Community Paths Fund is limited to £1,800, but the development of a path network from Lochaline into or through Lochaline

Community Forest might be eligible for support from their Community Project Transition Fund (£5,000-£100,000). Also their Ian Findlay Path Fund also offers 100% of design costs and up to £100,000 for construction costs (with 30% match funding).

National Lottery Awards for All Scotland could provide up to £20,000 for community led projects. Applications to the **National Lottery Community Fund** might also be worth applying to, especially if the path construction work involves building up teams of volunteers that can help with the completion and maintenance of the project.

Scottish Forestry also manages a community fund that could be applied to for supporting the establishment of volunteer activity for managing the woodlands and developing community engagement in the woodland.

8.5 Grants for Woodland Crofts

There are two **crofting grants** potentially available to woodland crofters, through the Croft House Grant Scheme³² (CHG) and the Crofting Agricultural Grants Scheme³³ (CAGS). Neither of these is automatic, nor will every woodland crofter be eligible for them. Full details are available via the footnote links below, but the following represents a summary of the key features of the schemes.

8.5.1 Croft House Grant

The Croft House Grant is available to both tenants and owner-occupier crofters who are inadequately housed, or have a need to live on the croft because of the type of agricultural or non-agricultural activities undertaken or proposed. Grant support is available towards new house construction, for rebuilding and improvement, or energy efficiency improvements.

In all cases the maximum grant available is £38,000 in the high priority geographical areas (which include Morvern). However the basis for the grant differs: for new house construction it is a lump sum; for rebuilding and improvement, it is 60% of costs; and for energy efficiency improvements it is 80% of costs.

It is important to note however that the scheme is competitive, and applications are prioritised against a range of factors, so even an eligible application is not guaranteed to be approved for the CHG. There are also a number of exclusions to the scheme, so the full scheme guidance should be studied before making any application. There are four application rounds each calendar year, i.e. assessment of applications is carried out quarterly against published deadlines.

Conditions apply to the grant for a period of 10 years, and a business plan for the croft must be agreed and adhered to as part of the scheme. In the case of new house construction, there are limits to the size of house which can be funded, and limits to what can be funded (for example mobile homes and temporary structures are not eligible for funding). Finally, although the new croft house should usually be on the croft, it can be built on land adjoining or adjacent to the croft provided the applicant can demonstrate that this would be a more feasible option than building on the croft.

8.5.2 Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme

This scheme provides grants for crofters to make improvements to their crofts, and help to sustain their businesses. A range of items is fundable including sheds, tracks, hard standings, drainage, livestock facilities etc. However, it is an agricultural grant scheme which has implications for woodland crofters, both in terms of eligibility, and in terms of what can be funded.

³² [Croft House Grant full guidance](#)

³³ [Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme](#)

In regard to eligibility, a woodland crofter is only eligible to apply to CAGS if they are running an agricultural business, in addition to any woodland business they run. Many woodland crofters will combine both, and thus be eligible, but some (who do not) will currently be excluded from applying to the scheme.

Furthermore, even those woodland crofters who are eligible for the scheme are only entitled to assistance for agricultural improvements. For example, an agricultural shed to house agricultural equipment or livestock feed would be fundable; a forestry shed to house a mobile sawmill and sawn timber would not.

As the requirement in crofting law is actually to 'cultivate' the croft, whose definition includes traditional agricultural activities but is much broader, many consider the current grant scheme inequitable as it funds certain aspects of cultivation but not all. Representations to that effect have been made to the Scottish Government over a period of years; the issue was accepted by them, and a commitment subsequently made that the successor scheme to CAGS (in development) would be available to all crofters.

This commitment was given in the National Development Plan for Crofting (2021): "All crofters will be allowed to apply for (future) CAGS support. As in the current scheme, sufficient business justification will always need to be demonstrated before any approval of grant." At the time of writing, neither the timescale for the introduction of the new scheme, nor the scope of its eligible works, is clear and so CAGS currently remains of limited use to woodland crofters. Furthermore, as with the CHG there are a number of exclusions to eligibility in addition to the above, so the full scheme guidance should always be consulted.

8.5.3 Forestry Grants

Woodland crofts would be eligible for FGS, depending on their business plan. Restructuring regeneration grant would support re-planting.

Agroforestry grants would support the growing of trees, either for timber, biodiversity or tree crops (fruit & nuts), with grant rates dependent on the planting density of trees (2 options). If livestock are to be introduced to the woodland croft then consideration needs to be given to alternative grazing areas, if, for example, sheep and cattle will benefit from field grazing rather than being on the woodland croft all the time. If hens or geese are in the grazing mix then they will need to be provided with adequate security from foxes, pine martens, white-tailed eagles and other predators.

