

Feasibility Study for Dunvegan Community Trust



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FINAL REPORT

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1. Executive Summary

Background

- Highlands & Islands Enterprise acquired Orbost Forest in 1997 as part of a land swap deal with Forestry Commission Scotland, creating a contiguous landholding with the Orbost estate on which HIE settled a number of smallholders and a tenant farmer as part of a land settlement project. HIE is now looking to exit from ownership in the area and intends to sell the forest. Dunvegan Community Trust (DCT) commissioned the present study to explore the potential for community ownership of Orbost Forest.

Community & Stakeholder consultations

- The local community was consulted via 2 community Zoom meetings, 17 individual telephone/Zoom interviews and an online survey completed by 95 individuals within the DCT area and 24 from outside.
- The consultation process identified that Orbost is identified locally as a 'special' place with a distinctive 'unspoiled' character, reinforced by the absence of the type of high-volume visitor footfall that is drawn to many other iconic areas of Skye such as the Fairy Pools, the Old Man of Storr and Glenbrittle.
- The community is supportive of community ownership of Orbost in principle with a strong desire to enhance management for environmental benefit and improved public (non-motorised) access. There is support for small scale timber harvesting, increasing native species, maintaining and developing the path network, outdoor education, creating a small number of forest crofts, and facilitating the development of small-scale woodland-based businesses. Potential concerns about community ownership included the scale of the asset, the cost and financing of a purchase, community capacity to manage the asset, and the risk of overdevelopment.

Forest Management

- The land was afforested by the Forestry Commission who planted a mixed conifer wood from the shores of Loch Bharcasaig, up Gleann Bharcasaig between 1957 to 1961. This section of forest contains a wide range of conifer species – Noble fir, Sitka spruce, Lodgepole pine, Scots pine – which have been planted in small, discrete areas, which are unusual in planting design and which would not be considered as viable by today's industrial forest sector. This oldest section has suffered from windblow – up to 30% of the area- and from the fungal disease *Phytophthora ramorum*, which kills larch. Marine extraction of timber by barge was done in 2002, using the beach at Bharcasaig as the timber handling point; and diseased larch was felled by Tilhill contractors and left in situ in 2018.
- A less diverse section of commercial conifer comprising Sitka spruce and Lodgepole pine in intimate mixture north of Beinn na Moine was planted from 1990 to 1992, some of which failed, and much of which has grown more slowly than the original, more sheltered conifer stands. This is because the 1990s planting was on more exposed land and higher altitude planting has grown patchily with Sitka yield classes between 12 and 16. None of this planting has been thinned.
- New native woodland was planted at Brandarsaig and Idrigil in 2004, extending to some 80 hectares, some of which was part funded by carbon credits- the Joe Strummer, Rebel's Wood – and much of which appears to have failed, possibly due to heavy deer browsing. In

2014 the small outlying woodland at Cruachan, adjacent to Orbost Farm, was clearfelled and restocked with broadleaves.

- The forest could be managed differently in the future by patch felling or selective felling, rather than clear felling. Windblown timber (with high dry matter content) could become a wood fuel resource and selective planting and natural regeneration (subject to adequate deer control) could allow for greater biodiversity within the forest. This approach risks greater windblow but the combination of discrete pockets of species, windfirm edges, low growth class and local geography could mitigate this. Mobile equipment would allow for small scale forestry business activities including milling and drying larch for local use and training of local people in forest management skills.

Development Options

- Several crofts could be created in the Cruachan wood area which could potentially provide several house sites either for the crofts there or for crofts that could also be created in the main forest.
- There are no land-based conservation designations in the area. However, the site hosts protected sea eagles which are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Nature Conservation Scotland Act 2004. Forestry operations during the nesting season need to be carefully managed. Their presence could be used to offer managed guided walks and to create a viewing platform or shelter which would benefit walkers and cyclists generally.
- Current parking provision is in the Orbost farmyard which creates problems in terms of safety and some drivers use the track to Bharcasaig Bay without permission. A new parking area could potentially be created in Cruachan wood or adjacent to a new road created for timber extraction. A new road would allow for a circular walk and would offer a different approach to MacLeod's Tables, removing unnecessary activity from the existing settlement.
- The current path to Idrigill is in poor condition in places and would benefit from upgrading. It would not be appropriate to create additional paths near where the sea eagles nest but the natural bowl of the Forse area offers opportunities for additional footpaths/cycle trails.
- A small number of pods/cabins/shepherd's huts could be discretely located in a small part of the forest to provide accommodation for volunteers and an income from visitors.
- It is considered that a micro-hydro scheme will not currently be viable due to the removal of Feed-In Tariff support and the hydro resource being modest. Similarly, small-scale wind struggles to be viable without FIT support and the site has additional disadvantages due to tree cover and the landscape sheltering the area from westerly winds. Small scale solar PV panels could be used to provide power on a small building for milling and drying wood.

