

Fernaig Community Trust

Land Purchase in South Strome Forest

Options Appraisal

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1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Purpose of report

Fernaig Community Trust wishes to explore opportunities offered to acquire part of Strome Forest through the National Forest Land Scheme. A significant factor which has changed since Fernaig Trust commissioned this work has been the funding scenario. The Lottery programme, Growing Community Assets, has closed and not been replaced. Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) can fund up to 40% of purchase costs if the project is within an area determined as fragile by HIE. If assisting, they would look to the purchasing organisation to make a contribution of some 5% towards the purchase. The Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) has been mentioned as a source of acquisition funds but this is still being researched. The Trust has decided to proceed with a scoping study to enable the community and the Trust to make decisions as to what options, if any, it wishes to pursue, should the opportunity to purchase be approved at Government level, and to explore alternative options not involving outright purchase.

This options appraisal forms part of the overall scoping study, commissioned by the Trust in 2009. Following the undertaking of a baseline socio-economic assessment of the area, Solas Business Services Ltd has prepared an outline options appraisal, to assist the Trust and the community to identify which option(s), if any, to pursue and investigate in more detail. Further analysis of community aspirations and the capacity of the community to manage and develop a project of this size, and a community skills audit to enable an assessment of community capacity building requirements to be carried out would be essential before taking any proposal to the next stage.

1.2 Methodology

Using the baseline study referred to in 1.1 above, with its assessment of community aspirations for reference, a desktop investigation was carried out into the formulation of similar forest development plans by other community organisations and the recommendations, requirements and potential outlined in documents published by organisations such as Reforesting Scotland, the Forestry Commission's National Forest Land Scheme (NFLS), the Community Woodlands Association (CWA), the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP), the Scottish Forestry Strategy and the UK Woodlands Trust Woodlands Assurance Scheme Standard (UKWASS). Each option was evaluated to assess issues such as sustainability and viability, outcomes, impacts and wider public benefits of implementation, and to identify possible timescales and likely management resource requirements, including finance and training. From this evaluation, recommendations have been made as to the next step. As this study is provided as an initial summary only, and was carried out without detailed input from specialists, more detailed assessment of the next stage would be required prior to application for purchase and/or funding.

At draft stage, a meeting was held with two directors of the Trust and the HIE Woodland Crofts Officer to source further information.

1.3 Background information

1.3.1 South Strome Forest

South Strome Forest extends to 1,623 ha and is located in Wester Ross. Purchased by the Forestry Commission (FC) in 1925, there have been regular plantings by them since that time. 70% is Sitka spruce, with larch, Scots pine, lodgepole pine, Norway spruce and Douglas fir also present. Some of the stands of timber, while of value, would present extraction difficulties due to the steep slopes. Any area which is felled requires re-stocking by law, either by planting or natural regeneration.

The geology of the area consists of mostly Lewisian Gneiss, but is also cut through by the Moine thrust line which includes a variety of rocks. The soil is quite basic; brown forest soils on the old woodland sites and better drained lower slopes, lots of peaty gleys and peat in the wetter bits and up the hills, and very thin soils at the top. All areas are subject to high levels of rainfall and wind. The altitude in some areas reaches 300m above sea level, resulting in considerable soil exposure, particularly in bog woodland and open ground. There is a wide range of soil fertility. The ancient woodland and grassland provides a rich habitat in places, with almost all native tree species present. The better land has potential to grow (and does grow) quality hardwoods and boatskin larch, though timber value varies with fluctuations in market and transport costs.

Access roads are in good condition, and though boundary fencing has not all been well maintained, the forest is within the sea to sea peninsula fence, so deer numbers are controlled to some extent.

Located within the forest is Strome Wood, an area of 30 ha which stands on a steep hillside overlooking the narrows of Loch Carron. It was purchased by the Forestry Commission in the 1920s, when it was planted, and additional planting was carried out in the 1970s. It comprises a mixture of mature Sitka spruce, western red cedar, larch and Scots pine, with younger Sitka spruce and a little beech, birch and hazel. Some ancient, semi-natural birch is present, and natural regeneration of many species in felled and cleared gaps has resulted in a fairly intimate mixture of species and ages. This area is scheduled on the Forest Design Plan of November 2003 for long-term retention, meaning that it is not a Forest Enterprise production area, and that alternative management would not compromise the financial output of the forest. Signposted footpaths were created, though some require reinstatement after wind throw and clearance are now mostly lost in the undergrowth and some clearings have been created by windthrow. This paths network provides the potential to create links and make circuits in short stretches. There is considerable current community interaction with and use of the forest, with informal use of paths & tracks by walkers, cyclists and ponies and organised

visits by groups such as the Wester Ross field club, the Kyleakin day centre and local primary schools.

1.3.2 Fernaig Community Trust

Fernaig Community Trust (FCT) was set up in 1998. It has over 50 members, who elect the Board, which currently has 8 directors. It was financed by Highlands and Islands Enterprise's (HIE) Community Land Unit (CLU), with the original intention of purchasing Fernaig Estate. This buyout fell through; however, the Trust was successful in purchasing 110 acres of the Estate in 2001, and has created new smallholdings and house sites.

Prior to this, when numbers employed by Forest Enterprise (FE) continued to be reduced, the Strome Forest Initiative was formed to attempt a community buyout, with a view to managing the forest, providing recreation facilities, restructuring the forest to include a wider diversity of species, adding local value to silvicultural products and increase employment opportunities in the area. Having been informed that the forest was not on FE's disposals list, a compromise was subsequently reached between the Trust and FE, and a partnership agreement was established, which resulted in proposals for a café and shop at the viewpoint about Strome Ferry and some footpaths and recreational facilities in Strome Wood. A Concordat was signed in October 2000.

Volunteer time has been variable and unpredictable, but a number of people have assisted with rhododendron cutting, fencing, tree planting, path works etc.

1.3.3 Concordat

In 2000, Fernaig Community Trust signed a Concordat with Forest Enterprise, now Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), which was updated in 2006, with a view to undertaking developments within the forest. The Concordat lasts for 25 years and is reviewable every three years, with the next review due in September 2009.

A Community Woodlands Association Report of May 2006 identified community benefits and overall general satisfaction in partnership working with FCS throughout Scotland. It also states that "In a small number of cases, there has been dissatisfaction that, following partnership agreement on a design plan, forest operations have proceeded without further communication with the community. Significant thinning or clear-felling programmes can have a dramatic impact aesthetically, and raising the awareness of and prior discussions with the local community can help prepare them for this."

A report in "Involvement in Scotland" of March 2002 referred to

"a pro-active local community, with a very close relationship (between Forest Enterprise and the community)...regular meetings, community becoming

aware of FE direction and standards, common goals now more easily identifiable. Community representatives use forest facilities for planning.”

There is a feeling within the Trust, however, that the relationship has been of limited success, often fraught with frustrations and difficulties, although some of the earlier problems have been addressed. The Trust feels, moreover, that there are basic differences in approach, understanding and organisational setup between FC and themselves, and that there would inevitably be some things that are undeliverable through the Concordat, and therefore might be better served through land purchase.

1.3.4 Aspirations

The Trust wishes to consider purchasing part of the Forest in order to achieve more local management of this asset, and to identify potential income streams and other economic development opportunities. The National Forest Land Scheme is open to communities who wish to acquire or lease National Forest Land, extending the provision detailed in the Community Right to Buy, which formed part of the Crofting Reform Act of 2003. In order for any application to the National Forest Land Scheme to be successful, the Trust would have to demonstrate that it has the capacity to compile and implement a comprehensive management plan (see 2.1.1).

The Trust’s overarching vision is to develop projects which would bring local economic benefits and opportunities, while improving the local environment through local involvement and promote a more sustainable future for the local community. Options under consideration include the creation of woodland crofts, the facilitation of affordable house building, the formation of a community woodland scheme and the creation of a jointly managed common grazings type scheme. Although the level of home ownership in the area is 91%, 14% of those responding to the questionnaire expressed the view that there was a requirement for further housing provision in the area. There are 36 households on the Highland Housing Register that have indicated that they would accept a house in Achmore. The survey indicates a high level of interest in outdoor activities which identifies potential for community woodland and recreational activities. Need and desire for land for crofts or business enterprises has yet to be fully assessed; however eight individuals residing locally have expressed an interest in acquiring woodland crofts.

Potential specific objectives arising from these aspirations might include the safeguarding of the long-term future of forest, enhancement of conservations interest and structural diversity, promotion of the area as an educational and recreational resource, employment creation, income generation through growth in local products and services, and community involvement and capacity building.

1.3.5 Human capacity within the community

The baseline study estimates the population of the Trust area (the settlements of Achmore, Ardnarff, Braeintra, Craig and Stromeferry) as between 150-200,

with a more age-balanced community than average in the Highland Region. The 2001 census shows a population increase of 17.5% on the 1991 census. Approximately 80% of the population sample is in full, part-time or self employment or training. A relatively low percentage (3.7%) was employed in agriculture, stalking or forestry. Most of the sample is employed in construction, utilities, education and hospitality sectors. No information is available about the level or type of skills available locally. This would need to be assessed prior to the drawing up of any forest business or management plan.

1.3.6 Constraints

1.3.6.1 Local Plan

Although there is no provision for any development in the 2008 West Highlands and Islands Local Plan for any development within Strome Forest, it is generally supportive of any development proposals that are acceptable in terms of design, scale etc., and which demonstrate sensitivity and appropriateness. There has been some indication, however, that clustered housing proposals are unlikely to receive support unless contained within pre-designated areas, none of which are in the Strome Forest area.