Harvesting & Processing grants might support the development of enterprises on the woodland crofts, or in relation to the woodlot. Grant support will only be provided towards the capital cost of the purchased equipment, delivery or importation costs are not supported. Grant support is based on actual costs with a maximum contribution of 40 per cent. The balance of funding must come from private funds and not from other public funds, including local authority and lottery grants. In any single application, the minimum and maximum grant award totals will be:

- Aim 1: Harvesting and primary processing equipment minimum £2,500 and maximum £50,000.
- Aim 1: Secondary processing equipment minimum £1,000 and maximum £6,000.
- Aim 2: Nursery, seed supply and ground preparation equipment minimum £2,500 and maximum £50,000.
- Aim 2: Deer larders (in Scotland's rainforest and Caledonian Pinewoods) minimum £2,500 and maximum £50,000.

It is not clear whether Forest Infrastructure grant to support forest access creation could be used if woodland crofts are not eligible for support under CAGS.

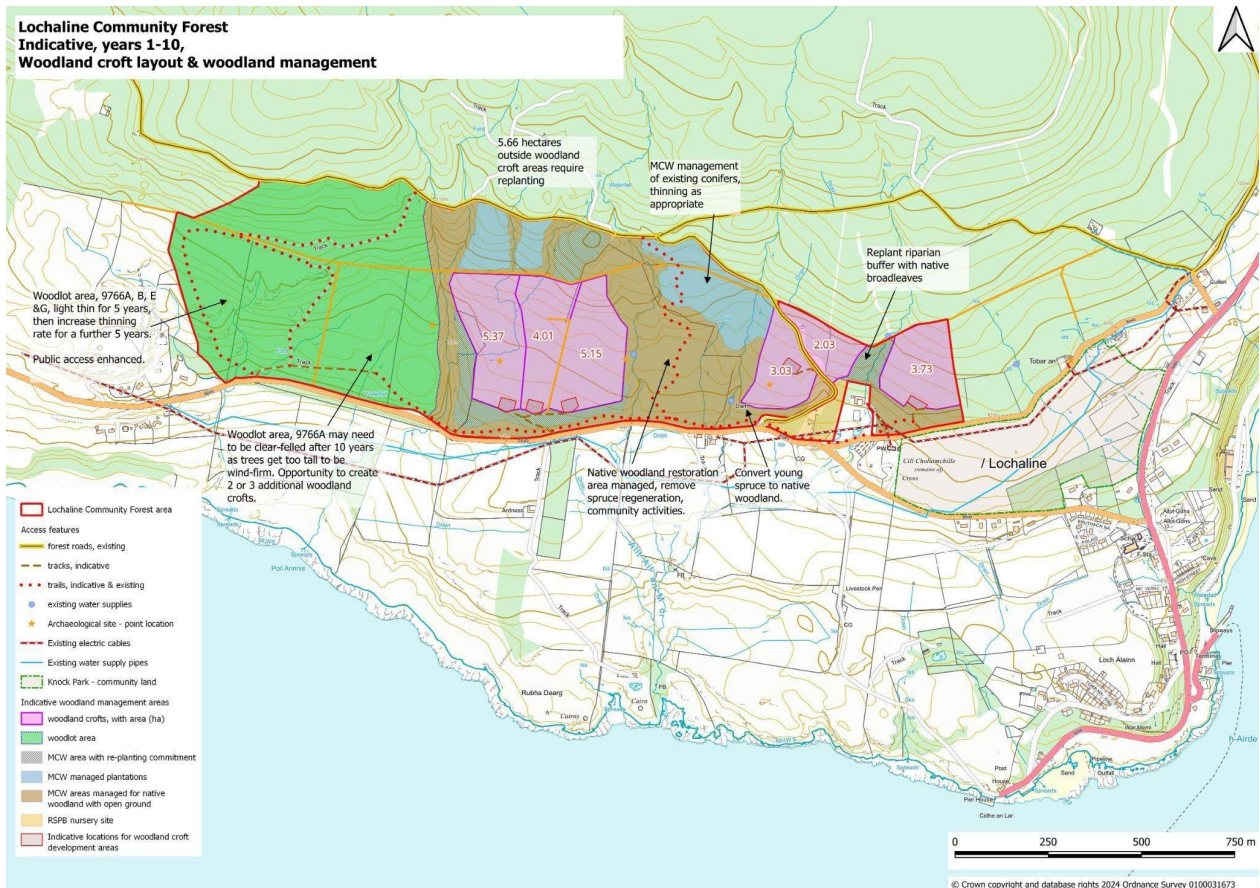
Foundation Scotland may also be a route to securing grant and loan finance to support the servicing of woodland croft sites.

9 Indicative Management and Business Plan

9.1 General

The following development plan and associated [cash-flow forecast \(Appendix 4\)](#) are included in the feasibility report to help demonstrate that in principle there is at least one selection of options for delivering MCW objectives for the community forest that is viable. The map below illustrates an indicative 'master plan' for MCW acquisition, management and allocation of woodlots and woodland crofts in the first 5 years of activity. As explained in Section 8.2, the CATS application will be for Lots 1-4 in the valuation report. Given the commitment made to native woodland restoration to date and the potential difficulty in creating compliant domestic/development access off the B849, the central part of the community purchase North of Struthan, that is planted with native species, would be allocated to community use and management rather than to woodland crofts. The western compartments (Achabeag East) would initially be managed through a woodlot lease up until it might need to be clear-felled. After clear-felling a further 2 or 3 woodland crofts could be allocated in this area. It is expected that the woodland surrounding the Achabeag East core path loop would remain under MCW/woodlot management.