Management Scenarios

- Three different scenarios have been modelled for managing the forest:
 - A High Impact Scenario, with large scale forest removals through clearfelling, as outlined in the current Long Term Forest Plan (LTFP) prepared by Tilhill Forestry Ltd on behalf of HIE.
 - A Moderate Impact Scenario, where the forest is managed with smaller felling coupes.
 - A Low Impact Scenario, where the forest is managed on a continual thinning regime, mimicking a Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) or Low Impact Silvicultural System (LISS).

- The first scenario would remove timber by barge from Bharcasaig Bay to the BSW pulp mill in Corpach. The second and third scenarios would require the construction of a new road for timber extraction across hill ground on Orbost estate joining the unclassified road to Dunvegan to the north of Orbost. Funding towards the creation of the road and improvements to the public road could come from the Timber Transport Fund.
- Scenario 1 would create a 0.7 full-time equivalent (fte) post. Scenarios 2&3 would create 1.2 and 1.4 fte posts respectively, plus training opportunities for 4 young people. They would also enable the sale of 1000t of timber for firewood to a local business.
- Financial modelling over 20 years showed that Scenario 1 would only be viable with a considerable subsidy (£306,00) from DCT's windfarm revenues. Scenarios 2 & 3 would generate cumulative surpluses of £351,711 and £524,041 respectively.

Skills

- A survey of directors' skills showed strong skills/experience in project development, project management, managing businesses and managing staff. No directors have skills in forestry management and operations. This is not unusual in groups considering purchasing forests. The necessary expertise can be brought in by recruiting directors and staff with the requisite skills.

Purchase strategy

- If the community and DCT wish to pursue a purchase they should do so after: ensuring that there are no liabilities arising from failures to fulfil planting contracts; negotiating a discount on the sale price for the benefit that will arise from community ownership; negotiating the right to construct a new timber extraction route across Orbost estate; securing support for a new road from the Timber Transport Fund.

2. Introduction

Dunvegan Community Trust (DCT) commissioned the present study to explore the potential for community ownership of Orbost Forest.

DCT was formed in 2009 with the primary purpose to distribute the community fund generated by the Ben Aketil Wind Farm (<https://www.falckrenewables.com/>). The majority of funding is available as a grant to locally constituted, not-for-profit groups that operate in the Dunvegan area. Project and skills development grants must benefit the residents of the Dunvegan area (which includes the surrounding townships of Harlosh, Feorlig, Vatten, Roag, Herebost, Orbost, Horneval, Greep, Claigan and Uiginish). DCT has distributed over a quarter million pounds since the fund was established in 2009 following the opening of Ben Aketil windfarm.

Orbost Forest currently belongs to Highlands & Islands Enterprise. It acquired the forest in 1997 from Forestry Commission Scotland as part of a land swap deal. The forest extends to approximately 612 ha. The forest and the sandy bay at Bharcasaig are highly valued by the local community for their amenity, recreational and wildlife value, and their place in the wider landscape. The community also remembers that 6 foresters were employed in the forest at one time and wish to understand what options there are to create new employment in the forest and to enhance its biodiversity value.

3. Policy and Socio-Economic Context

This section outlines the wider policy and socio-economic context within which the potential community purchase of Orbost Forest is being considered. It highlights the importance of community land and asset ownership as a policy driver for sustainable place-making and its evolving role in addressing the climate emergency and post-pandemic recovery. The discussion then considers features of the regional and sub-regional economy, set against the economic impact of the pandemic. Finally, it provides an overview of socio-economic characteristics of the geographical area covered by Dunvegan Community Trust, utilising available data from the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Community Land and Asset Ownership

Community ownership of land and other assets is now an established public policy objective in Scotland. It aims to empower people to develop their own local places by stimulating sustainable economic growth and generating social and environmental benefits. Two of Scotland's sixteen National Performance Framework (NPF)¹ outcomes are directly relevant in that regard. Specifically, that *"we have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others"* and that *"we live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need"*. Moreover, 'number of assets in community ownership' is included as an indicator against which to measure progress in relation to the 'communities' NPF outcome.