1.3.6.2 The Trust

The Trust has a mandate to carry out any activities which have received support from Trust members. It has an obligation to consult widely with the community it serves. It is largely dependent on volunteer resources. A number of its current Board members have experience in forest management; Robin Phillips is an ex forestry contractor, Hector Morrison spent a good part of his working life as an FC employee, and Colin Parsons has a forestry degree and 20+ years in the industry, with a long time special interest in native woodland and continuous cover. There are also several other Trust members who have forestry experience. Although the local FC district would not be involved in management if land were purchased, it would still act in advisory capacity, and help is available from the Community Woodlands Association and other sources. It is likely, however, that the Trust would require professional assistance and possibly a paid project officer, mainly because of the time required to undertake any of the projects discussed in this appraisal. As the Trust has only very limited income streams at present, budgetary constraints are also likely to be considerable. These limitations are also likely to have a negative effect on project delivery timescales.

1.3.6.3 Silvicultural constraints

The only silvicultural constraints are those in the agreed current forest design plan, and mainly relate to the ancient woodland areas, which the Trust would also like to see restored. Any clear felled areas carry a legal obligation to replant, in line with current Government policy against deforestation. As requested by FCT, the new version of the forest design plan will have Strome

Wood as partly non-intervention, for the time being, and partly continuous cover.

1.3.6.4 Forestry Commission Scotland

If only part of forest is purchased, FCS becomes a neighbour. However, there are no negative implications of this, as the remainder would continue to be managed under the Concordat.

1.3.6.5 Conservation and heritage interests

There are no designated areas nor any features of historic or cultural value identified. However, there are Ancient Woodland areas, which have been defined by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) as being present on Roy's map (c1770) and the 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps (1875). There are also ruins and other features of cultural and historic interest, although they have no official designation.

1.3.6.6 Access constraints

Public access routes within the forest can be temporarily suspended for safety reasons when felling is taking place, but the forest, in line with all FC land, has open access. Access for timber extraction is constrained by the landscape - steepness, wetness, watercourses, etc. Although many main roads are excluded from timber transportation, this is unlikely to be an issue for the Trust unless it decides to enter into substantial timber extraction in a similar way to the Forestry Commission, an option which seems unlikely. Sea access is not really practical as the railway runs between the forest and the sea. However timber could be loaded on to boats or trains at Strome.

1.3.6.7 Other neighbours

Attadale Estate borders the forest to the north east, which provides some deer stalking. Conchra Estate to the southeast has cattle and sheep. To the south, across the main Stromeferry to Lochcarron road, there is some privately owned forestry. To the west there is some hill ground under a natural regeneration scheme, small farms in the Glen and Fernaig Trust land with various stock. It is unlikely that any development or change in ownership would raise significant issues with neighbours.

1.3.6.8 Funding constraints

In recent months, there have been discussions between the Scottish Government and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) regarding the use of public funding to assist the purchase of publicly owned assets by community groups. This has now been resolved and it has been confirmed that HIE can fund community purchase of public assets, such as forestry or SGRIPD estates, to a maximum of 40% in areas defined by HIE as fragile. Strome Forest falls within a fragile area.

The LEADER Programme (part of the Scottish Rural Development Programme - see below) can provide match funding up to a maximum of 45% for a variety of capital and revenue projects which relate to a range of themes. However, this is targeted primarily at small-scale projects and community land purchase is likely to be outwith its budget.

The National Lottery has been a major funder of community buy-outs but the previous fund, Growing Community Assets, is now closed. There has been consultation to inform the next funding opportunities but as yet, no decisions or announcements have been made as to what these would be.

The Scottish Rural Development Programme offers many funding opportunities, which are detailed in section 8.1 of this report.

1.3.7 SWOT analysis of forest and development/management options

Strengths

- Trust members experienced in forestry operations
- Scenic location with outstanding views
- Popular tourist area
- Land available
- Willingness within the community to manage resource
- Good road access
- No designated areas, therefore lack of severe planning restrictions
- Wide range of ages and species of trees
- Wide range of habitat types, soil types
- Some areas of native woodland, pleasant established pine and larch woods,
- Some areas approaching continuous cover, good natural regeneration of native species
- Diversity and quantity of wildlife
- Good rail road and sea links
- Strong community support
- Considerable community experience in land ownership, fundraising, community activities and events

Weaknesses

- Community support for options only partly assessed
- Limits on volunteer resources
- Lack of concrete objectives of Trust, although consensus of direction.
- Lack of information on value of forest
- If crofts are created, crofters may not be able to make the level of investment in the short term required for woodland management
- Limited infrastructure – access, water, sewage and electricity supplies
- No agreed management structure to take proposals forward
- Any development within the forest is outwith local plan
- Timescale to purchase and develop site

- Possibility that forest cannot realistically be economically viable in the long term
- Steep location
- Not a prime site for general housing

Opportunities

- Potential to purchase land through NFLS and Community Right to Buy
- Potential to create new crofts under Crofting Reform Act
- Tourism opportunities
- SRDP funding opportunities to assist with projects
- Croft housing more likely to obtain planning permission than other houses
- Opportunity to improve carbon footprint through biomass production, hydro or wind power generation and local production of a range of produce.
- Business start up opportunities
- Employment opportunities
- Potential for Trust to develop commercial income stream
- Integrated approach
- Increase in popularity of eco-tourism
- Potential source of material for biomass or sawn timber business
- Steep terrain and environmental resources could provide opportunities for renewable energy schemes
- Opportunity for small scale environmental management of resource
- Potential for micro management and attention to detail not possible under FC management

Threats

- Inability to source funding for proposals
- Over-reliance on volunteer resources may threaten sustainability of projects
- Insufficient volunteer capacity to take forward developments
- Steepness of area makes timber extraction unviable in some places
- Limitations to external and internal access in the Forest
- Continued challenge of managing windblow
- Putting some or all of the land into crofting tenure would have significant negative effect on land value
- Purchase could mean loss of expertise of FCS, although they could still act in an advisory capacity.
- Accidents and public liability
- Other legal liabilities
- Lack of public support for management and development
- Climate change
- Fluctuating timber prices, though local markets may be less likely to suffer from this than the global ones currently operated in by FC
- Potential for division within community
- Potentially very large workload could lead to volunteer fatigue

- Doing nothing might lead to environmental and social degradation of amenity
- If housing association builds affordable housing, Trust may lose power to select tenants and control house designs etc.
- May be difficult to identify potential woodland crofters who also wish affordable housing provided for them
- Land purchase would result in exposure to fluctuation in land and timber values, though this may not be an issue if the land is removed permanently from the market.
- Current economic climate – though this could have a positive effect, if people move towards local produce, woodfuel etc. as transport becomes more expensive,

1.3.8 Wider Context

Recent Government legislation, including the Land and Crofting Reform Acts of 2003, has set the scene for the delivery of the current rural economic framework. The Scottish Government wishes to increase the capacity of rural communities to manage and sustainably use the resources around them. The National Forest Land Scheme has been created to facilitate the release of land for affordable housing and community use. In order to access the Scheme, the following conditions must be met:

- Community body must be eligible
- Land must not be excluded land
- Community must have a substantial connection with the land
- Community must have capacity to manage the land
- Proposal must be consistent with the principles of sustainable development
- Proposal must be in the public interest
- Proposal must not be detrimental to the management of the forest estate

The Scottish Forestry Strategy outlines FCS's plans for landscape improvement with the protection of cultural heritage, and UKWAS sets out the best practice for woodland management. It is now possible to create new crofts, and Reforesting Scotland and CWA has carried out research and a review of how forest crofts might be created. Project funding is available from SRDP, to assist communities achieve their aspirations, and Woodland Improvement Grants are also available to assist with the preparation of Forest Plans. Various community groups throughout the Highlands have taken advantage of these opportunities, and their experiences and research have assisted with this options appraisal. They include Tormore in Sleat, Culag Community Woodlands Trust, Gigha Heritage Trust, Embo Trust, Dunnet Forest Trust and the North West Mull Community Trust.

1.3.9 Outline of Options and Relations

A list of possible objectives is listed below. There is more than one possible way to achieve each objective, and these have been discussed in the appraisal of each option, which has been considered in the study as "stand alone".

However, it is possible that a combination of two or more options might become the preferred route. A summary of the options considered and potential relationships or conflicts between them are outlined below.

1.3.9.1 Possible objectives

- Creation of recreational facilities
- Silvicultural enterprise
- Increased biodiversity of the forest
- Provision of business start up opportunities
- Achieve an income stream for the Trust
- Increased community participation in forest management
- Non forest timber product enterprise
- Use of forest as an educational resource
- Creation of affordable housing
- Creation of biomass business
- Increased use of local timber
- Provision of holdings in forest for individuals

1.3.9.2 Community Woodland Management

Tenure options

- Continue with partnership working with FCS
- Lease land from FCS
- Acquire land and create and operate community woodland scheme
- Acquire land and lease parcels of land to individuals for business enterprises within woodland scheme

Area options – numbers refer to FCS Forest Strategy Zones

- 5525 (part), 5526, 5527, and 5528 (part) This area is south facing and lies to the east of the village of Achmore and Strath Ascaig and lies north and east of the Auchtertyre – Strathcarron road
- 5532 and 5533 This area is north facing and lies east of the Auchtertyre-Strathcarron road.