This indicative plan does not meet the current demand for woodland croft sites, but it does meet the range of demands and expectations for Lochaline Community Forest, as expressed in local consultation. It shows a high proportion of the woodland being managed as native woodland. It does not illustrate how the woodland might be managed within the crofts, as this will be dependent on the plans that will work for the woodland croft tenants. It illustrates that the existing water supplies will not be impacted by the development of woodland crofts. The catchments for these supplies that are within the community forest area will remain under MCW management as native woodland. Any livestock kept on the woodland crofts then won't have any impact on the water supplies. The water supply users will be members of MCW, or consulted regularly as stakeholders.



Map 15: Indicative layout of woodland crofts, croft access, croft 'yards' (homes, sheds, garden, hard-standing), public access, & woodland management within the first 5 years of Lochaline Community Forest.

9.2 Woodland Crofts

The woodland croft boundaries as illustrated are indicative but they do aim to exclude areas that are part of water supply catchments and that would be better managed by MCW to deliver native woodland and recreation objectives. Boundaries within or between the woodland crofts could change on further discussion with prospective woodland croft tenants and more detailed analysis of the site prior to registration of the crofts.

- ❖ The simplest development plan only considers finalisation of The Scottish Land Fund restricts any selling-on of land bought with SLF support to 20% of the area, so in this case, no more than 19ha.

and registration of woodland crofts, leaving the prospective tenants to sort out the servicing of their crofts as they deem suitable, and in collaboration with each other as required. Alternative cash-flows are provided for whether only access roads are installed by MCW, or whether all services are included to accommodate the sale of affordable house plots. At this stage the cash flow assumes that for water supplies pipework needs to originate from the existing public water supply close to Lochaline.

The woodland croft site north-west of Kiel House is the only croft where domestic development is not being factored in, essentially to minimise domestic access being taken from the forestry haul road, and acknowledging that not every woodland croft needs accommodation on-site. Only one woodland croft with domestic development options will connect directly to the haul road.

Prior to any development within the woodland crofts or timber harvesting within other areas all archaeology features will need to be properly described, mapped and their protection secured within detailed management plans.

MCW have already advanced their ideas and plans on how allocation of woodland crofts might work and how to score the applicants based on the mix of skills, ages and ideas that it might seem ideal to have in the community of woodland crofts. This is an important part of the project once the land is secured and prior to croft registration.

With respect to planning permission and registration of the crofts, it may be appropriate to run the two activities in parallel and to seek Planning Permission in Principle from The Highland Council so that this will help support the application to register the crofts with the Crofting Commission. Once the woodland crofts have been registered they can be allocated to tenants.

Woodland croft tenants will then be responsible for developing management plans for their crofts and securing detailed planning permission for any development on the woodland crofts. Within the management plans for individual crofts, those that include recently felled areas will need to explain how these will be re-planted to meet the requirements of the UK Forestry Standard. Woodland croft business plans will be required to support planning applications for any development proposed within the woodland crofts. At this stage, depending on how the woodland croft plans are to be financed, applications may be made to de-croft house sites, but with the land remaining in MCW ownership.

9.3 Public Access - Recreation

The plan illustrates public access improvements. The link between Lochaline and Achabeag will be built to a standard suitable for pedestrians, bikes and some horse-riding use, a gravel surface at least 1.5m wide, with bridges over significant water courses and culverts for smaller water courses. It will connect with the proposed public access developments on the community land at Knock Park so that those living in Lochaline can connect with the community forest by suitable off-road as well as on-road routes. Parking will be improved at the Achabeag East forest access, but probably only for up to 4 cars.

Other public access routes will be managed to ensure they are suitable for the level of use that they are receiving. Board-walks will be installed/replaced where path sections need to cross through wet woodland. Vegetation will be managed to ensure trails are kept clear of brambles, bracken and tree/shrub branches. As required, sections will be drained and surfaced with gravel if they become too muddy through use. The core path within the central area of the community forest will be re-routed so that it does not have to cross burns that are used as water supplies.

This central area will be used as a focus area for the community, to deliver training and volunteering opportunities in path building/management and rainforest restoration. A shelter might be built that could be a venue for woodland events, woodland learning and craft-work courses.