The Scottish Government's policy objective of encouraging more community ownership is further underpinned by legislation, including the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016, and development support from the Scottish Land Fund and public authorities including Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE). Amongst other provisions, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 introduced a Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS) designed to enable rural and urban communities to take ownership of land and built assets. A key set of provisions in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 introduced a Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement (LRRS) designed to ensure that landowners of all types strike an appropriate balance between their rights and responsibilities regarding the management of their land assets.

The contemporary community land movement, dating from the early 1990s, has its origins in the Highlands and Islands. HIE has been a leading source of support in enabling land to be taken into community ownership, particularly since establishment of its Community Land Unit in the mid 1990s. Indeed, the purchase of the Orbost Estate by HIE in the 1997 was undertaken specifically with a the objective of transferring the land into community ownership.

The Climate Emergency and Post-Pandemic Recovery

Scotland has committed to becoming carbon-neutral by 2045 as a vital step in addressing the ongoing Climate Emergency. In March 2021 the Scottish Government-appointed Just Transition Commission published its report on the need to ensure that the shift to a carbon-neutral economy is undertaken fairly in the interests of social justice. In calling for "a national mission for a fairer,

¹ Scottish Government. National Performance Framework. <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/>

greener Scotland” the Commission’s report highlights the potential of diversifying Scotland’s uniquely concentrated pattern of land ownership as a way to spread the climate benefits of land more widely to include community benefits. The Commission states:

“Part of ensuring a just transition must be about making sure the benefits of investment in carbon sequestration are felt as widely as possible. Without careful design and meaningful engagement there is a risk that benefits may flow mainly to large landowners and opportunities for community benefit will be missed.”²

‘Community Landowners and the Climate Emergency’³, a research report also published in March 2021 by Community Land Scotland (CLS) shows how community landowners are addressing climate change in various ways. These include managing ‘carbon sinks’ such as woodlands, peatlands and green spaces, renewable energy generation to address local electricity needs; improving household energy efficiency to reduce fuel poverty, promoting active travel and low emissions transport, and promoting local food growing and access to healthy and affordable local produce.

The CLS report shows that community landowners tend to take a holistic approach to climate action, resulting in carbon emissions reductions and ‘soft’ benefits linked to environmental education, skills development and enhanced health and wellbeing. One of six case-studies accompanying the report focuses on the activities of Abriachan Forest Trust which operates a pioneering Forest School, promotes local food growing and manages its community-owned forest to capture and store carbon.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also emphasised the important role of community organisations in helping their communities to both deal with the immediate crisis and help navigate their way to post-pandemic economic recovery and social renewal. The Scottish Government-appointed Social Renewal Advisory Board calls for more funding and support to be provided:

“to help communities buy land or buildings and run them for the benefit of the community so that they become self-sustaining.”⁴

‘Built-in Resilience: Community Landowners’ Responses to the Covid-19 Crisis’⁵, a report published by Community Land Scotland, also highlights the importance of community trusts in responding to the pandemic as a result of their central role as ‘anchor’ organisations within their communities.

Socio-Economic Profile

A key concern driving much of rural public policy is the need to address a depopulation crisis in many of Scotland’s Sparsely Populated Areas (SPAs). Research published by The James Hutton Institute in 2018⁶ projected that the SPAs risk losing a quarter of their populations by 2046 if current trends are left unchanged. The depopulation projections for many parts of the Highland Council area are similarly discouraging. However, Skye and Lochalsh is one of several areas in the region forecast to buck that trend as a result of its population increasing over the next two decades. The area is projected to increase its population by 1,551 (+11.2%) between 2016 and 2041⁷.

² Just Transition Commission (2021). Final Report. ‘A National Mission for a Fairer, Greener, Scotland’.

³ Community Land Scotland (2021). ‘Community Landowners and the Climate Emergency’.

⁴ The Scottish Government (2021). ‘If Not Now, when?: The Social Renewal Advisory Board Report’.

⁵ Community Land Scotland (2021). ‘Built-in Resilience: Community landowners’ Responses to the Covid-19 Crisis’.