Wood options

- Silvicultural Management
- Restructuring restocking
- Biodiversity schemes
- Use of wood as biomass
- Sale of wood products

Other activity options

- Creation of recreational facilities e.g. paths, cycle tracks, picnic areas, interpretation

- Renewable energy projects

Relationships with other options

- Could be combined with creation of forest crofts
- Could be combined with creation of affordable housing
- Crofts and housing could conflict with other forest management
- Possible conflict between recreational and silvicultural activities
- Possible conflict between renewable energy projects and other activities

1.3.9.3 Common Grazing Style Joint Management

Tenure options

- Lease land from FCS
- Purchase land from FCS, to be owned and retained by FCT

Area options

- As 1.3.8.2

Wood options

- As 1.3.8.2

Other options

- As 1.3.8.2

Relationships with other options

- Could be combined with affordable housing option
- Could be combined with creation of forest crofts to allow crofters access to and use of common land in similar manner to crofting common grazings
- Could conflict with forest crofts and affordable housing if tenants are not members of common land committee
- Although similar in some respects to Woodland Management Scheme, it would not be possible to operate them both simultaneously
- Possible conflict committee and Trust, depending on aspirations of membership

1.3.9.4 Affordable Housing

Tenure options

- Work in partnership with local housing association or other registered social landlord to create affordable housing – housing association would need to own land

- Set up own housing association and register as social landlord – Trust would need to purchase land
- Sale of sites for house building
- Erection of houses for sale
- Erection of houses for rent
- Mixture of sale/rent/shared equity options

Area options

- Forest Strategy Zone 5534, which lies to the west of the Auchtertyre – Strathcarron road has been identified as suitable, due to its proximity to the main road
- Strips or clustered housing

Wood options

- Use of local timber for house erection
- Installation of biomass heating system

Other options

- None identified

Relationships with other options

- Could be combined with any one or more of the other options
- Could be combined with creation of crofts where land available for use by crofter is combined with allocation of affordable house provision
- Depending on location, house-building could conflict with all other options
- Possible conflict with forest management if right to buy is not excluded
- If housing association acquire land, their aspirations could conflict with Trust forest management objectives

1.3.9.5 Woodland Crofts

Tenure options

- Land is purchased by the Trust to lease to crofting tenants
- Land is leased to crofting tenants by FCS (FCS are unwilling to progress this, however)

Area options

- Forest Strategy Zones 5525 (part), 5526, 5527, and 5528 (part) This area is south facing and lies to the east of the village of Achmore and Strath Ascaig and lies north and east of the Auchtertyre – Strathcarron road
- Clustered housing
- Housing dispersed on croft land

- Equal sizes of land
- Varying sizes of land

Wood options

- Silvicultural activities
- Non timber forest products
- Sale of other wood products
- Biomass business

Other options

- Other individual business activities, as outlined on applicants' crofting management plans

Relationships with other options

- Could be combined with joint common land management
- Could be created in conjunction with affordable housing
- Could be created and work alongside community woodland management if carefully planned and managed
- Individual crofter interests could conflict with overall management of forest, including provision of recreational activities, access and silvicultural activities
- Possible conflict with forest management if right to buy is not excluded

1.3.9.6 Doing Nothing

Tenure options

- Continue with Concordat and not seek renewal
- Continue with Concordat and seek renewal

Area options

- Continue with area under Concordat
- Seek to increase or change area under Concordat

Wood options

- Do nothing
- Continue with FCS to try to achieve greater biodiversity and social amenity

Other options

- Development and expansion of existing recreational facilities e.g. paths, cycle tracks, picnic areas, interpretation

- Renewable energy projects, though these might be difficult to develop under the Concordat

Relationship with other options

- Continuing with the current setup would preclude any relationship with other options

2. Community Woodland Management

2.1 Outline of option

2.1.1 Community Woodland Scheme

A proposed option is to purchase part of the forest to create a community woodland under local management, to help achieve community aspirations and develop community opportunities. The Community Woodlands Association definition of a community woodland is one partly or completely controlled by the local community through a Community Woodland Group, which can be owned or leased and can be managed by the group on its own or in partnership with other organisations such as FCS.

The UK Woodland Assurance Scheme Standard is a comprehensive one, which lays out best practice for woodland schemes. The standard covers the following areas:

- 1 – Compliance with law and conformance to certification standard
- 2 – Management planning
- 3 – Woodland design; creation, felling and replanting
- 4 – Operations
- 5 – Protection and maintenance
- 6 – Conservation and enhancement of biodiversity
- 7 – The community
- 8 – Health and Safety

In order to create a Community Woodland Scheme, aims and objectives would need to be clearly identified and agreed. It is desirable that in order to ensure good practice they would follow the guidelines of CWA and UKWASS, and include some or all of the following:

- Safeguard the future of the forest as a whole – development and implementation of a five year plan and secure funding to achieve objectives, including restructuring and restocking using a variety of species and planting systems and locally sourced and grown stock where possible, protection from grazing and climate, repair and maintenance of boundary fencing, drainage and surfacing, membership recruitment to encourage public involvement and feedback
- Creation of recreational facilities – enhancing opportunities for health and enjoyment, maintenance/creation of access through informal paths allowing pedestrian, cycle and equestrian access, mountain bike trails, way-marking interpretation and notice boards, provision of picnic tables and benches, bird hides, weather shelters, orienteering courses, provision of car parking and access road(s) if appropriate, erection of perimeter fences, event hosting, increasing the contribution of forestry to tourism.
- Biodiversity schemes - restoration and expansion of native woodlands, habitat improvement and species management, protection of conservation

interest of the forest and enhancement of existing resource, positive contribution to soil and landscape quality

- Rural development projects– increasing value and providing income stream to Trust and local community, through job creation, and the facilitation of local processing and marketing of timber products and non-timber forest products (ntfps), renewable energy projects – development of local supply chains and markets for woodfuel, reducing dependence on fossil fuels, sustainable forest management plan
- Social inclusion – assisting community participation, involving all community sections in planning and decision making, ensuring benefits and access to facilities are available to all, wheelchair access, use of the forest as an educational resource through interpretation and educational leaflets and materials, capacity building and contributing to growth in learning and skills through facilitation of rural skills training and assessment of potential for training in forest skills through forest management
- Maintenance and improvement of relationships between stakeholders – community, businesses, schools, neighbours, organisations and funding bodies
- Management and operational objectives – maintenance of public safety through safety inspections and felling regime, erection of fire signs and installation of fire beaters, provision of litter and dog waste bins, organised planning, administration and record keeping and financial control, raising skills base of management, keep informed of up to date forest silviculture and management of forests, networking with other woodland groups, maintenance in compliance with UKWASS.

Following UKWASS guidelines, a complete assessment and mapping of the woodland resource would need to be undertaken, including “appropriate aspects of physical, silvicultural, ecological, archaeological, social and landscape issues and any special characteristics, demonstrating consideration to neighbouring landowners” (though much of this information would be obtainable from FCS). It would then be necessary to agree and draw up a long-term plan, outlining the objectives and implementation requirements for the next twenty five years, following by a detailed five year plan, with clear milestones and detail of tasks required to be undertaken, and demonstrating how each project would integrate with the others. This should detail the percentage of woodland cover to be maintained, any restocking, thinning and harvesting plans, recreational activities planned and likely impacts on biodiversity of the forest. Objectives should be prioritised and a timescale for implementation drawn up.

Further consultation with the community and public agencies would be required, in order to ensure full community support for the venture and assess community aspirations. However, the baseline study indicates a high level of interest among those responding to the questionnaire in outdoor activities such as those a community woodland might afford.

In order to create a community woodland, it is not essential that the Trust owns the land. Given the level of past dissatisfaction with the delivery of the

Concordat, however, it seems unlikely that it would be possible to create a community woodland without land purchase or leasing, although this has improved in the recent past. Issues such as management and control of the woodland, and potential difficulty in sourcing development funding after purchase are discussed below.

2.1.2 Biomass

The opportunity exists for the creation of a new, timber-based enterprise. This could be operated by the Trust, leased to a private enterprise or contracted to local businesses. Wind-blown timber has commercial value as saw logs, but must be recent and still alive, though dead timber is suitable for use as firewood as it is dry. Woodchips currently sell for around £65 per tonne, but sales prices fluctuate considerably. Cost of access and distance from market are also factors requiring to be taken into consideration. Assessment of local demand would be essential. There are a few woodchip systems in the area and a large and increasing number of households using woodfuel in open fires, stoves etc. It is possible that the woodchips could be chipped on site or baled in the area, adding value at source and reducing waste and haulage costs and restrictions. The potential for this would depend on the quality of the standing timber resource. 1 ha of Sitka spruce could yield 50 cubic metres of wood after 20 years, provided it has been fully maintained.

Wood chip heating systems are said to offer fuel savings to users but feedback is mixed (e.g. residents in the new Housing Association at Portree Home Farm Development have raised concerns about the high cost of their biomass heating system). Wood chip systems have higher maintenance costs than oil or gas systems.

It might be possible to develop some partnership working with FCS, Highland Timber Transport group and the Strategic Timber Transport Fund. This option could be followed up at a later stage if interest was identified.

2.1.3 Recreational facilities

It is possible to improve the recreational facility afforded by the forest – thinning trees to create views, linking roads, creation of pedestrian or bike track, and creation of a loop road. Creation of a forest road can cost around £45 per metre, though this varies according to ease of access, topography etc. Initial work would be required to clear-fell windblown and high-risk areas, which could be extensive. Creation of new paths, which would involve drainage, surfacing and possibly fencing work, with interpretation panels, signposts and way-markings, bird hides, weather shelters, picnic areas with tables and benches, and the provision of litter and dog-waste bins would increase the amenity of the forest. Areas could be identified for the provision of specialist routes, such as orienteering and mountain biking. Car parking facilities may also be required. Funding could be sourced through SRDP for some or all of these facilities. (see section 7)

2.1.4 Biodiversity

The opportunity exists to change the crop structure of the wood/forest to promote and increase biodiversity, possibly by increasing the proportion and diversity of broadleaves planted and aiming to achieve a varied age structure within the area.

2.1.5 Other silvicultural enterprises

Any other silvicultural enterprise would need to take into consideration such factors as management costs, replanting costs, maintenance, insurance, stock fencing etc., and would also need to consider timber value and haulage costs. However, it is unlikely that the Trust would wish to consider selling timber to large mills at a considerable distance, along the lines of current FCS operations. A more likely scenario would be to sell to local contractors, in which case it would be up to them to consider the economic implications of such an enterprise.

