**ACCESS TO LAND**

**Ian A Hepburn – Chair Community Land Scotland**

Ian trained as an accountant and has worked as a project manager in a variety of industries from Heavy Engineering to Logistics. He fulfilled a long-held ambition of moving to Mull in 2006 and was employed as a Development Manager for North West Mull Community Woodland Company from September 2008 until April 2014. Ian is now a Director of NWMCWC Ltd and The Community Woodlands Association with a continuing keen interest in community ownership and Land Reform.

See web: <http://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/>

Community Land Scotland aim to help communities register an interest in land and support them in becoming landowners.

Ian led on discussions around access to land in an urban/peri urban context supported by Mark Fitzpatrick of the GCFN.

**DISCUSSION**

**APPROACHES**

Wide and varied interest from those exploring large scale peri urban farming sites such as Clem and a 60 plus acres’ dairy farm and those looking at smaller urban sites such as the Children’s Wood and Blackhill growing site. There was also mention of possible Glasgow University owned peri urban sites and other organisations negotiating more productive use of land sites.

Various approaches can be taken while assessing the most appropriate access to land for any community or organisation. It was widely agreed that getting to know areas through a mixture of processes e.g speaking to local authorities, support agencies, community development trusts and local communities could allow you to build a case for cheaper/discounted or even very long term leases accompanied by a strong business plan. Whatever project is being considered through the land reform/empowerment act, it should directly support local areas i.e. placemaking as opposed to any isolated projects which might not be as invested in a geographical area.

In Glasgow City’s case, the Local Authority could be supportive of food projects that benefit large numbers of people from across the city when considering land or other assets such as buildings that have been left neglected, abandoned or disused.

It was also noted that Glasgow City Council has the highest levels of neglected, disused and abandoned land in Scotland (and UK?). Stalled spaces had been a positive move to bring ownership back to the city pre- the Empowerment/Land reform act and gave a sense of ownership to communities. Leases and resources, however varied, based on what funding or deals could be made at specific sites leaving many communities with uncertainty over the future of their projects. It was agreed GCC should be looking to develop a new Stalled Spaces program to lead the way again given the new rights created under the Empowerment/Land reform act! Part of this could include long term leases over 25yrs, land given at discounted or little cost to communities where development plans would maximise community activities and where more support could be given to develop community development trusts to help strengthen and empower communities to take more ownership of their cities.

GCC have informed GCFN that they are creating a map available to the public, marking out who owns the assets of land across the local authority area. It was uncertain how detailed this would be and if only marked private for example, we assumed there would need to be a system developed to quickly access the details of private land ownership. This could encourage groups to form and look at land in local areas such as Our Land Edinburgh group that recently started with the aim of exploring possibilities across the city. In all instances there will be a need to build alliances across sectors to negotiate deals over land and buildings that, due to the market process, could be out of reach for many communities. Building capacity and strengths with local groups will enable them to further the case for the best deal for communities, their organisations and communities of interest such as food. It is now the role of local authorities to act in the interest of their communities so getting organised is key!

It must be noted that the Empowerment/Land reform acts have only come into effect over the last couple of years. There are still changes developing due to a lack of understanding of the implications by some local authorities and bigger organisations such as the NHS as they come to terms with the acts or it may be that they are under-resourced to look at it in any depth. In it rawest form the acts will allow organisations acting in the local communities’ interest to negotiate and take ownership of any assets they are able to resource.

There should be a joint strategy between communities local/interest, support agencies/local authorities to work with large city land owners to use and develop different private sites across the city.

It was also discussed that there was a need for ‘nice and light’ and palatable guidance notes for your everyday person to get involved in shaping their own local communities.

**RESOURCES**

Resources vary widely and there are many different financing mechanisms/approaches, for example:

**BUY**

Straight out **purchase** can be funded up to 95% by the Scottish Land Fund. Interestingly the 5% match funding can be met by negotiating down a discount from the land owner. Minimum £10m/yr funded by Scot Govt and partly managed by the Big Lottery <https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/scottishlandfund>

Within this fund are amounts of around £20K for feasibility studies.

Work with local authorities, local groups such as community development trusts to negotiate costs of assets. Ian used an example of a public toilet they wanted to bring back into use where the asking price started at £30k and they made the case and purchased it for £30.

In discussions with Clem, an aspiring dairy farmer, it was suggested that speaking to people about their local areas to development trusts, the local authorities and support agencies like possibly the Leader program to argue the case for more productive uses of land in their local areas.

It was also acknowledged that the launch of the new Scottish Land Trust which is exploring the possibility of raising funds (such as farm trusts like Frances Terre Des Liens which raised £53m) to buy land for Agroecology (environmentally friendly farming) to lease to new farmers (smallholders) cheaply and to negotiate land for sale. This organisation has just started, so uncertain if there are plans for urban strategies/support.

Buying land to lease to other partners is a possibility e.g. to public sector organisations. The Stove network in Dumfries are looking to do this with NHS in the High Street. You could also balance community interest with activity from commercial companies.

Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS) and it’s division Community Ownership Support Services (COSS) can help with any asset transfers and detailed queries around taking ownership.

Community Shares Scotland also advise on getting people to buy shares in an asset which often increases the feeling of participation from the wider community as they have an actual stake in the project. Examples such as Govanhill Baths came to mind.

Triodos the ethical bank give low interest loans to organisations with similar values.

General fundraising activities and trusts were mentioned.

**LEASE**

Buying is not always the answer given the price of land, so look at **long term leases** – Be ambitious. Ian was part of a community woodland that secured a 99yr lease for little cost.

More than just mapping. GCC Food Growing Strategy should be developing resources to help get the best deals for local people and communities of interest. Perhaps GCFN could provide support here for aspiring food enterprise/growing.

Shared leases could be considered where you invite commercial activities.

Working with community development trusts like Locavore at Neilston farm can help secure affordable long -term leases.

Further to this is a £80k pot managed by Community Alliance Scotland to support organisations who would like to visit community buyout projects across the country.

**OTHER TOPICS**

Land Banks in Philadelphia were mentioned where the City Council has a committee who strategizes, deciding uses of disused, derelict or abandoned land in its city which consists of 11 members. Four of the committee members are community leaders from across the city and they vote on projects always in the interest of the community. There is also a wider system with local community land trusts that from first glance seem similar to Community Development Trusts in the UK. This system could work with local authorities on land procurement and taxes.

Land/development trusts could raise money to buy land/assets and lease for low price to activities such as market gardens and food enterprises.

Working with public land for common good on larger scale projects could help develop areas with food growing/enterprise in mind, taking into consideration the people’s needs in any given area. In the first instance it is easier negotiating with LA’s than fighting with private developers. Again GCC (LA) should be expected to lead here!

Another suggestion was partnering with affordable housing developments. Example of exciting projects with food and eco housing outside Amsterdam – ReGen project.

It was discussed that we should be looking at better uses for public land therefore lease or buying not always necessary – expanding the commons.

Susan SCDC raised the issue that perhaps those who are most often in need are left behind. Can we work in a way that looks to build more capacity in areas where people need educated about ownership and the new legislation. A nice and light easy read guide could be a start.

Finally, there was a brief discussion about contaminated land which raised the question “could there be a study looking at sustainable decontamination which could provide more access to land for food growing.