⁶ The James Hutton Institute (2018). ‘Demographic Change in the Sparsely Populated Areas of Scotland (1991-2046)’.

⁷ The Highland Council (2019). ‘Corporate Plan:2017-2022 (updated 2019)’.

Sub-regional data collected by HIE regarding Lochaber, Skye and Wester Ross shows that the population of the that area increased from 39,146 in 2011 to 39,339 in 2018 (an increase of 0.5 %). The data also show that the area has an older age profile than both the Highlands and Islands and Scotland as a whole. 55.6% of Lochaber, Skye and Wester Ross's population was aged over 45 years in 2018. The equivalent figure was 52.5% for the Highlands and Islands and 46.5% for Scotland. Almost a quarter of the area's population was aged 0-24 years (the equivalent figures is 25.6% for the Highlands and Islands and 27.6% for Scotland).

Many of the economic indicators for Lochaber, Skye and Wester Ross were positive in comparison to comparative data at both the Highlands and Islands and Scottish levels, prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically:

- Higher Economic Activity rate (83.2%) than Highlands and Islands (80.9%) and Scotland (77.9%).
- Higher percentage of self-employed people (14.8%) than the Highlands and Islands (11.0%) and Scotland (8.7%).
- An employment rate (83.2%) higher than for the Highlands and Islands (78.6%) and Scotland (74.7%).
- An unemployment rate lower than the Highlands and Islands and Scotland in September 2019; 1.6% for the region compared to 2.3% for the Highlands and Islands and 3.2% for Scotland.⁸

Inevitably the Covid-19 pandemic has had a very significant disruptive impact on these and other economic indicators in Lochaber, Skye and Wester Ross and the Highlands and Islands as a whole. Data from HIE published in September 2020 calculates that unemployment in the area had increased from 1.6% to 7.3%. (representing the greatest increase in all HIE area offices over the previous year). HIE's analysis indicates that the structural dominance of micro businesses and a higher share of employment in SMEs means that the economic impact of Covid-19 on the Highlands and islands is likely to be greater than elsewhere in Scotland.

The pandemic's negative impact on tourism, a significant sector of the economy in both Skye and the Highlands and Islands more generally, has been particularly serious. In the region as a whole, GVA related to accommodation and food services is estimated to have decreased by £259m (-39%) in 2020.

There is no available socio-economic data at the level of the geographical area that DCT covers. However, the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) provides socio-economic information for the area of 'Skye North West' which includes DCT's geographical area of coverage. The 11 townships in the area covered by DCT are contained within two separate SIMD data zones for Skye North West, both of which also cover areas outwith DCT's area.

⁸ HIE (November 2019). 'Lochaber, Skye and Wester Ross: Key Statistics'.

Several of the townships are contained in SIMD data zone S01010685. They include Orbost, Greep, Roag, and Uiginish. Townships contained in SIMD data zone S01010684 include Claigan, Dunvegan, Horneval, Vatten, Harlosh, Feorlig and Herebost.

Table 1, below, shows key indicators for the two data zones regarding total population, working age, income deprived and employment deprived populations. It should be noted that the data for the income and employment deprived categories may have changed significantly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Data Zone	Total Population	Working Age	Income Deprived	Employment Deprived
S01010684	771	438	42	18
S01010685	580	352	51	25
TOTALS	1351	790	93	43

Table 2, below, shows the overall ranking for both data zones in relation to the seven measures of deprivation used in the SIMD. The measures are divided into deciles. Areas ranked 1 are calculated as being in the 10% of most deprived areas in Scotland relating to the specific measure. Those ranked '10' are classified as being in the 10% of least deprived areas in Scotland relating to the specific measure.

Data Zone	Overall Rank	Income	Employment	Health	Education/skills	Housing	Access to services	Crime
0684	6	7	8	8	6	7	1	6
0685	4	6	6	6	5	3	1	9

Table 2 shows that there are significant differences in relation to several of the measured of deprivation in relation to the data zones. Data zone S01010684 has a higher ranking for all measures apart from crime and access to services. There is a relatively high level of deprivation in data zone 0685 (including Orbost) in relation to housing and both data zones are in the highest decile of deprivation in terms of geographical access to services.