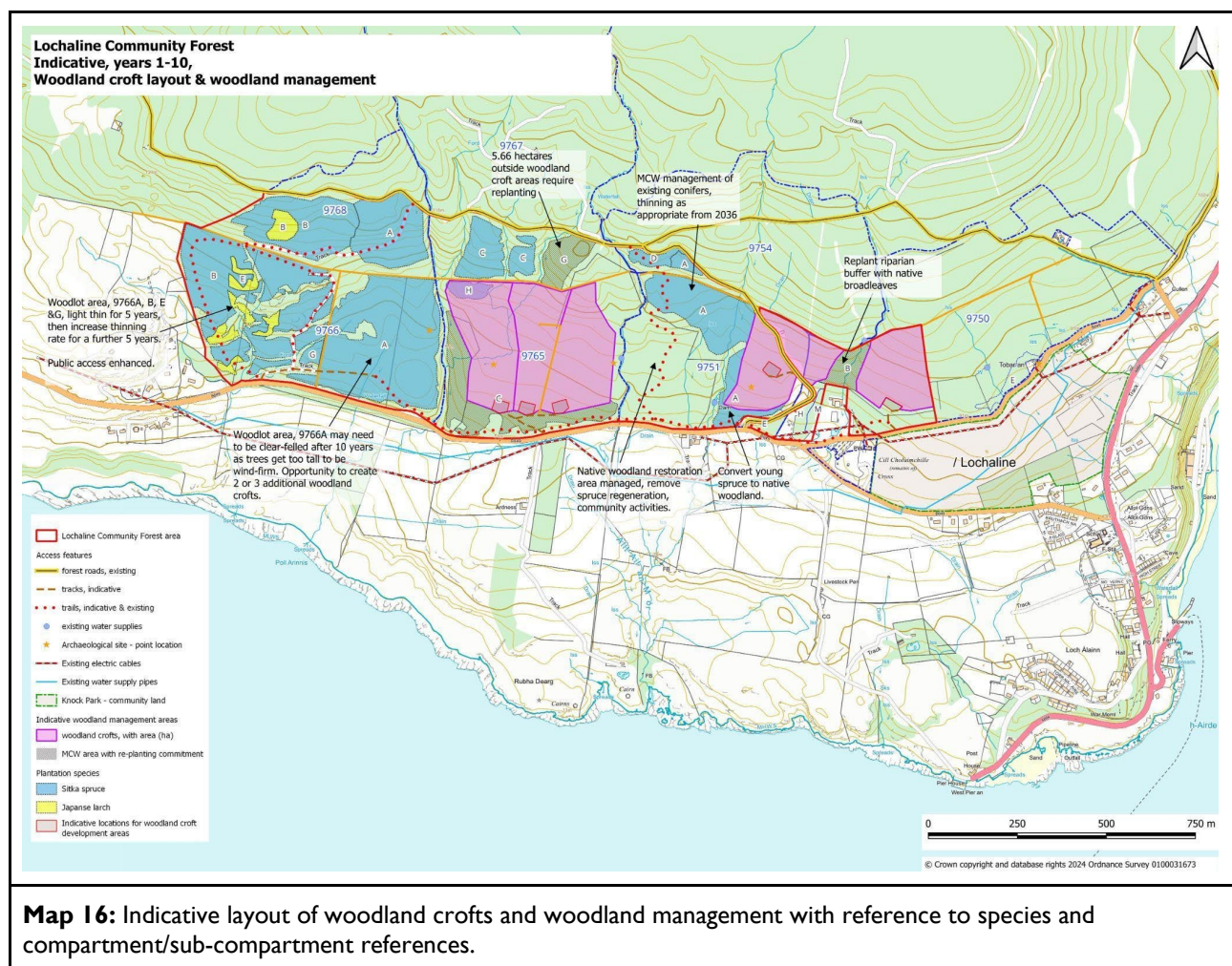
9.4 Woodland management

The focus of woodland management will be on securing native woodland where it is already established or establishing and thinning stands of Sitka spruce where this can be done without precipitating significant wind-blow.

Currently, the primary action for native woodland areas is to remove spruce regeneration and remove invasive species such as cotoneaster and Himalayan honeysuckle. In addition it may be beneficial to replant areas of elm and ash that have suffered deer damage and Chalara dieback, replacing these trees with species such as silver birch, oak and hazel. Within the areas to be managed

by MCW, there are 5.66ha of recently felled conifer crops that need replanting within the next 5 years.

For the conifer areas, a woodlot tenant will be found who can take on the work of lightly thinning compartment 9766 and sub-compartment 9768a to produce and sell small logs for fuel wood, along with perhaps a component of logs for milling. It will be necessary to improve the forest road into 9766a from the Achabeag East access and probably create a working area for processing firewood. At 36ha in size the woodlot area may qualify for infrastructure grant under the Forestry Grant Scheme. For any timber haulage requiring lorries, if of any quantity, timber extraction will need to take logs uphill to the forest haul road to avoid putting timber lorry traffic onto the B849. If setting up a woodlot lease is not possible, it may be a matter of MCW waiting up to 10 years before clear-felling sub-compartments 9766a and 9766g and thinning 9768a, followed by felling sub-compartments 9766b, c & e some 10 years after that. By this time, sub-compartments 9768b & c and 9767c will be ready for thinning.



9.5 Deer management.

Ideally one or more of the woodland croft tenants will have, or gain, appropriate training and licences to control deer numbers as they move into the community forest area. If it is not possible to secure broadleaf tree regeneration by shooting alone, deer fences will be required to exclude deer from discrete areas. Within the first 5 to 10 years, this may be necessary for the woodland crofts with replanting obligations.