2.1.6 Non-timber forest products

If woodland is in common control, harvesting of ntfps would become the responsibility of community. However, managing woodland for diverse range of outputs is complex, and needs technical advice when drawing up management plans. Diversification from wood products would help encourage co-operative working practices and resource sharing. Products such as fungi, honey, birch sap, foliage, moss, seeds, small wood and sticks, fruit and nuts are all possible products which could be investigated. Further information is available on the foresthharvest.org.uk website.

2.1.7 Renewable Energy Project

Some discussion has taken place between the Trust and Community Energy Scotland (CES) re the potential to create a hydroelectric scheme in the glen at Strath Askaig. Scottish and Southern Energy have confirmed that it would be only be possible to connect such a scheme to the national grid after 2012/13. Their estimated cost for this is in the region of £35,000 plus VAT. If such a scheme were to be established, it would be necessary for the Trust to set up a separate trading company, to protect the charitable status and objects of the Trust. CES has confirmed that they could provide up to £15,000 of grant assistance to technical feasibility and grid connection study. A renewable energy project of this kind could generate substantial income for the Trust in future years, but requires more detailed costing and assessment before a decision if made to proceed.

2.2 Sustainability issues

A harvesting and restocking plan would need to be drawn up, showing growth and yield estimates, and planned thinning intensity. If it were decided to replace conifers with broadleaves and/or create additional open space, the productive potential of the woodland would be decreased in volume terms though not necessarily in value. In order to achieve sustainability, it would be

necessary to ensure that the management plan ensures the integration of woodland management with the recreational resource. The woodland may require restructuring to ensure stability and value, and stock fencing erection and maintenance may also be required.

The sustainability of the forest as a social amenity would require maintenance of footpaths etc.

2.3 Environmental issues

Health and Safety issues such as safety felling, inspection, erection of fire signs and beaters, provision of litter/dog waste bins, arrangements for litter picking etc. would need to be incorporated into the management plan.

Consideration would need to be given to the existing wildlife and the potential impact on it of new path creation and ongoing maintenance. However, increasing the proportion and diversity of broadleaves and the creation of a varied age structure within the forest would help increase biodiversity

2.4 Food and energy security issues

Encouragement and establishment of local production would reduce food and energy security issues.

2.5 Wider public benefits

- The forest acting as a catalyst for a more healthy, secure and diversified community
- Enhanced recreational facilities
- Woodland tenure and management diversified
- Greater environmental biodiversity benefiting wildlife, local people and visitors
- New and diverse products from plantation
- Creation of renewable energy opportunities
- Provision of opportunities for employment and local income generation
- Provide opportunities for training and skills development
- Culture of forest stewardship and timber skills fostered
- Become an educational resource
- Local production would reduce carbon footprint
- More micro management and attention to detail possible under local community management, which would result in better delivery of biodiversity, recreational, and landscape benefits.

2.6 Viability assessment

2.6.1 Financial

2.6.1.1 Costs

The costs of any woodland management scheme would be considerable. In addition to the cost of capital outlay, including land purchase and infrastructure, are the costs of site preparation and development, costs of maintenance of footpaths etc., thinning, felling, replanting and stacking costs, fencing, weeding, etc. It is likely that to achieve proper management of the resource, it would be necessary to employ a part-time manager, which could cost around £8,000 per annum. To offset this, it would be necessary to include maintenance and administrative costs in any funding application. Potential maintenance costs are listed below. These are based on average figures. It is possible that due to the location of the area under consideration, these costs could be considerably higher.

Thinning costs - £400/ha
Felling and stacking costs £450/ha
Replanting costs – est £750/ha plus £60/ha spraying p.a.
Thickening up shelter belts £2000/ha
Weeding £100/ha
Fencing £6/m

Set against this would be any income earned by the Trust, either through direct earnings from one or more of the enterprises outlined above, or from lease or rent of the facility to a private enterprise, plus any grant income obtained.

2.6.1.2 Funding

Scottish Rural Development Programme

It is possible to access SRDP funding through several different schemes. These are detailed in section 7 of this study. However, it is likely that some matched funding would need to be identified for some projects.

2.6.2 Technical

Before any replanting or increase in biodiversity is undertaken, it would be necessary to carry out more research and seek professional advice, to ensure that species are matched to site conditions. A 5 year rolling programme of felling and re-stocking throughout area of highest risk would be required, possibly using FCS's pc-based wind risk model, ForestGales Analysis. A renewable energy study would be required to assess timber extraction possibilities.

2.6.3 Operational

If timber extraction were considered, it would probably be necessary to employ a contractor. A felling licence is required for extraction over 5 cubic metres per annum, unless the area is covered by an agreed management plan such as Strome's Forest Design Plan. Timber hauling issues would also have to be taken into account, with restrictions placed on road haulage of timber products. Records and documentation are required to be kept of harvesting and

timber sales in order to ensure traceability. This is the responsibility of the owner/manager. The forest plan would cover these considerations.

While focus needs to be maintained on restocking of failed areas, and where possible a variety of species and planting systems used, a wind throw monitoring programme and clearance programme would also be necessary, to ensure damage is surveyed and repaired.

Management resources would need to be clearly identified and in place, in order to implement any Woodland Scheme. The Board's skills and capacity in terms of management and time commitment needs to be assessed and any requirements addressed, through training, professional assistance or the employment of manager or project officer. The Community Woodlands Association is a useful resource and would provide advice, assistance and information in operational matters, in addition to facilitating networking and training.

Issues of public liability and Health and Safety would need to be addressed. Any arrangement or lease with a private enterprise would need to outline clearly where responsibilities for these lie.

2.7 Likely Outcomes

2.7.1 Changes

- Increased ability of the community to exercise some control over this part of its environment
- Improvement of the biodiversity of the forest
- Optimum use of forest resources, including timber and non-timber resources
- More use of the forest by the community
- More access of the forest by visitors and tourists
- Increased knowledge and awareness among the local community of forestry issues
- Increased local economic activity and potential
- Increased availability of local products

2.7.2 Impacts

- Educational benefits within the community
- Business start up and employment opportunities
- Income stream for Fernaig Community Trust
- Increased length of tourism stay
- Increased retention of population

3. Common Grazing Style Joint Management

3.1 Outline of Option

3.1.1 Background

A common grazing is land which is equally accessible to all croft tenants within a crofting township, subject to souming. In practice, there is usually a common grazings committee which oversees the use of the common grazing land and agrees its optimum use, for animal grazing, peat cutting, etc. Existing trees fall outwith the crofting tenancy, though new crofter forestry is allowed under the Crofting Forestry Act, and some biodiversity schemes, previously funded under the Rural Stewardship Scheme, are common. The Steering Groups for Forest Crofts Report of 2006 states that the “term common grazings should be replaced by Common Land to avoid the exclusion of forestry”. Although there are clear parallels between the use of a common grazings for pasture and the use of a wood for forestry, there are important practical differences, particularly the length of the growth cycle, which should be reflected in any joint management structures.

3.1.2 Fernaig

The option under consideration is that the Trust establishes and operates a Common Land Joint Management Scheme. In order to do this, it would first of all have to be agreed who would be eligible for membership. This could be residents within the Trust area, members of the Trust, or Forest Crofting Tenants, if the option outlined in section 4 is chosen. Members’ rights would have to be agreed and drawn up, and land use would have to be monitored by a Common Woodland Committee or similar body, to ensure that development plans are implemented and restrictions adhered to. In order to do this, it would not be necessary for the Trust to be the landowner; it could operate the management scheme in the same way as crofting tenants do – the majority of them do not own their crofts or the land used for common grazing. The land covered by the joint style management would not be covered or protected under crofting legislation, unless it was combined with the creation of new woodland crofts, discussed in section 5.

The options here are:

- in-hand management by the Trust, in which case the proposal is similar to the one discussed in Section 2

or

- management by tenants of the Trust, either as a common resource by forest crofters, in which case the proposal is similar to the one discussed in section 5, or as tenanted land of other legal person or entity – in the form of a “club” in a similar way to a sheep stock club.

If management is by tenants of the Trust, the Trust would lose the risk of this option; however, it would also lose control of the forest management. To avoid this, the Trust could operate the forest plan in partnership with the

Scheme members, so that, although the day to day management would not be under their control, they could still ensure activities fitted with the Trust's overall strategy.

3.1.3 Possible activities

Activities which could be carried out under this kind of agreement are similar to those outlined in Section 2; however any benefits or net income would be payable to the membership rather than the Trust itself. Eligibility for funding such as SRDP would be similar to those available to a Community Woodland Management Scheme. Depending on the rules and rights laid down in the scheme, members would also have the right to pursue a variety of business opportunities, either on a private basis or in partnership with other Scheme members. This would not really vary from the Common Woodland Management Scheme outlined in section 2, unless the land was put under crofting tenure as a formal common grazing.

3.2 Sustainability issues

Issues of sustainability are similar to those outlined in section 2. Additionally, however, potential conflicts of interest between Scheme members could have a negative impact on the sustainability of the forest and the management of it, both as a resource and a social amenity.

3.3 Environmental issues

Similar to those outlined in 2.3.

3.4 Food and energy security issues

Similar to those outlined in 2.4.

3.5 Wider public benefits

Similar to those outlined in 2.5, plus

The potential for individuals within the community to achieve sustainable lifestyles

3.6 Viability assessment

3.6.1 Financial

Similar to those outlined in 2.6.1, plus

Requirement by individual members to invest in business enterprises could lessen the burden on the Trust, but, if their resources are limited, could restrict the economic activity within the forest. Sound financial management and accountability would be required for any joint economic activity, to ensure

that returns to members are fairly divided and timeously made. However, a separate legal person could be the applicant for SRDP and other support.