Summary

This section has illustrated that community ownership of land and other assets is now a well established driver for the sustainable development of Scotland's rural and urban places, facilitated by a range of legislative and other support from Scottish Government and its agencies. The role of community land ownership in addressing the climate emergency and as a way of helping to enable post-pandemic recovery is also becoming more recognised by policymakers.

Skye, as a whole, was performing relatively well on a range of economic indicators in comparison to other areas in the Highlands and Islands prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the pandemic has had a significant negative economic impact on the Highlands and Islands as a whole and, by implication, the economy in Skye, the full extent of which is not yet known.

The geographical area served by Dunvegan Community Trust falls within the mid-range of its overall levels of deprivation according to SIMD measures. There are, however, quite marked differences in levels of deprivation within the area, especially in relation to housing. Moreover, the entire area is in the most deprived 10% of areas in Scotland in relation to geographical access to services. The Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have negatively impacted on the amount of deprivation in the area regarding several of these indicators, if not necessarily its relativity.

Against that background, section 4 considers the community's views regarding Orbst forest and its potential community purchase, then Sections 5-8 consider the opportunities under community ownership.

4. Community and Stakeholder Consultations

This section provides an overview of the findings from the community consultation process undertaken as part of the feasibility study. That process included two online community consultation meetings, individual 'one to one' consultations and an online community survey. The findings from each consultation method are presented and discussed in the following subsections.

Initial Online Community Meeting

An initial online community meeting was held on February 3rd 2021, attended by 31 members of the community from Orbost and elsewhere in the Dunvegan Community Trust area. The meeting included a presentation on the feasibility study from the consultants and a facilitated discussion to get participants' views on managing and developing the forest under community ownership.

There was a general sense from participants that community ownership offered the possibility of developing the forest in ways that would generate community benefits for the area. Some disquiet was expressed about the poor condition of the forest and a perceived lack of sustainable management of it. There were mixed views as to the commercial value of the forest with scepticism expressed by some participants about its viability as a community enterprise.

A central theme of the discussions was the need for management and development of the forest to be undertaken in a balanced and sustainable way, so as not to unduly compromise the local amenity value of Orbost as a whole. Managing access, both within the forest and to it, and within the wider estate, in a sustainable way was viewed as a critical issue in that regard. There was concern about potential disruption caused by additional visitors to the area as a result of inappropriate car-parking (e.g. in residents' driveways). It was felt that such disruption would be exacerbated in the absence of appropriate car-parking infrastructure. Linked to this, a tension was identified between wishing to retain and develop the area's amenity value while not increasing visitor traffic to unsustainable levels. There was wariness amongst participants about the risk of overdeveloping the area.

Keeping the beach "pristine" was mentioned as being important, with a suggestion that a focal point should be created away from it. Some concerns were expressed about perceived negative implications of making the track to the forest more accessible for motor vehicles.

Improving access specifically within the forest was highlighted as an important consideration, especially given the difficulties of walking there due to its current condition. There was substantial support for improving the existing footpath and creating a paths/trail network for all abilities and provision of mountain bike tracks. The idea of having different types of 'routes' (e.g. a therapy route or a poetry route) in the forest was also highlighted. Links between improved access to the forest and the positive impacts on physical and mental wellbeing were also discussed.

The scope for using the forest as an outdoor educational resource was also highlighted during discussions, for example through the Forest Schools model of delivering aspects of the curriculum. Similarly, the idea of using the forest to communicate and interpret the social history of the area (e.g. links to the Highland Clearances) was also mooted. Interest was also expressed in enhancing the environmental value of the forest's biodiversity through horticulture and in developing small-scale green energy initiatives such as hydro or solar developments. The possibility of establishing woodland crofts was also discussed, with varying levels of support for that type of development.

Individual consultations

A total of 17 individual telephone and zoom consultations were conducted with a range of individuals within Orbst and the wider area that Dunvegan Community Trust (DCT) serves⁹. These individual consultations typically lasted between 30 minutes and one hour and covered consultees' views on the following issues:

- Orbst as a place
- Community ownership of the forest
- Managing and developing the forest

Orbst as a Place

Orbst is viewed by some consultees as a 'special' place with a distinctive 'unspoiled' character, reinforced by the absence of the type of high-volume visitor footfall that is drawn to many other iconic areas of Skye such as the Fairy Pools, the Old Man of Storr and Glenbrittle.