An ideal scenario would also see deer controllers in the Community Forest using the Forestry and Land Scotland deer larder at Knock before they are butchered for local sale or donation into the community.

9.6 Project Management & Staff

The Lochaline Community Forest project is directed by the MCW board of directors, supported by a woodland crofts steering group. These voluntary groups will be supported by staff employed to full-fill the following tasks:

- Developing the detail of a master plan and long-term forest plan for the area to be managed as woodlot and by MCW.
- Applying for forestry grants.
- Researching and applying for other implementation grants.
- Applying for additional short-term core funding to pay for staff time until generated income is sufficient to pay for staff costs.
- Preparing planning permission documentation and liaison with THC.
- Liaison with the Crofting Commission and registration of woodland crofts.
- Liaison with other woodland croft projects and researching tenancy agreements. Working with legal advisors to prepare tenancy agreements for the woodland crofts and woodlot.
- Administering the tenancy agreements.
- Oversight of woodlot activity.
- Contract tendering and contract management to implement project plans.
- Woodland & infrastructure health and safety checks and risk assessments.
- Developing a programme of volunteer events, training volunteers, volunteer leaders and carrying out risk assessments for activities and events.
- Project communications - Facebook posts, posters in the community, contributions to community newsletters.

Potentially these tasks could be allocated to 3, part-time staff or self-employed contractors who would cover administration/book-keeping, forest management and development/project management roles. It would be advantageous to have a development manager in post by September 2025 in order to complete final resolution of the CATS process and SLF application and to initiate work on future fund raising. Staff requirement will be greatest in the first few years, but once management systems bed in and projects are completed, staff requirement will decrease. On-going staff costs will need to be met by revenues generated from woodland croft rent and timber sales from the woodlot.

9.7 Fundraising Strategy

MCW are using this report to support an application to the Scottish Land Fund for the purchase of the woodland. This has been backed up and supported by local fund raising efforts and an application for discount on the purchase cost of the woodland. If there is any short-fall on the purchase costs, then this might be met by an application to community hydro funds, or to larger trust funds as part of a package to deliver native woodland restoration.

MCW already recognise that the priority is to secure funds for staff costs to help implement the community forest project plan until generated revenues can pay for staff costs, and have initiated conversations with local organisations to identify funding options from community hydro funds.

While the CATS and SLF applications are under consideration there will be several months when more research on funding options can be carried out and a time-frame put together based on when funds are open for applications for expressions of interest. Community support organisations such as CWA, Community Land Scotland (CLS), Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS), Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), all have suggestions for different funding organisations. It

may well be worth applying to join DTAS to get access to their Strengthening Communities Programme and Recovery & Resilience Fund.

Some of the key funds to approach would be National Lottery and SSE's Sustainable Development Fund.

More details on some of the possible funding sources are listed in Appendix 2 and earlier in section 8.3 to 8.5.

The cash-flow illustrates how grants will under-pin delivery of path infrastructure, native woodland restoration and staff costs to get the project up and running. It illustrates that there may be deficits in some years but that timber incomes will also fluctuate and can fill the financial gaps when harvesting volumes are increased.

Note, that for now the cashflow forecast is based on costs with VAT included. If MCW is delivering some of these high cost items it would be advantageous to be VAT registered so that VAT can be reclaimed on expenses. Funding applications would then be based on costs exclusive of VAT.

9.8 Timeline for Management / Project Implementation

The following table is an indicative timeline for the implementation of management and development projects after the purchase of the woodlands has been secured:

Month-Year	Management Activity	Fundraising activity
05-06/2025	CATS application	SLF application
07-11/2025		Securing expressions of interest for revenue funding
12-2025	CATS & SLF decisions	
01/03-2026	Establish management structure, recruit project manager	Apply for implementation grants
02-2026	Initiate Planning Permission In Principle application for the woodland crofts and community forest master plan.	
03-2026	Final agreement on the overall plan for the area, including recreation and community engagement.	
03-2026	Prepare Woodlot tenancy agreement	
03-2026	Initiate volunteer engagement & training	Scottish Forestry Community Fund, National Lottery
07-2026	Secure Planning Permission in Principle for the woodland crofts	
08-2026	Afirm woodland croft boundaries and register woodland crofts	
02/08-2026	Prepare woodland croft lease template	
09-2026	Advertising and allocation of woodland crofts	
09-2026	Install access for woodland crofts and initiate work on core public access infrastructure.	FGS/National Lottery/Paths for All/National Park, AECS/National Lottery/Sustrans, Crofting grants.
	Installation of croft services & access for Woodlot area.	Crofting grants, FGS
10-2026	Appoint deer management services.	Secure FGS funding for forest & deer management as appropriate
10-2026	Secure approval for forest/woodland plan.	FGS if LTFP route taken
10-2026	Approval of individual croft plans	