3.6.2 Technical

Similar to those outlined in 2.6.2.

3.6.3 Operational

Similar to those outlined in 2.6.3, plus

There would be the additional challenge of managing the group, ensuring fair and equal division of tasks, responsibilities and income, constant full communication with members, monitoring of activities and proper handling of joint finances, and agreement as to timing and methods of dispersal. However, if a separate legal entity is the tenant, this would not be the Trust's problem.

3.7 Likely Outcomes

3.7.1 Changes

Similar to those outlined in 2.7.1

3.7.2 Impacts

Similar to those outlined in 2.7.2.

4. Affordable Housing

4.1 Outline of Option

- 4.1.1** The option exists to purchase the land to allow the local Housing Association or other registered social landlord to build affordable housing on the site. A need for affordable housing was identified in the baseline survey, although there was a mixture of views expressed. However, with the likely continuing increase in population growth forecast over the next ten years and the existing waiting list for 36 houses in the area, sufficient interest is likely to make this option worthy of further exploration. House purchase prices in the area tend to be less affordable than the Highland average. The preferred location identified is that designated as Forest Strategy Zone 5534, which lies west of but close to the main Auchtertyre – Strathcarron road. Services to this site would be more readily obtainable, and the area could potentially house up to 12 housing sites.
- 4.1.2** NFLS Guidelines permit the purchase of land at a reduced price for the provision of affordable housing for those in need. This can be by providing house for rent or shared ownership or by selling plots to local people in need of housing. Houses are not required to be timber clad, but there would be a contractual clause requiring housing bodies to build houses in timber frame. The applicant must be a Registered Social Landlord or other appropriate housing body, which must have undertaken a local needs survey, community consultation and discussions with the planning authority prior to application, and be able to demonstrate how retention of the houses in the affordable sector would be ensured. If the Trust was to enter into a partnership agreement with a local housing association or similar body, this would pass the management requirement to that body, but the Trust would to a large extent lose control of what would take place on the house sites, ability to select tenants, and decrease its ability to maintain overall control of the area. It would not be required to obtain the funds required for house-building, but it would not obtain an income stream from this either.
- 4.1.3** It is possible for the Trust to set itself up as a rural housing body or social landlord, and apply for registration with the Housing Corporation. In order to do this, it would probably have to create a separate body, as a condition of registration is that it should be the main aim of the organisation. This has been done in Craignish in Mull. Registration is free, but in order to obtain it, several criteria have to be adhered to, and it could prove a lengthy and complicated process (see tables below). There is also a requirement to comply with a number of regulatory obligations once registration has taken place, which would affect the Trust's ability to select tenants, for example. The issue would be, however, that the Trust (or new organisation) would require to source the funds to build and maintain the houses and to manage its obligations as a social housing provider. Conversely, however, rental income from the houses would provide the Trust with a steady income stream for a long period of time.

Social Landlord Registration Procedure

Key Stage	
1	Consider registration criteria and requirements
2	Confirm organisation has eligible constitution for RSL status
3	Complete a preliminary application form outlining constitution and role
4	Agree timetable for registration assessment
5	Complete pre-registration assessment with Housing Corporation staff, culmination in compliance review
6	Complete more detailed formal application form
7	Arrange a final compliance review visit
8	Registration Committed considers assessment reports, recommendations and formal application
9	Notification of Registration Number, if successful

Social Landlord Registration Criteria

Requirement	Sub- section	Summary of requirements
1 - Viability	1.1 Financial planning and funding	Robust business plan, sufficient financial resources, management structure, schedules, realistic budgets, based on demand of local need, risk assessment
	1.2 Risk Management and Financial Control	Risk management based on good practice guidelines, financial policies and procedures, housing policies, internal controls, submission of accounts
2 - Governance	2.1 Constitution and control	Governing body has full control, broad membership, agreements and contracts non-prejudicial, independence
	2.2 – Board composition and executive structure – experience and skills	Published Board selection policy, balanced composition and profile of governing body, ability to act in organisation’s best interest and be effective and accountable
	2.3 - Probity	Adopted appropriate codes of conduct and policies on conflict of interest, compliance with Housing Act good practice guidance, internal review and control systems
	2.4 – Protect public investment	Non-housing related activities identified in business plan and demonstration how risk management protects social housing assets
	2.5 – Resident involvement	Demonstrate accountability to stakeholders, involvement of residents in decision-making, opportunities for tenant management, complaints and compensation policies
	2.6 –	Address need for improvements, observe RSL

	Regulatory Code and Regulation	criteria
	2.7 – Equality and diversity	Fair dealings with all, equality and diversity policy in place
3 Proper Management	3.1 - Rents	Rent plan with target rents, consistent with social rent reforms, information disseminated to tenants, details of separate service charges
	3.2 – Management structures and systems	Monitoring of arrears, voids, letting, maintenance performance, finances against budget and business plan, board reporting systems
	3.3 – Best value and continuous improvement	Formal improvement and value for money policy
	3.4 – Stock condition, asset management and new development	Policy statements and procedures for maintenance and improvement of stock and services, mechanisms to provide stock information
	3.5 – Housing Services	Demonstrate arrangements for good and responsive, cost-effective service to tenants, including selection, allocation and transfer policies and procedures
	3.6 – Local authority relationships	Adoption and publication of lettings policy and procedures to ensure open and fair access
	3.7 – Strategic housing role	Supply details of links with local authority partners and contribution to local housing strategy and renewable and sustainable communities, development strategy

4.1.4 A further option is to work in partnership with a local Housing Association or other registered social landlord. Gigha Heritage Trust has done this very successfully, however, and working with Fyne Homes Housing Association has achieved the building of 18 new affordable houses on the island. A housing association would be able to agree with the Trust the possibility of offering a mix of rented, bought and shared equity housing, and would allow access by potential owners to the Rural Home Ownership Grant Scheme.

4.1.5 Plots of land for house building could be sold by the Trust; however, this would make it difficult to exercise any level of control.

4.2 Sustainability issues

- more efficient use of energy and resources
- reduction in fuel poverty

- location has impact on transport and employment opportunities
- thermal efficiency potential
- energy rating
- local sourcing of materials and recycling
- maintenance of critical population mass

4.3 Environmental issues

- Potential strain on environment caused by necessary site clearance, preparation, infrastructure and development
- Possible reduction in carbon footprint if community combined heating system using biomass is introduced

4.4 Food and energy security issues

- Energy efficient buildings could reduce carbon footprint

4.5 Wider public benefits

- stimulation of economic activity through creation of housing
- retention of young people and address demographic profile
- use of biomass for fuel

4.6 Viability assessment

4.6.1 Financial

Cost of infrastructure, site preparation and development costs are likely to be high due to the remoteness of the wood from neighbouring settlements. If Trust decides to become the landlord, the issue of raising the capital costs required becomes a substantial problem.

4.6.2 Technical

Technical issues may arise due to the remote location and topography of the site, such as preparation and building difficulties, difficulty of access, and practicalities of providing utilities and communications in the area.

4.6.3 Operational

If technical issues are addressed, the opportunity would arise to share access links, infrastructure and services with other businesses, projects undertaken through a woodland scheme, or crofters, if that route is chosen. Planning permission for such a development would depend on establishing a definite local requirement, and although the baseline study indicates a potential waiting list and desire for affordable housing, it could be argued that the need has not been clearly expressed by those interviewed. In addition, although a community combined woodchip heating system might appear a preferred option, it may not be viable to install one, if the development consists of less

than 20 houses, or if they were spaced out, as the pipework would be expensive. This would seem to be in excess of requirements, and would be unlikely to gain planning approval. Planning officials have, in addition, displayed a reluctance to consider the construction of clustered housing outwith the areas designated on the local plan, as is the whole of the Strome Forest area. Depending on location, siting of houses may interfere or conflict with timber operations.

4.7 Likely Outcomes

4.7.1 Changes

- New residents within the area
- New infrastructure allowing possible future additional development
- Removal of people from housing waiting list

4.7.2 Impacts

- Conservation of population numbers in area
- Increase in families leading to increase in school rolls

5. Establishment of Woodland Crofts

5.1 Project Outline

5.1.1 Background

The Crofting Reform Act came into effect in June 2007. It allows for the creation of new crofts, addresses the neglect or misuse of crofts and ensures that crofters are able to take full advantage of the economic benefits of croft land. It also provides a mechanism to allow a crofting landlord to remove a crofter's statutory right to buy their croft for any new crofts created, and also to limit a crofter's right to assign (transfer) the croft lease to non-family members. Applicants must be approved by the Crofters' Commission. New crofts can only be created by the landowner, therefore in order to do this, the Trust would have to acquire the land concerned, as FCS has indicated that they are unwilling to do this.

The concept of woodland crofts is relatively new and "embraces a continuum from predominately woodland to predominately agriculture with a woodland element, to link housing, local rural livelihoods and woodland management, bring new business dimensions to crofting activity and enable ideas behind land reform and rural development to be realised". In order to create woodland crofts, the landowner must demonstrate public benefit and a genuine intention to manage land. There must also be an element of the land not under crofting tenure. Woodland croft proposals may combine the creation of crofts with the provision of affordable housing.

Woodland crofts may differ from other woodland holdings in several respects:

- Tenure arrangements

The tenant may enter into an agreement with landlord not to exercise right to buy or assign. Agreement must be lodged in the Crofters' Commission's Register of Crofts. This can ensure that the tenant is unable to sell land for private profit. Additional conditions of let can be agreed, but can be challenged in the Scottish Land Court. The right to manage and extract trees in woodland crofts rests with landlord, though tenant could be allowed to do this, or landlord could sell trees to tenant.

