

## **Communities and the National Forest Estate**

### **Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 – 1st Annual Report**

**23 January 2017 to 31 March 2018**

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# Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 – 1st Annual Report

Forest Enterprise Scotland's [Community Asset Transfer Scheme \(CATS\)](#) was launched in January 2017. CATS sets out how we'll deliver the asset transfer rights for communities covered in Part 5 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 for the National Forest Estate.

This first annual report covers the period **23 January 2017 to 31 March 2018**.

During that period, communities have made 7 requests for ownership of sites on the National Forest Estate. 4 of the requests were for land notified for sale under our New Woodland Investment Programme. A further 3 community groups made requests for land that they have identified on the Estate, to contribute to delivery of their objectives and benefit their communities.

By 31 March 2018, Forest Enterprise Scotland had issued decisions on 3 sites:

- 2 request for ownership approved
- 1 request for ownership refused

A review by Scottish Ministers of the decision to refuse 1 request for ownership has been allowed under Section 87 of the Act.

No transfers of ownership were completed by 31 March 2018. A full list of asset transfer requests received for the National Forest Estate, and progress to date is shown in Annex 1.

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Forest Enterprise Scotland approved a further 2 requests for ownership on 4 June 2018.

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# Empowering Communities

## Informing, Consulting and Engaging

The National Forest Estate is a multi-purpose resource that sustains livelihoods, improves quality of life, and offers involvement and enjoyment to communities.

A key part of our work on the Estate is actively informing, consulting and engaging with communities, including:

- Publishing a map based [Register of Land](#) on the National Forest Estate and increasing the spatial data available, with richer functionality, via our [OpenData](#) website.
- Keeping people informed of management proposals, gathering views from developing a range of stakeholders, particularly local communities land management plans in developing land management plans and publishing the plans [online](#).
- Notifying communities first when we intend to sell land under the [New Woodland Investment Programme](#), to make sure groups have the opportunity to register their interest in acquiring the land for their community.

## Getting Involved

We work in partnership with local communities and interest groups and have a directory of over 250 bodies, including those we currently work with and have worked in the past.

A summary of current activity of communities getting involved on the national forest estate:

- Partnerships / agreements/ leases: 45
- Actively engaged/empowered/submitted asset transfer requests: 76

Our staff work closely with communities locally to put in place the right agreement to deliver the community's objectives and manage the Estate responsibly and sustainably.

We have also published [guidance and case studies](#) on how communities can get involved to deliver projects and activities on the National Forest Estate.

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## Asset Transfer

### Community Asset Transfer Scheme

The Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS) enables communities to take greater control of the land through ownership or lease. We have published CATS guidance setting out the process and to support our evaluation of community requests, we have appointed a 7 member [CATS Evaluation Panel](#) to make independent and impartial recommendations to Forest Enterprise Scotland, based on their knowledge of the social, environmental and economic aspects of communities and forestry.

We work closely with other key organisations to support communities. On 18 January 2018, we supported the [Community Woodlands Association](#) to host a [community workshop](#) for groups to talk through their proposals, share ideas and get feedback from both peers and advisors including [HIE's Community Assets Team](#) and [DTAS Community Ownership Support Service](#). We work closely with colleagues across the public sector, particularly funders, to provide joined up support for communities where possible.

### New Woodland Investment Programme

Forest Enterprise Scotland, from time to time, sells sites on the National Forest Estate so we can invest in new land to plant more trees and increase the public benefit realised by the Estate. We notify the community first and if a community thinks the land is of use to them, they can then develop an asset transfer request. If the community is not interested in a specific site, it will be put up for sale on the open market.

Over the last year, community bodies registered interest in about 75% of sites identified for sale. We then worked with the communities – meeting with community bodies, providing information and signposting support – so the community body could explore the opportunity. Communities are now submitting or developing request for 12 of the notified sites, roughly one third.

## Looking Ahead

Over the coming year, we will continue to review, update and improve the information for communities including:

- review CATS to incorporate lessons and experience gained over the first year of the scheme to improve external advice for communities and internal processes;
- continue to support staff to ensure they can effectively signpost communities to the best sources of information and advice;
- building on the feedback from the first CATS workshop to support networking and knowledge sharing between community groups.

## ANNEX: Asset Transfer Requests Received by Forest Enterprise Scotland, 23 January 2017 to 31 March 2018

■ Progress since 31 March 2018

Property Address	Community Transfer Body	Initial request date	Validation date	Size (ha)	Type – purchase or lease	Proposed use	Outcome	Date of outcome	Status
<a href="#"><u>Gamescleuch Forest and the Ettrick Marshes</u></a> Ettrick, Selkirk, Scottish Borders	Ettrick & Yarrow Community Development Company	23/06/17	26/06/17	173	Ownership	Community woodland	Refused	03/11/17	Review
<a href="#"><u>The Fairy Pools Car Park</u></a> Minginish, Isle of Skye	Minginish Community Hall Association	16/08/17	16/08/17	12.3	Ownership	Parking facilities	Approved	03/11/17	Offer received 06/07/18
<a href="#"><u>Carron Valley</u></a> Carron Bridge, Stirling	Valley Renewables Group	14/12/17	20/12/17	21.3	Ownership	Community woodland	Approved	28/02/18	Awaiting offer
<a href="#"><u>Leadburn Wood</u></a> Leadburn, Scottish Borders	Friends of Leadburn Community Woodland	26/02/18	26/02/18	9.4	Ownership	Community woodland	Approved	04/06/18	Awaiting offer
<a href="#"><u>Dronley Wood</u></a> Auchterhouse, Angus	Dronley Community Woodland	2/03/18	19/03/18	50.7	Ownership	Community woodland	Approved	04/06/18	Awaiting offer
<a href="#"><u>Eshiels Wood</u></a> Peebles, Scottish Borders	Peebles Community Trust	9/03/18	22/03/18	6.9	Ownership	Community woodland	Approved	04/06/18	Awaiting offer