Month-Year	Management Activity	Fundraising activity
2026-2030	Implement forest thinning & restructuring plans as appropriate	FGS
2026-2030	Annual woodland management work as per forest plan.	FGS
2031-2035	Ongoing project maintenance, woodland enhancement, update forest plan.	FGS & other restricted, project funding and unrestricted funding from donations and sales.
2036-2040	Schedule timber harvesting (clear-felling) work as appropriate.	Timber sales
2036-2045	Ongoing project maintenance and woodland enhancement, update forest plan.	FGS & other restricted, project funding and unrestricted funding from donations and sales.
2036-2045	Clear-felling, as required, re-appraisal of woodland plan, creation of 2 or 3 additional crofts, as agreed	Timber sales

10 Analysis of major risks³⁴

10.1 Table of risks

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
CATS application is not successful	Medium/ High	Project cannot proceed immediately	MCW maintains a professional approach and continues to build supporting evidence for community purchase.
Funding bid to SLF unsuccessful	Medium	Project v unlikely to proceed	High quality application, strong community support
Community unable to raise match funding for acquisition if required	Low/ Medium	Project v unlikely to proceed	CATS application secures reasonable discount. Local fund-raising helps evidence local support.
Significant fall in timber prices	Low	Reduced income for MCW	Flexibility in harvesting plans, fell when prices increase, ongoing work to build and sustain local markets
Deterioration of relationship with neighbouring landowners/managers	Low	Delays, changes to plans, loss of community support	Maintain good communications and relationships. Sensitive management. Maintain professional standards.
Severe wind-blow in woodland	Low/ Medium	Reduced income, potential impact on amenity and other projects	Careful management, flexibility if needed. Cash in hand to respond in case of emergency.
Lack of community involvement / volunteers	Low/ Medium	Delays in implementation, lack of community commitment or buy-in	Active communications and promotion of opportunities. Working with external groups that can help liaise with interested volunteers

³⁴ See section 12 for impact of COVID-19

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Lack of capacity within group / loss of key individuals	Low/ Medium	Delays in implementation, management failures	Robust governance systems, wider networking and support. Keep it fun and interesting for directors.
Funding bids for development projects unsuccessful	Medium	Delays, projects unable to proceed	Good quality applications, flexibility
Crofting Commission rejects croft registration	Medium	Delays, Woodland Crofts change identity to standard tenancy	Good quality plans, open communications with the Crofting Commission and THC in advance.
Planning application delays or refusal for woodland croft development.	Medium	Delays, potential crofting tenant/applicant walks away.	Pre-planning application and advice sought for master plan. Good quality master-plan approved. Presentation of good quality individual croft plans worked up through advisory services and pre-planning advice.
High cost of servicing woodland croft sites	Medium	Makes crofts unaffordable for prospective tenants, significant delays in letting crofts, MCW has to replant felled areas.	Development grants carefully justified, woodland croft tenancies go to those who don't need to live on site.
Lack of finance for croft development.	High	Delays, resignation of lease	Good quality individual croft to support croft grant applications. Work to secure confidence from mortgage providers.
Tenant struggling to deliver on their management of the lease	Medium	Reputational damage, additional conflict management and stress on trustees & staff	Legally enforceable agreements, crofting/tenant committee to help resolve issues, community support to deliver community outcomes on tenancies, building sense of common purpose.
Significant opposition to plans from within the community	Medium	Delays, prospective tenants walk away, community divided.	Good communication within the community, sufficient opportunities to hear and respond to plans, due process followed, robust systems of governance in place.

10.2 Grant aid

Many of the likely activities and operations to be pursued by MCW will rely on grant aid to some extent. Woodland management operations, including restocking, are currently supported through the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS), which is entirely supported by the Scottish Government. Whilst the scheme will continue in the short term, the longer term outlook (post 2024) is unclear, although the importance of forestry in tackling the climate and biodiversity emergencies gives some

confidence of extended support. Most FGS options are continuing in 2025 but capital payment rates have not been adjusted since they were launched in 2015.

Many suggested development projects will require funding (or investment capital) from a range of sources, some of which are identified in Appendix 2. Government funding has been reduced of late. For example the Public Access grant for rural woods through the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme is still not open for applications. Nature Scot's Nature Restoration Fund is not open for applications or expressions of interest. Some community groups have looked to private finance through voluntary carbon or nature payments, offsetting for economic activity. Not all groups want to be associated with payments from companies where there may be accusations of 'green-washing'.

Individual woodland croft tenants will be eligible for a range of crofting grants from the Scottish Government. These would only be accessible if The Crofting Commission approves the registration of the new woodland crofts.

10.3 Timber price

The most important factor in timber price fluctuations is the **exchange rate**, because timber is bought and sold on an international market.

The second key factor is **foreign supply** of timber, because the UK imports the vast majority of its timber/wood product requirement. The key factor affecting supply in 2022 is the reduction of imports from Russia, due to embargos in the wake of the war in Ukraine. There are still some hurdles in supply due to Brexit, but these are being overcome steadily and some agents are now supplying timber into Europe due to the restrictions on Russian timber.