- Compensation for improvements

Crofters can claim compensation for improvements on renouncing or giving up croft at a value to be agreed between crofter and landlord, or the Scottish Land Court if agreement cannot be reached. A forest crofter has legal authority to use all or part of his croft as woodland – definition of "cultivate" includes "planting of trees and use of the land as woodlands".

- Importance to supply of affordable rural housing

The Woodlands Croft Steering Group report emphasises the right for crofters to access housing on their crofts. New crofters would be eligible for funding under the Crofting House Grants Scheme, which would enable them to build

houses at affordable cost. If however, the right to purchase the house site is denied, it might prove difficult for crofters to secure other borrowing requirements.

- Relative importance of national and local benefits

These must be taken into consideration when crofting is created

- Greater reliance on small scale and collaborative approaches to forest management and utilisation

Business plans must be compliant with the overall management of the forest in addition to demonstrating the ability to provide an income for the crofter

5.1.2 Creating woodland crofts

To create woodland crofts, clear aims and objectives need to be identified, economic, social and environmental benefits outlined, and the proposed tenure system needs to be appropriate to long-term forest management. The aims and objectives could include maintenance and improvement of landscape and biodiversity, increasing local use of woodlands and timber, and/or involvement in large scale timber supply. Aims need to reflect local stakeholder interests – an “independently facilitated stakeholder analysis and participatory planning process, formalised into a 10 year forest management plan,” ideally to meet UKWAS standard. This allows for the creation of a maximum of 20% open space (not necessarily evenly distributed); large scale forest clearance would be unacceptable, and some woodland area should be retained. The location and size needs to be identified, and a policy showing how tenancies are advertised and allocated and commitments to forest management are fulfilled must be prepared. This policy must be fair and transparent, and outline the ongoing responsibilities of landlord and ensure the financial viability of managing crofters.

A “normal” entry fee charge of between £5,000 and £10,000 may be charged to help demonstrate commitment from incoming crofters. Annual rents would probably be in the region of £30-£40.

The creation of crofts can be a complicated and time-consuming task. In order to demonstrate demand, further community consultation would be required, prior to application to NFLS, and, from the information gathered, the location, number and size of crofts to be created determined. This could vary from 0.8ha – 20ha, and would need to ensure that the areas are sufficient to accommodate the aims and objectives of the Trust and individual tenants in short and long term, accommodate landscape and biodiversity interests, recreational interests and meet anticipated timber requirements. The layout would need to be agreed, whether linear or clustered, though options for this might be limited given the location, and would need to consider issues such as access and services provision. There are currently 2 working farms and 6 crofts in the area, plus 9 holdings not currently under crofting tenure created by the Trust in 2001. Interest has been expressed locally by at least 8 households who desire croft land. Requirement for a house to accompany the croft, whether provided or self-built has not been determined.

5.1.3 Possible crofting activities

Each crofting applicant would be required to submit an application form with a management plan annexed to it, outlining their intentions for their crofting activities, and demonstrating that they are in keeping with the aims and objectives of the Trust and the Woodland as a whole. Woodland crofting activities would vary according to the skills, entrepreneurship and aspirations of individual crofters.

The Woodlands Croft Steering Group report points out that forestry is a skilled and dangerous occupation, and that the development and maintenance of relevant skills and interest would be a major issue for any crofting project to succeed. Health and Safety would be of paramount importance. However, depending on the scale of forestry operations, and specialist worker requirements, a co-operative approach such as the establishment of a machinery ring, collaborative management of climatic and biological constraints, management of landscape and biodiversity, planning shelterbelts and timber processing and marketing etc. could succeed.

FCS grants for productive woodlands for local use up to 30ha are available. Training needs would need to be identified, and the Trust, perhaps in co-ordination with the Community Woodlands Association, could assist with access to courses in forest management skills such as fencing, road building, chainsaw and other specialist equipment operation. Crofters would be able to access the Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme (CCAGS) to assist with costs such as fencing (currently 50%).

Woodland crofts are likely to be only one component of a household income stream. The Trust should, in its tenancy agreement and forest management plan, encourage small-scale approaches to forest management and local utilisation of timber and nftps. NTFPs could comprise significant seasonal income stream with significant local added value potential.

Possible activities which might be included in individual management plans are:

- Silvicultural enterprises
- Growing, harvesting, processing and/or sale of non forest timber products (NFTPS)
- Poultry farming and egg production
- Animal rearing
- Horticulture,
- Nursery establishment,
- Coppicing,

5.1.4 Housing

Local timber could be used for housing to save transport costs, at a relatively low cash cost, but the economic benefit may be marginal; there might be a net

cost involved in harvesting and transporting wood. Low energy building and local wood fuel might be economically justified but further research would need to be carried out.

The creation of housing would inevitably impose constraints on forest management, especially with regard to access roads, utility wayleaves and the house sites themselves. The resulting need to open the forest canopy, wind throw risk, fire breaks, monitoring of fuel accumulation, organisation of controlled fires, and maintenance of safe access for residents during forestry operation would all have to be taken into consideration. However, part of the open space created could be used for this purpose.

An environmental impact assessment would be required. Clustered housing could help minimise the environmental impact, as could the choice of materials used for building – timber has a low carbon footprint. The design and constructional detail would be critical and professional expertise would be required. The use of renewable energy such as woodfuel would be beneficial, but a district heating system is not really feasible for developments of less than 20 houses. Exposed areas or watercourse could be potentially useful for the generation of electricity.

Housing development on new crofts must be supported by land management justification – e.g. to support a community experiencing difficulty in maintaining population and services. A landowner must be able and willing to develop the site, and water sewage and roads must be in place or able to be provided at reasonable cost. Close community consultation would be essential. A development brief or master plan, providing information to possible developers re siting, design, layout, infrastructure and service requirements may be required as a precursor to planning approval for woodland crofts. Houses would be required to be associated with crofts in perpetuity to satisfy NPLS requirements, therefore the creation or allocation of woodland crofts should not to be viewed simply as a route to securing a house site.

Options for self-build or provision of housing by the landowner needs to be considered, along with planning and building controls. If the house remains tied to croft through retention of house site as croft land, funding could be obtained through the croft house grant scheme, otherwise the issue would remain of how to overcome problem of raising loan finance. However, it is possible that some crofters may not require a house site if they are resident locally.

5.2 Sustainability issues

It is likely that demand for “traditional” crofts would be greater than that for woodland ones, so consideration must be given to likely uptake if crofts are created. Woodland crofting would be a new activity for crofters so support and advice would be needed.

Small scale woodland management is fundamental, so applicants would need to demonstrate a good grasp of the practicalities and economics involved, along with the commitment and skills to implement proposals. They should be encouraged to build on the success of existing community initiatives where possible.

Small scale allows support greater diversity of local economic activity, enhancing potential to improve biodiversity and reduce vulnerability to ecological or economic change. However, coterminous holdings risk fragmentation and could adversely affect coherent approaches to forest management - e.g. pest control, harvesting practices. Change in tenure could lead to neglect, loss of value and exacerbation of management problems for other tenants. It would be necessary to minimise risks by including the agreed forest management plan as an annex to tenure documents, with regular review, to help ensure retention of active forest management. This plan would be the cornerstone of the project, and would address many of the difficult issues.

5.3 Environmental issues

- Retention of woodland – needs to be managed separately – minimum of 80% of total area
- Actively micro-managed woodland
- Diversity of uses and habitats
- Low impact businesses with reduced carbon emissions
- Infrastructure, site preparation and development costs

5.4 Food and energy security issues

- Encourage use of renewable energy technology eg woodfuel heating
- Food production on crofts could help reduce food miles

5.5 Wider public benefits

- Exemplar of sustainable lifestyles
- Employment creation
- Increase in & retention of population
- Generation of local income
- Secure affordable family home
- Base for business and part-time income
- Development of saleable skills
- Sustainable and innovative housing design
- Opportunity to take advantage of wood fuel.
- Local economic spin-off
- Availability of local produce
- Improved forest management

5.6 Viability assessment

5.6.1 Financial

- Minimal extra cost to community and trust – crofters take the risk
- Income from rents
- Income from sale of trees
- Income from ingoing croft entrant fee
- Reduction in land value by croft creation (only an issue if planning to sell)
- Site services costs likely to be high.
- Income generation for tenants
- SRDP and CCAGS funding
- Use of local timber saves on transport costs

5.6.2 Technical

- Utilities and communications
- Sewage could be problem if ecology fragile
- Answer could be to explore innovative rural solutions – roads minus tar macadam, reed beds for waste treatment etc.
- Ecological constraints – plans must take account of prevailing conditions – soil and climate factors may restrict
- Is timber suitable for intended uses? Need to address potential shortfalls by identification of alternative local sources.

5.6.3 Operational

- Commitment requirement of time and energy from trust
- Revision to Local Plan required
- Planning issues – it would be necessary to seek Highland Council guidance, and take into account council services, including transport to schools and refuse collection, involving planning at initial stages and throughout.
- Development of integration with planning would be possible through designation of Woodland Croft Development Zone – changes can be introduced gradually with planning and service support.
- Skill of tenants

5.7 Likely Outcomes

5.7.1 Changes

- New residents within the area
- New infrastructure allowing possible future additional development
- Removal of people from housing waiting list
- Improvement of the biodiversity of the forest
- Optimum use of forest resources, including timber and non-timber resources
- Increased knowledge and awareness among the local community of forestry issues

- Increased local economic activity and potential
- Increased availability of local products

5.7.2 Impacts

- Business start up and employment opportunities
- Income stream for Fernaig Community Trust
- Increased retention of population
- Increase in families leading to increase in school rolls

6. Status Quo

6.1 Background

As the Concordat with FCS would continue to exist, the Trust would continue to have some input into the management and development of the Forest, but as has been described previously, would be constrained in its activities, and would be unable to create forest crofts.

