



SCOTTISH LAND COMMISSION
COIMISEAN FEARAINN NA H-ALBA

Community Engagement Baseline Surveys 2019



The Scottish Government's [Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement](#) (LRRS) sets out a vision and principles for land use, management and ownership in Scotland. Principle 6 states: "There should be greater collaboration and community engagement in decisions about land".

To support this principle, in April 2018, the Scottish Government published [Guidance on Engaging Communities in Decisions Relating to Land](#). This was followed by the launch of a [Protocol for Community Engagement](#) by the Scottish Land Commission in January 2019.

The effectiveness of the Scottish Government guidance must be assessed three years after publication. The Commission has carried out two surveys, one for landowners and one for communities, to establish a baseline understanding of the level of awareness and participation in engagement activities.

The survey for landowners and managers was launched in April 2019 and ran until mid-July, while the communities survey ran from mid-July to the end of September. Both surveys were promoted widely across our social media channels and with key stakeholders and membership organisations.

Summary of Key Findings

Response Levels and Context

The landowners' survey was completed by 64 people, with responses coming mainly from rural areas, and just over a third of respondents from the Highlands. There was a low level of responses from community landowners and no responses from private developers.

By comparison, the community survey received 260 responses, from a wide range of individuals and community organisations representing both urban and rural areas. 41% were from urban areas and responses related to 30 of Scotland's 32 local authority areas.

Current Experiences

We asked landowners and managers whether they currently have a plan in place for how they engage with their local community. 53% of respondents reported that they did or were planning to produce one. Those without a plan were mainly smallholdings and farms who did not believe it necessary to create a plan.

Benefits and barriers

73% of landowners and managers who responded indicated that they believe there are benefits to engaging with local communities. On describing the benefits, respondents stated that engagement:

- Helps the public to understand what's happening better
- Promotes better understanding of other perspectives and builds relationships
- Provides a chance for landowners to explain proposals and reduce misinformation
- Can provide valuable local support for planned changes, reducing controversy and opposition
- Promotes more open-minded views and makes those who own or manage land more aware of local opinions
- Allows people to comment, express views and make suggestions, and provides an opportunity for these to be responded to and incorporated into decision making.

Just over half (53%) of landowners and managers responding thought there could be barriers to engaging with local communities. Issues identified include:

- Community groups can be fractured or dormant or lack clear focus which can make engagement difficult
- Difficulty managing strong or dominant opinions and ensuring a balanced input
- Overcoming lack of interest or consultation fatigue within communities
- Creating trust and openness between all parties
- Managing pre-set hostility / 'them & us' attitudes
- Unrealistic expectations of landowner resources
- General lack of understanding of land management practices and constraints.

Knowing who to speak to

Communities were asked whether they knew who landowners were in their area and how to contact them. This varied considerably. Community members responding from accessible or remote rural areas were much more likely to know all or some of the owners than those from urban areas. Around half of respondents from urban areas did not know who landowners were or how to contact them, compared to around only 15% in rural areas. In comparison, almost 97% of respondents to the landowners and managers survey knew who the community organisations in their area were and how to contact them.

Contribution to Human Rights

In both surveys, we asked the question: *“The Scottish Government believe that land is a resource for all the people of Scotland, that should make a contribution to realising Human Rights by making a positive contribution to economic, environmental and social goals. Do you think the way land or buildings are managed in your community contributes to this aim?”*

83% of the owners and managers of land responding thought that the use or management of their land assets contribute in a positive manner to realising human rights. Comments provided on how a contribution is made included production of high-quality food, maintaining environmental standards, providing access to the outdoors, provision of land for affordable housing, and business development for community benefit.

Only 12% of people in communities thought land in their communities contributed to realising human rights, while 46% thought they did not. Comments provided noted that experience could be both positive and negative in the same community depending on the type of landowner, and on their motivations and resources available. The most common theme in comments made by communities referred to the pursuit of economic goals and commercial gain to the perceived benefit of a very few, and to the detriment of social and environmental goals.

Engagement Activities

Both surveys asked about experiences of engagement carried out in the last two years. 81% of landowners and managers reported that they had carried out an engagement activity within the last

year. Meanwhile, 66% of community respondents said that they had taken part in engagement activities carried out by landowners in their area.

Respondents to both surveys identified a range of types of engagement activities taking place, including:

- Statutory planning processes
- Public meetings
- Surveys
- Social media.

Subjects of engagement

Landowners and managers reported that they had engaged with communities on a wide range of issues, including management agreements or plans for local facilities, forestry operations, housing developments, heritage assets, and deer management.

Respondents to the community survey were asked to indicate topics on which they would like to be consulted and they identified housing and development, access routes, changes of ownership, and significant changes of land use as the key issues they would want to share their views on.

Effectiveness

Almost half (49%) of those responding from communities thought engagement had *not* been effective, with people from large urban areas more likely to report negative experiences.

Comments reflected feelings that engagement had not been genuine and open, with insufficient notice given or a lack of awareness that it was happening, a perception that decisions had already been made, or a lack of feedback or demonstration that comments had been factored into decision-making.

Respondents did highlight examples of engagement that they felt were effective, which included:

- Meaningful engagement, with open listening, honest dialogue and mutual trust
- Good use of informal dialogue to convey useful information and keep people up to date
- Having a range of approaches to reach more people in the community.

Communities were asked to indicate how they would *like* to be engaged with. There was a preference for public meetings and workshops, and for engagement through relevant representative local bodies such as community councils. However, there was also considerable interest in written consultations, project groups, and social media as engagement methods.