The UK economy is steadily recovering after the Covid-19 pandemic, but rising prices across the board increases the risk of a recession that will again slow down demand for timber products.

Diesel is still the biggest component of harvesting, extraction and timber transport costs. The price of crude oil rose significantly as national economies recovered from the pandemic and output remained low due to staff and other shortages. The conflict in Ukraine and embargoes on Russian oil/gas have also pushed fuel prices upwards, but some stability has returned to the oil markets and prices fallen back as other countries increased supply.

The government and business response to the climate emergency should see a significant switch to renewable materials for energy and construction. Timber is in a very favourable position to meet demand for building materials (products are developing all the time to utilise the resources available from Scottish forests for constructing energy efficient homes in Scotland) that will lock carbon into buildings that last 100 years. It is also a suitable feedstock for energy generation and long-term might also supply raw fibre for cellulose products that can be turned into clothing, for example.

• **Appendix I MCW Trustees**

The list of skills within the current Morvern Community Woodland Board of Trustees, as of February 2025 is listed below. In addition the MCW Board is supported by a Woodland Crofts Steering Group that includes representatives from neighbouring home owners, Ardtornish Estate, prospective tenants and MCDC. It demonstrates the breadth of community engagement and the Board's ability to collaborate across the community.:

Forestry & Woodland management
Native Woodland Restoration
Tree nursery management
Fencing
Woodland ecology, Plant identification
Invasive Species Control, Rhododendron eradication
Mapping & GIS
Land management

Crofting & Croft law
Vegetable growing
Livestock Rearing (cattle, sheep, goats, chickens)
Tiny House construction

Project management, Business Management, Budgeting, Human Resources and recruitment
Property Management
Administration
Press and Public Relations, Social media/ marketing
Fundraising
Data management and analysis
Charity Governance
Outreach & Education, Teaching (children and adults), Workshop leading

Filmmaking, Animation
Community arts
Music Composition, Music performance
Creative Writing
Graphic Design
Creative collaboration,
Creative workshop leading (children and adults, diverse settings including for those with ASN or dementia)

Deer stalking
Electrical (certified electrician)
Renewables installation
Carpentry
Craft work

• **Appendix 2 Potential funders for community development projects**

Scottish Rural Development Programme

Forestry Grant Scheme

Support for a wide range of woodland management operations

<https://www.ruralpayments.org/publicsite/futures/topics/all-schemes/forestry-grant-scheme/>

I.1 Grant aid to support forest management

The current Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) contains two relevant packages of grant aid to support the management of existing woodlands: Sustainable Management of Forests (SMF) and Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG). The former makes annual recurrent payments for routine management (such as deer control) whilst the latter pays one-off capital grants for discrete activity.

Given the likely range of management activities, MCW would be eligible for the following elements of the current Forestry Grant Scheme:

- Low impact silviculture (SMF & WIG)
- Native woodland (SMF & WIG)
- Public Access – Rural woods (SMF)
- Species Conservation – reducing deer impact (SMF)
- Long-term forest plan & Deer management plan (WIG)
- Restructuring Regeneration (WIG)

The caveat on these grants is that the grant income needs to be sufficient to justify the time involved in making an application, reporting on and claiming the grant.

1.1.1 Low Impact Silviculture

The aim of this option is to facilitate the transformation of stands to low impact silvicultural systems: it provides grants currently set at £30/ha/yr to assist with additional deer control and management planning costs. In addition, one-off capital grants are available for operations such as stand monitoring (£50/ha) and respacing natural regeneration (£600/ha). Both of these might be useful for CCF stands in the Community Forest. It is unlikely that an appropriate LIS system could be applied to certain sub-compartments at this stage in its growth and eligibility will also be restricted by wind-throw hazard class.

1.1.2 Native Woodland

The aims of this option are to maintain native woodland, bring native woodlands and designated woodland features into good ecological condition and restore Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites to native woodland through deer control and natural regeneration. The grant rate is £25/ha/yr. As Lochaline Community Forest includes very little native woodland, little or none which appears on the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland, a grant payment under this option will be very low. The associated Woodland Improvement Grant “Habitats and Species” includes funding for operations such as £500/ha for seedling tree removal (mechanical) and £3/tree for small-scale tree & shrub planting. The latter option might be appropriate for enrichment planting in some sub-compartments.

1.1.3 Public Access – Rural Woods

This option aims to provide support for the management of rural woodlands for public access. Support is provided to assist with the ongoing maintenance of paths that promote the use of woodlands for health benefits. It pays £100/ha/year to support the costs of tree and path safety inspections, litter removal and keeping paths, signs and facilities up to an acceptable standard. The area covered by the grant is based on 25m either side of qualifying paths (other than forest roads). The grant is capped at £10,000/landholding/year. Currently, the eligible paths are the core paths not also used for vehicle access, which might yield £324/year.