6.2 Sustainability issues

- Difficulty in maintaining enthusiasm in the Trust for management of the forest resource
- Potential conflict of aspirations of the Trust and FCS
- Limited scope for development and economic opportunities
- Doing nothing would not help address the wider issues of lack of business opportunities and population retention
- No requirement for Trust to source funding for development activities

6.3 Environmental issues

- There should be no environmental issues arising as FCS are working to environmental guidelines; however, opportunities to improve or enhance the environment would be substantially reduced, and, to a large extent, outwith the control of the Trust and the community it serves.
- There would be no micro management of the forest or increased working time that would be likely to occur under Trust/crofter management, and therefore the status quo is likely to result in lower environmental management delivery.

6.4 Food and energy security issues

- Opportunities for local food production, use of renewable energy and reduction of carbon footprint greatly reduced

6.5 Wider public benefits

- Lack of reliance on Trust funds means that energy which would be spent on Forestry purchase and developments can be utilised elsewhere. However, on balance, effect is likely to be negative

6.6 Viability assessment

6.6.1 Financial

- Financial constraints from FCS budget

6.6.2 Technical

- No technical viability threats; however the opportunity would be lost to increase forestry and entrepreneurial skills in the area

6.6.3 Operational

- Continued requirement to work within FCS guidelines, budget and priorities would be a constraining factor
- Constraint on community development potential

6.7 Likely Outcomes

6.7.1 Changes

- No change

6.7.2 Impacts

- Little impact, though lack of opportunity might lead to population decline
- Unlikely to have impact on tourism spend in the area, but loss of potential to increase it

7. Suitability of Options and Valuation of Forest Land

7.1 Transfer of ownership to Fernaig Community Trust

The acquisition of all or part of the forest land is the principal option open to the Trust and while being the one which has the greatest potential rewards, it also carries the highest level of risks. It is theoretically feasible to look to a phased purchase of the Forest, as has been done in Kilfinnan. This option would involve the initial purchase of a smaller area of land, followed in a number of years by the remainder of the Forest. However, given the funding situation for land acquisition, which is also complex and time-consuming, it would be more efficient to concentrate the volunteer time and effort in a single purchase bid. A greater range of projects and improved access options would also be possible from the outset. However a phased acquisition would allow the community to develop skills and experience in a smaller, less onerous area of land, and, when it felt that it had developed sufficient confidence and skills to take on ownership of the remainder, a second acquisition process could be undertaken.

Advantages

- FCT would have security of tenure over the asset.
- Flexibility to utilise the land asset according to the current and future requirements of the community, tempered by conditions attached to offers of grant given to purchase the land, legislation, planning controls etc.
- Potential income stream from sale of timber. If the capital timber asset is purchased, the community can utilise the proceeds from the sale of timber to subsidise other non-income generating aspects of the project. Could be particularly useful when requiring to demonstrate a community contribution for funding proposals.
- Potential for the future lease or sale of land to 3rd parties to achieve objectives, subject to the agreement of funding organisations
- Potential income stream from rents, leases etc.
- Potential to develop renewable energy project

Disadvantages

- The initial purchase of the capital asset is expensive and may require considerable fundraising.
- Any funds raised would then be tied up and unable to be used.
- The ownership of land is a considerable commitment for a community to take on and entails responsibilities – for the land itself, for any staff employed and for visitors to the property. Taking out insurance would be essential to mitigate against any risks to 3rd parties.
- Requirement of ongoing community volunteering commitment. The establishment and running of a community land initiative entails considerable commitment in terms of volunteer time and energy, and requires the Trust to consider issues of succession, maintaining membership levels, and finding ways of keeping the community informed,

participating and being involved in the operation and management of the Trust.

7.2 Lease agreement with FC in order to carry out specific activities

Advantages

- Less funds required up-front – no capital sum required.
- Any funds raised by the community could be utilised in the development of projects.
- Less onerous in terms of responsibilities

Disadvantages

- Under the terms of the Forestry Acts, FCS cannot lease land to 3rd parties for forestry purposes or to carry out woodland management activities, which would restrict the Trust's ability to achieve its objectives.
- Given the restrictions in terms of land use under the terms of the lease, this option gives the Trust a limited ability to achieve its organisational objectives.
- An ongoing annual rent payment would be required. Whilst it is possible to source funds to purchase a capital asset, it would be difficult for the Trust to find funding for annual rental payments
- Use of the property would be restricted to the terms of the lease. It is likely that any lease would seek to limit the use of the land.
- Under Scots Law, it is not possible to lease land for the purposes of the construction of housing
- A lease is a depreciating asset. At the end of the term of the lease, the community would have no physical asset, despite any investment made by them.
- Reduced security of tenure. At the end of a lease, it may not be possible for the tenant to renew the lease. In addition, if any of the terms of the lease were broken, the landlord would have recourse to terminate the lease.
- Funding for projects on leased land can sometimes be problematic
- Would not then be possible to create woodland crofts

7.3 Continuation with Concordat/management agreement

This is the least onerous of the options open to the Trust, but one which has limitations.

Advantages

- Low risk
- Little or no funds required up-front
- Funds raised can be utilised on project development rather than acquisition
- Access to FCS skills and assistance with projects

Disadvantages

- Use of land restricted to terms of agreement.
- Given the limited scope of the agreements, there would be a limited ability for the Trust to realise its organisational objectives
- Likely that this option would have little financial impact on local economy
- Restricted by law affecting FCS and FCS working practice.
- Fundraising restricted due to land being government owned.

7.4 Community Woodland Management

Advantages

- Tenancy of larger woodland blocks important to generate scale and continuity if forestry to be a significant contributor to community
- Ensures community control and allows strategy to be implemented in a holistic way
- Opportunities for creation of biomass and/or renewable energy projects
- Opportunities to improve recreational facilities and use of forest
- Potential to increase biodiversity
- Could be combined with creation of woodland crofts

Disadvantages

- Could limit scope for individual entrepreneurship
- Would be heavily dependent on volunteer help
- Management of woodland scheme involves considerable costs
- Public liability and Health & Safety considerations need to be taken into account

7.5 Common Grazings Style Joint Management

Advantages

- Similar to those outlined in 7.4 plus
- Opportunity to individual members to create small enterprises
- Ensures involvement by all members
- Individual investment in business enterprises could lessen financial burden on Trust

Disadvantages

- Conflicts of interest could arise between scheme members and Trust
- If land is put under crofting tenure might limit rights of non-crofting members to pursue their own individual interests
- Limited resources of members could restrict economic activity within the forest

7.6 Affordable Housing

Advantages

- Sale of land for housing could provide Trust with income stream
- Potential to work with local housing association
- Stimulation of economic activity during building phase
- Population retention

Disadvantages

- High development costs
- Potential difficulties with planning authorities
- Not a prime location for housing
- Potential conflict with other uses of forest

7.7 Establishment of Woodland Crofts

Advantages

- “Entry fee” would create immediate income for Trust
- Potential to create tenure agreements which ensure sustainability of forest
- Opportunity to increase community capacity through development of forest skills
- Opportunity for small scale wood-related business startups
- Could encourage local food production and use of biomass for fuel
- Would support diversity of local economic activity
- Minimal cost to the Trust as crofters take the risk

Disadvantages

- Requirement to allow access to housing could cause conflict with other uses of forest
- Croft creation can be time-consuming and complicated
- Any housing development would impose constraints on forest management
- Potential reduction in land value by croft creation
- Coterminous holdings risk fragmentation could adversely affect coherent approaches to forest management - e.g. pest control, harvesting practices
- Change in tenure could lead to neglect, loss of value and exacerbation of management problems for other tenants.

7.8 Relationships and conflicts between options and projects within options

- 7.8.1** If land is purchased, then all the options (apart from the status quo) are possible. If land is leased, then a community woodland management scheme or a common grazing style management scheme could be created. It would not be possible to create woodland crofts or develop affordable housing if land is leased. If housing were developed in conjunction with a local housing

association, the housing association would need to be the landowner. If the Trust continues with the Concordat, it would still be possible to create a community woodland management scheme; however, the other options are no longer possible.

7.8.2 It is possible to develop one or more projects in conjunction. The community woodland management scheme would work well with the creation of forest crofts provided there was a sufficient space between the areas selected for each activity, otherwise the area designated for community management might be deemed to be part of common grazing rights. If this was the case, it could still be possible to combine woodland crofts with the creation of a common grazings type management scheme. This would depend on the areas selected for each project. The housing project could also be undertaken alongside the other projects provided it was sited far enough away from crofts or from any common grazings type agreement.

7.9 Land valuation and purchase funding options

7.9.1 Land valuation

Prior to considering any purchase, the area of land desired needs to be fully identified and costed. The areas listed as 5526, 5527, 5533 5532, which are the areas most likely to be identified, comprise approximately 120ha, and the value of this land has been estimated at around £250,000, but this needs to be verified before proceeding any further. NFLS allows for a valuation to be carried out on a shared cost basis between the community organisation and FCS and FES would provide the maps, stock maps, boundaries and inventory data for the valuation. The land would be assessed at full market value.

7.9.2 Assessment of purchase application

Assessment of eligibility would be carried out by FCS within 21 days of receipt of application. If the application does not appear to be eligible, FCS would advise the organisation on what steps could be taken to achieve this. Once an application has been deemed eligible, it would be published on the FCS website, and sent to those with legal rights over the land. A 28 day period of public consultation would then follow, where anyone, including FES can comment on the application. This would include an assessment of FCS as to whether the organisation has the capacity to manage the land. All comments are then sent to the applicant who has a further 28 days to respond. All responses are published on the FCS website.