The area is valued by residents in Orbst and within the wider community for its amenity value. Residents from out with Orbst use the area for recreational purposes such as walking. However, some consultees spoke of a sense of Orbst being perceived as a separate, relatively self-contained community within the wider area that the Trust serves. That sense of 'otherness' is compounded by the relative distance between Orbst and the main settlement of Dunvegan. Indeed, some consultees suggested that many non-Orbst residents from within DCT's area do not view Orbst as a place to spend recreational time in. That sense of disconnection was considered to have reduced over time. Nevertheless, it is felt by some consultees to be important in terms of the extent to which the Forest might be viewed as a viable community asset of relevance to the overall community that DCT serves.

Community Ownership of the Forest

Most individual consultees are broadly in favour of community ownership of Orbst Forest in principle, although that is not a unanimous view. One consultee viewed private ownership of the forest (with conditions attached to such ownership to guarantee community benefits) as the best ownership option.

Some consultees suggested that the implementation of what was viewed as HIE's original 'top-down' vision for the Estate had left many in the community sceptical as to the merits of community ownership. However, it was noted that a more 'bottom-up' and organic approach to managing and developing the forest under community ownership was likely to gain more traction within the community.

Some consultees expressed concerns about what they perceived to be the considerable responsibilities associated with taking ownership of the forest and the risks of assuming liabilities relating to that. Concern was also expressed regarding DCT's capacity to manage and develop the forest, given that the Trust has no experience of owning and managing a comparable asset.

⁹ Representatives of the Highland Council, NatureScot, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Forest and Land Scotland, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Skye Cycle Network were also consulted in relation to specific policy, development and technical issues of relevance to the study.

However, it was also recognised that other communities had been in the same position and had been able to take ownership of and manage land and other assets successfully. It was noted that securing development staff resourcing would be key to enabling DCT to do that.

Some concern was also expressed about the scope to operate the forest as a commercial operation in relation to timber extraction, on the assumption that was a favoured development option of the community. It was also suggested that philanthropic investment would be required for successful purchase and management of the forest.

Managing and Developing the Forest

The need for a balanced approach to managing and developing the forest under community ownership was a consistent theme emerging from the individual consultations. There is very little appetite for undertaking large-scale commercial timber extraction in the forest, primarily because of concerns about the disruptive local impacts to the landscape and amenity value of the area, both for local residents and the wider community.

Similarly, there is relatively little appetite to increase the scope for high volume visitor traffic to the area due to the potentially disruptive aspects of that within the context of existing inadequate access infrastructure in terms of car-parking and the road to the forest.

Consultees were broadly in favour of relatively low impact initiatives that would deliver a range of economic, environmental and social community benefits without significantly altering the character of Orbost. In that regard there was some support for small-scale timber extraction if such an operation could be used for local benefit such as woodfuel supply to help address local fuel poverty. As such, there was support in principle for helping establish a small number of woodland-related micro-businesses, although there was no overall consensus as to what such micro-businesses might entail.

There was considerable support for more environmentally sustainable management of the forest through reintroduction of native species and other habitat restoration and management initiatives to rewild the area.

It was suggested that better access in the form of paths development for walking and cycling in the forest would be beneficial for recreational purposes. However, some concern was also expressed as to the potentially high construction and maintenance costs associated with developing and managing such infrastructure.

There was some support for the idea of establishing woodland crofts as a way of helping to counter the lack of affordable housing for people in the wider DCT area. However, it was noted that careful consideration would have to be given to the number of such crofts that might be established and where they might be located. It should also be noted too that not every consultee favoured housing provision as an option for development.

Several consultees noted the lack of available land in the DCT area for developing initiatives for community benefit. It was suggested that, under community ownership, part of the forest could be used for community growing via the creation of allotments or a community garden. It was suggested that such a model could generate significant benefits in relation to community wellbeing and mental health, as well as having an educational impact in relation to climate change issues and food production and consumption.

The potential for the forest to be an educational resource as also discussed in relation to the Forest School model for delivering part of the curriculum. That approach is being used for primary school pupils in Dunvegan. It was indicated that the currently challenging nature of accessing the forest on foot would make using the forest for educational purposes challenging for younger children. However, it was suggested that there could be scope for introducing forest school holiday or after-school clubs if there was appropriate infrastructure in place (including appropriate insurance cover). Similarly, there was support for using community ownership of the forest to help explore the cultural and wider social history of the area.