Land Use Decision Making

Short and Long-term Plans

We asked about short-term and long-term plans for land – whether landowners had shared information, whether communities were aware of any plans, and whether landowners had knowledge of the community's aspirations.

58% of landowners and managers said they had taken at least a moderate level of action to make communities aware of their plans. However, when communities were asked about awareness of landowner's long-term plans only 22% said they were aware, with better knowledge of plans reported in rural areas than in urban. Awareness of short-term plans was slightly better overall, with 35% reporting at least moderate knowledge of landowner's plans.

64% of landowners and managers reported that they were aware of local community aspirations. Those who did not feel able to answer this positively stated various reasons, including that interests didn't overlap or that the community had not yet identified aspirations.

How decisions are made

Communities were asked if they understood how decisions about land and buildings in their area are made. They were generally aware of how decisions were made (65% reported at least some understanding), though this was significantly higher for people responding from community groups (76%) than it was for individuals (45%). Similarly, 65% of respondents were greatly or moderately familiar with how access to land or buildings can support community aspirations.

Influence

In terms of influence on decision making, more than half of the landowners and managers who responded (53%) said that community views had a great deal or moderate influence on decisions about significant aspects of the way land or buildings are managed. This compares to 30% of community respondents who thought that community views had a moderate or high influence on decisions made about land. The perceived influence was lowest in urban areas – almost a third of respondents from urban areas felt that their community's views had not influenced decisions made about land at all.

Opportunities

Furthermore, we asked owners and managers whether they had assets that are unused, underused or no longer required, which could be sold, leased or made better use of in collaboration with the local community: 22% said that they did, while 19% said they possibly could. The majority of those responding would consider a range of options, including ownership, management, or partnership arrangements with a community body. This suggests that there could be more collaboration between landowners and communities.

Awareness and Use of Existing Published Guidance

We asked landowners and communities about how familiar they are with the Scottish Government's Guidance on Engaging Communities in Decisions Relating to Land and the Land Commission's Protocol on Community Engagement in Decisions Relating to Land.

65% of landowners and managers indicated that they had read or used the Scottish Government guidance, with only 23% of community respondents saying the same.

Both surveys asked respondents to indicate where they heard about the Scottish Government guidance. Landowners and managers indicated that they had heard about it through sector membership organisations, with the Scottish Land Commission website an important secondary source.

For communities, the most common source of information about the guidance was by word of mouth, followed by the Scottish Land Commission or Scottish Government websites and social media.

One third (33%) of the landowners and managers who responded reported that they had read the protocol and a further 23% were aware of it but had not yet read it. Meanwhile, around 28% of community respondents said that they had read or were aware of the protocol.

Landowners were also asked about their awareness of the joint Protocol for Negotiated Sales of Land developed by Scottish Land & Estates and Community Land Scotland. 48% responded that they were aware of the protocol and, of these, just under half were not a member of either organisation.

Future Support Needs

Landowners and managers were asked about how confident they were about engaging with their local community. 57% of those who responded felt extremely or very confident about engaging with the local community.

We asked landowners and managers how they would like to receive any further guidance or support about community engagement, and they identified sector membership organisations and the Scottish Land Commission website as preferred sources of future information. There was also a strong desire for face-to-face events in the form of training and seminars or regional events, and skills development to manage conflicting interests and expectations.

Asked how engagement could be improved, the main themes identified by community respondents were:

- A need for cultural change
- More meaningful engagement through proper listening, dialogue and transparency of decision making
- Getting more and better-quality information
- A greater range of engagement activities to engage a broader spectrum of people to participate
- For communities to be better organised and better supported with resources to take part in and respond to engagement activities.

Conclusion

Many of the responses given in the surveys indicate that there is a need to promote greater understanding between landowners and communities. Some of the comments made suggest that there are frustrations on both sides and that support in engaging and developing relationships would be welcomed.

We will continue to work with communities and landowners with a focus on promoting the benefits of engagement, including the following identified by landowners via the survey:

- It enhances understanding between communities and landowners
- It builds trust
- It leads to improved relationships
- It saves time
- It reduces conflict and controversy
- It promotes sharing of ideas and suggestions.

Almost 51% of people in urban areas do not know who local landowners are or how to contact them and 35% of all community survey respondents saying they had little or no understanding of how decisions relating to land are made in their area. This suggests that there is a requirement for greater transparency around ownership and decision making processes, especially in urban areas. Through our [Good Practice Programme](#), we will be developing a Protocol on Transparency in Relation to Land Ownership and Management. We will also be publishing additional guidance on producing Management Plans that will enable landowners to share information about land use and management with communities.

There was a clear indication from respondents to the landowners' survey that membership organisations are a key route for gaining access to information and training, with 46% indicating that that was the case. We will continue to work with membership organisations to promote the community engagement guidance and protocol. We will deliver a programme of workshops and training for key intermediaries, including membership organisations and land agents, to strengthen understanding and use of the guidance and protocol.

Moreover, the results of the two surveys demonstrate that further work is required to promote and embed the Scottish Government's Guidance on Engaging Communities in Decisions Relating to Land and the Land Commission's Protocol on Community Engagement in Decisions Relating to Land, particularly at a community level. Awareness of the Guidance and the Protocol among respondents to the landowner survey was 65% and 46% respectively, while for community respondents it was 23% and 28%. Our work on Community Engagement will continue to be a key part of the Good Practice Programme as it develops. We will promote and share information, including practical advice and case studies, which will provide clarity about expectations and reasonable and fair behaviour.

As we develop the GPP, other protocols and guidance and our work around piloting self-assessed LRR Reviews will also direct landowners/managers and communities to our guidance and protocol on community engagement.