The decision whether to approve the purchase would be made by an NFLS evaluation panel, which is independent of FCS. The panel would consider the application under the Land Scheme Guidelines and would make a recommendation to the Director of FCS within 28 days. It may also request additional information, which can require additional time. The panel can recommend that the application be wholly approved, approved in part or rejected, and their recommendation would be published. The Director would then consider the panel's recommendation and make a decision accordingly.

This can take up to a further 28 days, and any reasons for refusal would be published. There are two appeals processes which can follow either the valuation itself or the Director's decision.

If approval has been granted, the applicant would usually be expected to conclude the sale within eighteen months of the approval date. The valuation would be held for this time period, except in exceptional circumstances.

7.9.3 Purchase funding options

7.9.3.1 Community Land Unit

There are many potential sources of funding for specific project management and development, which are discussed in section 8 below. However, in order to source the funds for land purchase, the main option is HIE's Community Land Unit (CLU). HIE have supported many community land purchases since their establishment of their Community Land Unit, including Assynt, Knoydart and Gigha, and the Land Reform Act has made it easier for communities to take ownership and control of the land where they live and work. The Community Land Unit can provide up to 40% of acquisition costs for this area, in addition to providing revenue and project funding, and some pre-acquisition funding, including the preparation of business plans and feasibility studies. Once the Trust has reached a decision about its preferred way forward, contact should be made with the CLU to explore the options available to them.

8. Development and Project Funding Options

8.1 Scottish Rural Development Programme

The Scottish Rural Development Programme is scheduled to run until 2013. It is possible to access SRDP funding through several different schemes. If funding is accessed for a specific project from one scheme it is not possible to access funding for the same project from another. To access most of SRDP funding it is necessary to complete and submit a Land and Business Change Form to register the organisation and be assigned a Business Reference Number (BRN) and a Land Parcel Identifier (LPID).

8.1.1 LEADER

This source of European funding can provide match funding up to a maximum of 45% of eligible project costs. The themes are local development strategies, renewables, culture and heritage, access to activities, facilities and services, land, environment and access to the countryside, and social enterprise & micro-businesses. Feasibility studies, project officers and environmental projects as well as economic development may all be eligible. However, projects have to demonstrate at least one aspect of innovation to be funded. Woodland crofts would possibly fit these criteria. Funding is paid retrospectively.

8.1.2 Rural Development Contracts – Rural Priorities.

This is a two-staged, competitive funding source. Initially, a statement of intent (SOI) has to be submitted to a local case officer. If the project receives an amber light, the applicant is encouraged to develop the project application further. Applications are scored on how well they match the criteria detailed in the “priority codes” and final decisions are made by a Regional Project Assessment Committee (RPAC), which meets three or four times per year. Funding is 50% of project costs and is paid retrospectively.

Among the options listed in the guidelines, many could be relevant to woodland management:

HIG03 – Improved business competitiveness or sustainability ... by supporting land managers to undertake practical, vocational or business skills training

HIG05 – new or expanded demand led markets. Through encouraging producers, processors, retailers and others in the supply chain to work together and build capacity

HIG06 – to promote local wealth and reduce food/timber miles (especially in relation to food, drink, woodfuel and biomass) through expansion of local sale and added value processing of primary agricultural and forestry products

HIG07 – enhanced viability and improved quality of primary products, where this would improved economic viability, through improved management practices (e.g. improved timber quality through good silviculture).....

HIG08 – A halt in the loss of biodiversity and reverse previous losses through ... management that restores, conserves or enhanced Biodiversity Action Plan species and habitats

HIG10 – viable populations of rare and/or endangered species through improved conservation management of the 32 species listed for priority action in the Species Action Framework for Scotland...

HIG11 – Reduce the threat fro non-native species, through action to eradicate or control target species....

HIG13 – Valued and attractive landscapes which contribute positively to people’s environment

HIG14 – An increased contribution to the diversity and character of landscape from Scotland’s woods and forests, though restructuring planted woodlands, particularly through the use of low intervention impact silvicultural systems and diversification of a range of well designed woodland types...

HIG20 – Improved protection in areas identified as most at risk from erosion, flooding, acidification and nitrate pollution, through appropriate management of existing habitats...

HIG21 – improve carbon sequestration through conservation of soil organic matter and expansion of woodlands...

HIG23 – improve carbon sinks through an increase in the use of low impact silvicultural systems within existing woodland and promotion of peat bog and woodlands regeneration/restoration...

HIG24 – provide an efficient and reliable wood fuel supply chain, through the development and sustainable management of short rotation coppice, short rotation forestry, biomass and bio fuel crops and other renewable energy projects on appropriate sites...

HIG25 – improved public access provision through the creation, improvement and promotion of paths and other facilities.....

HIG26 – Provide a diverse land-based business sector, through....developing the potential for non-timber forest products, e.g. mushrooms, add value to timber grown in Highland through support to micro-businesses to primary and secondary process....

HIG27 – higher value rural goods and services being delivered from the primary (agriculture and forestry)... sectors.... In particular proposals that educate and encourage primary producers to embrace opportunities presented by tourism...

HIG28 – The increase local use of renewable energy, e.g. woodfuel

HIG29 – improved number of career development opportunities... addressing rural skills...

HIG30 – improvement in the value and duration of tourism visits in rural areas, including maximising opportunities for green tourism...

HIG31 – Improved viability and wellbeing of Scotland’s rural communities ... including woodland creation, woodland management and recreation provision, among others

8.1.3 Rural Dev Contracts - Land Managers’ Options (LMO)

This is a non-competitive, one stage process. There is a maximum annual allowance based on number of hectares under control – 100 ha could attract £4350 per annum. LMO payments are administered by Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate (SGRPID) and applicants must be registered with the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) and have a BRN. The land must be owned or held under a secure tenancy for at least 5 continuous years. The scheme runs from mid-May to mid May, and applications have to be received by 15 May. Some options require the submission of additional information. Payments are made in arrears. Each option has its own payment rate and terms, the most appropriate of which are listed below.

Option and LMO	Name	Payment rate & terms
1 – TRA	Skills Development (Training)	75% up to £500 p.a.
2 -BSA	Business Audit	50% up to £150
5–SSR/ SSM	Management of genetically appropriate tree stocks for seed production	Registration 50% Management 50% up to £300/ha – 1 claim per 3 yrs/ per ha
6 - EFP	Modernisation through electronic data management for forestry	40% up to £1000 1 payment per 5 yrs
7 - SFM	Access creation for sustainable forest management	50% of costs
18 –SCWA/ SCWN	Small scale woodland creation	£2500/ha

19 – SWN/SWS	Management of small woodlands	Normal - £28/ha Stock exclusion - £41/ha
20 IAM/IAW/IAB/IAC	Improving access	Enhancement – 75% Boardwalks, bridges and culverts 75% up to £150

8.1.4 Forestry Challenge Funds

These funds are competitive and administered by FCS. To qualify, the land must be a minimum of 0.25 ha, and is available on both private and FE land. Project examples include walking initiatives, natural play areas, rehabilitation programmes, CPD for school teachers, the establishment of volunteer groups and green projects.

8.1.5 Skills Development Scheme

CWA have funded training events for community groups.

8.2 Community Energy Scotland

Community Energy Scotland (CES) can provide funding and technical support for the development of income-generating projects such as community wind farms or hydro schemes. It can also provide grant funding for the installation of biomass heating systems.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

9.1 Further consultation

Given the number of options available to the Trust, it seems sensible that further community consultation is carried out, possible through another public meeting, to discuss which, if any, of the options it wishes to pursue. If the decision is made to proceed with further investigation of one or more of the options, it would be necessary to identify in detail the land required, and, if a purchase is to be considered, steps taken to have the land valued.

9.2 Community Land Unit

It is recommended that if any action is agreed, that the CLU be consulted to assess likelihood of funding and availability of grant assistance for the financial assessment of the next step, the preparation of any application under NFLS and the development of an appropriate forest management plan. Assistance could also be sought for the employment of a part-time development officer, to further the development of the project plans.

9.3 Volunteer time

Given the amount of work required to enable any of the projects to proceed from the planning to the development stage, consideration should be given to the structure of the Board and the amount of volunteer time on which it so heavily relies. It is likely that a development officer or similar paid post might be required (see 9.2 above).

9.4 Community Woodland Management

This option would service more people in the community than any of the other proposals. However, it is not a task to be undertaken lightly and any proposal to purchase or lease the land for this purpose would require to be thoroughly assessed under CWA and NFLS guidelines, and would possibly require a part-time paid officer to deliver the project. The creation of a renewable energy project such as a hydroelectric scheme could provide the Trust with an income which would allow it to develop other projects for community benefit.

9.5 Common Grazing Style Joint Management

It seems that there is little to recommend pursuing this option in favour of a community woodland management scheme, unless the area selected was immediately next to any woodland crofts which might be created.

9.6 Affordable housing

It is not apparent from the baseline study that there is sufficient local demand for such housing provision. Furthermore it is unlikely to receive approval

from planning authorities. The setting up of a housing association is a complicated and onerous task, and, without a clear demonstration of need, this would not seem to be good use of volunteer time, which is already under pressure.

9.7 Establishment of woodland crofts

This proposal seems worthy of further investigation, and would generate economic benefit alongside population retention in the community. However, it is recommended that prior to pursuing this option, concrete proposals are received from potential crofters, to ascertain that there is no conflict between their proposals or community aspirations for the forest, and to identify the land requirements for each proposal. Provided there was a geographical gap between the crofts and the community woodland area, this option could be developed alongside the community woodland scheme outline in 9.4 above.

9.8 Status Quo

This is obviously the option which involves the least time and effort from the Trust, and more work could be done with FCS to make the Concordat work more in the community interest. However, the Trust was set up to further community interests, and it would seem a logical step that it proceeds to develop projects which increase community involvement and ownership of local assets.