1.1.4 Reducing deer impact

The aim of this option is to reduce deer impacts to a level that will allow the regeneration of unprotected soft conifer and broadleaved species at a landscape scale, to help diversify forests and improve their conservation value. £6/ha/yr is available to help reduce deer numbers or maintain them in the range of five to 10 deer per square kilometre, which would equate to £360/year for a

60 ha woodland. Bearing in mind that qualified professional assistance is required at times to monitor deer numbers and impact and prepare the required deer management plan.

I.1.5 Forest Plans

Funding is currently available under WIG to help pay for the preparation of a long-term forest plan (£1,500 for a plan covering 60ha.) Preparation of the plan would need to include stakeholder consultation. After 10 years, a forest plan renewal grant offers £600 for a forest of 60ha.

In addition funding is also available for a deer management plan (DMP) and a DMP is required for some of the SMF options.

I.1.6 Restructuring Regeneration

This WIG offers £300/ha for replanting UKFS woodlands and £550/ha for more diverse woodland. A £60/ha supplement is available for re-planting with Sitka spruce improved through vegetative propagation on sites that can achieve Yield Class 14 and above.

I.1.7 Forest Infrastructure

This grant is aimed at improving access to small and isolated woodlands in order to bring them back into management. It is possible that Achabeag East, the woodlot area, could be regarded as a discrete unit of management and would be eligible for this grant as it is under 60 ha in size.

I.1.8 Harvesting & Processing

Woodlot tenants or woodland croft enterprises may be eligible for this grant to support the purchase of equipment, be that a firewood processor or a charcoal/biochar retort. Applications require a reasonably comprehensive and well-reasoned business plan for which support might be required from Highlands and Islands Enterprise advisors.

Agri-Environment Climate Scheme – Improving Public Access

Capital funding for path creation and other recreation infrastructure. This grant has not re-opened for applications.

<https://www.ruralpayments.org/publicsite/futures/topics/all-schemes/agri-environment-climate-scheme/management-options-and-capital-items/improving-public-access/>

National Lottery

Awards for All Scotland

This can fund projects that'll do at least one of these things:

- bring people together to build strong relationships in and across communities
- improve the places and spaces that matter to communities
- help more people to reach their potential, by supporting them at the earliest possible stage
- support people, communities and organisations facing more demands and challenges because of the cost-of-living crisis.

Applications can be for funding to deliver new or existing activity, or to support organisations to change and adapt to new and future challenges, with funding from £300 to £20,000 for up to 2 years.

<https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/national-lottery-awards-for-all-scotland>

Community Action (Scotland)

This fund is for communities in Scotland, be they communities of interest or geographical communities. Projects will help people connect more with each other and are open, inclusive and led by their community.

Applications must show how the project will:

- help people come together through an activity or place, that's online or in person
- reach and support people who experience poverty, disadvantage or discrimination
- be community led
- build on the skills, experiences and strengths of the community
- understand the activities or services that are already available to the community, and show how the project will fill a gap.

The project must achieve at least 2 of these outcomes:

- build positive relationships
- support people's health or wellbeing
- help people improve their access and connection to nature
- make a positive difference to the environment.

Funding is from £20,001 to £250,000 for up to 5 years.

Heritage Fund

Grants from £10,000 to £10 million for projects that safeguard local heritage (both cultural & natural), engage people in the local heritage and improve the resilience of organisations working in natural and social heritage projects.

[What we fund | The National Lottery Heritage Fund](#)

Renewables Community Funds

These funds are offered from renewable energy schemes and, along with Morvern's own community owned hydro project there are funds from the Artornish Hydro and SSE' Kingairloch hydro project. SSE also manages a nationwide sustainable Development Fund which should open again for the Highlands in Autumn 2025.

[Apply for funding | Morvern Community Development Company](#)

[Hydro Power - Ardtornish](#)

[Great Britain | SSE Renewables](#)

Charitable Foundations

There are a small range of charitable trusts and foundations that could be called upon to support projects that support biodiversity, landscapes and access to the countryside. Potential funders that have supported community woodland groups recently can be found on the Community Woodlands Association website funding page.

Miscellaneous

Scottish Forestry Community Fund

This fund is open to groups and organisations that encourage people to get out and use woods more. It can also support costs associated with developing Community Asset Transfer Schemes.

<https://forestry.gov.scot/forests-people/communities/community-fund>

Paths for All – Community paths

Supports support communities to create, promote and maintain local community paths and active travel routes.

<https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/community-paths/cmp-grants>

- **Appendix 3 Morvern Land Management Plan**

The current Forestry & Land Scotland land management plan for Morvern is under review. Review documents can be seen here ([Morvern land management plan consultation | Forestry and Land Scotland](#)) with the expectation that a new plan will be approved in mid to late 2025.

- **Appendix 4 Indicative Cash-Flow forecast**

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1aJO3NNe3vCxspIir97EE59MiizJ6Y40j/edit?usp=drive_link&ouid=109735818900580730058&rtpof=true&sd=true

- **Appendix 5 Morvern Wind, Solar & BESS Feasibility Report**

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vyZg8HcPYEIGUOoiZ-AjbrovzwYX5GDv/view?usp=drive_link