Online Community Survey

An online survey of the community covered by Dunvegan Community Trust was also undertaken via SurveyMonkey which was available to complete between March 14th and March 28th 2021. The survey was designed to get respondents' views as to whether or not they were supportive of community ownership of the forest, in principle, and whether they were supportive, in principle, of potential types of development activities in the forest.

Respondents were also able to provide suggestions for development and express any concerns or other comments they had regarding community ownership of the forest. Full details of the survey results are included in appendix 1 of this report. This subsection provides a summary of the key findings for the survey.

The survey received 119 responses, of which 95 were from residents within DCT's area. The remaining 24 responses came mostly from individuals on Skye but resident outwith the Trust's area of operation. The places of residence of respondents is shown in table 3 below.

Township	N	%
Dunvegan	30	25.21
Orbost	9	7.56
Harlosh	25	21.01
Feorlig	7	5.88
Vatten	3	2.52
Roag	17	14.29
Herebost	1	0.84
Horneval	0	0
Greep	0	0
Claigan	1	0.84
Uiginish	2	1.68
Other	24	20.17

Support for Community Ownership of Orbost Forest in Principle

There were 105 responses to the question about support for community ownership of the forest in principle. 62% of all respondents indicated they were supportive; 20% were not supportive; and 20% were undecided.

Table 4 shows responses to the question about support for community ownership by township in the DCT's area of operation.

Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	11	50.00	9	40.91	2	9.09	22	100
Orbost	7	77.78	1	11.11	1	12.50	9	100
Harlosh	14	60.87	4	17.39	5	21.74	23	100
Feorlig	2	28.57	1	14.29	4	57.14	7	100
Vatten	1	33.33	1	33.33	1	33.33	3	100
Roag	10	66.67	3	20.00	2	13.33	15	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claigan	1	100.00	0	0	0	0	1	100
Uiginish	2	100.00	0	0	0	0	2	100

Very low or no responses were received from several townships. However, it is notable that in two of the three townships with 10 or more responses (Dunvegan, Harlosh, and Roag) there was a majority in favour of community ownership in principle. In Orbost, 7 of the 9 respondents (78%) indicated they were in favour of community ownership in principle. None of the townships had a majority that was unsupportive of community ownership although Dunvegan had a sizable minority (41%) in that category.

Support for Potential Development Options in Principle

Survey respondents were asked to indicate whether they were supportive in principle of the following potential options for development in the forest:

- Small number of woodland crofts
- Using the forest for outdoor education
- Developing small-scale renewable energy schemes
- Small-scale timber harvesting
- Large-scale timber harvesting
- Restoring native woodland species
- Enabling small woodland-based business to operate in the forest
- Paths maintenance and development

The survey results indicate that there are high levels of support in principle (60% or more of the sample) for most of the above development options apart from large-scale timber harvesting (13% were supportive and 57% unsupportive). The following tables show the levels of support for each option, both by township and 'other' responses

Support was expressed in favour of establishing a small number of **woodland crofts** with 49% of respondents being supportive, and 25% unsupportive, a majority of approximately two to one. An absolute majority was not achieved due to a fairly high 27% being undecided. As table 5 shows, a majority of respondents in five townships were supportive of woodland crofts in principle. However, only a minority of respondents in Dunvegan and Orbost were also supportive.

Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	8	36.36	10	45.45	4	18.18	22	100
Orbost	2	22.22	4	44.44	3	33.33	9	100
Harlosh	12	52.17	4	17.39	7	30.43	23	100
Feorlig	6	85.71	1	14.29	0	0	7	100
Vatten	2	66.67	1	33.33	0	0	3	100
Roag	9	60.00	3	20.00	3	20.00	15	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Claigan	0	0	0	0	1	100.00	1	100
Uiginish	2	100.00	0	0	0	0	2	100
Other	9	40.91	3	13.64	10	45.45	22	100

There was very strong support in principle for using the forest for **outdoor education**. 81% of the overall survey sample were supportive, while only 13% were unsupportive and 6% undecided. Table 6 shows that pattern of strong support being reflected in all townships that included respondents.

Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	14	63.64	5	22.73	3	13.64	22	100
Orbost	8	88.89	1	11.11	0	0	9	100
Harlosh	19	86.36	2	9.09	1	4.55	22	100
Feorlig	5	71.43	1	14.29	1	14.29	7	100
Vatten	2	66.67	1	33.33	0	0	3	100
Roag	13	86.67	2	13.33	0	0	15	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claigan	1	100.00	0	0	0	0	1	100
Uiginish	2	100.00	0	0	0	0	2	100
Other	19	90.48	1	4.76	1	4.76	21	100

There was clear support for **small-scale timber harvesting** in the overall sample. 62% of all survey respondents indicated support in principle, 25% were unsupportive and 14% were undecided. Table 7 shows that only in Orbost (78%) and Roag (67%) were a majority of respondents from townships supportive of that option in principle.

Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	11	50.00	9	49.91	2	9.09	22	100
Orbost	7	77.78	1	11.11	1	11.11	9	100
Harlosh	11	50.00	5	22.73	6	27.27	22	100
Feorlig	3	42.86	2	28.57	2	28.57	7	100
Vatten	1	33.33	2	66.67	0	0	3	100
Roag	10	66.67	5	33.33	0	0	15	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claigan	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	100
Uiginish	2	100.00	0	0	0	0	2	100
Other	18	85.71	1	4.76	2	9.52	21	100

In contrast to the above, a majority of all survey respondents (57%) were unsupportive in principle of **large-scale timber harvesting** in the forest. As table 8 shows, that pattern is repeated for every township that provided responses.

Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	5	27.73	12	54.55	5	27.73	22	100
Orbost	3	33.33	5	55.56	1	11.11	9	100
Harlosh	1	4.55	13	59.09	8	36.36	22	100
Feorlig	0	0	6	85.71	1	14.29	7	100
Vatten	0	0	3	100.00	0	0	3	100
Roag	1	7.14	8	57.14	5	35.71	14	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claigan	0	0	0	0	1	100.00	1	100
Uiginish	0	0	0	0	2	100.00	2	100
Other	3	13.64	11	50.00	8	36.36	22	100

There was widescale overall support for **restoring native woodland species**. 81% of all survey respondents were supportive in principle while only 11% were not. 8% of respondents were undecided. As table 9 shows, all townships in the DCT area that provided responses were supportive of such restoration.

Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	16	72.73	4	18.18	2	9.09	22	100
Orbost	8	88.89	1	11.11	0	0	9	100
Harlosh	19	90.48	0	0	2	9.52	21	100
Feorlig	4	57.14	2	28.57	1	14.29	7	100
Vatten	2	66.67	0	0	1	33.33	3	100
Roag	11	73.33	2	13.33	2	13.33	15	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claigan	1	100.00	0	0	0	0	1	100
Uiginish	2	100.00	0	0	0	0	2	100
Other	20	90.91	2	9.09	0	0	22	100

Two thirds of all respondents (66%) were also supportive of **small woodland-based businesses** to operate in the forest. 18% were unsupportive and 16% were undecided. Table 10 shows variations in the levels of support in principle across different townships, with neither Dunvegan nor Orbost having majorities in support of such development.

Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	11	50.00	9	40.91	2	9.09	22	100
Orbost	4	44.44	3	33.33	2	22.22	9	100
Harlosh	16	72.73	1	4.55	5	22.73	22	100
Feorlig	5	71.43	1	14.29	1	14.29	7	100
Vatten	2	66.67	1	33.33	0	0	3	100
Roag	10	66.67	3	20.00	2	13.33	15	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claigan	0	0	0	0	1	100	1	100
Uiginish	2	100.00	0	0	0	0	2	100
Other	18	81.82	1	4.55	3	13.64	22	100

There was similarly strong overall support in principle for **paths maintenance and development** with 80% of respondents indicating their support in that regard. 12% were unsupportive and 8% were undecided. Table 11 shows that all townships that contained survey respondents had majorities in favour of such developments.

Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	16	76.19	3	14.29	2	9.52	21	100
Orbost	7	77.78	1	11.11	1	11.11	9	100
Harlosh	18	81.82	2	9.09	2	9.09	22	100
Feorlig	4	57.14	2	28.57	1	14.29	7	100
Vatten	2	66.67	1	33.33	0	0	3	100
Roag	13	86.67	2	13.33	0	0	15	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claigan	1	100.00	0	0	0	0	1	100
Uiginish	2	100.00	0	0	0	0	2	100
Other	19	86.36	1	4.55	2	9.09	22	100

Respondents were also asked for any suggestions they had for managing and/or developing the forest in ways that would benefit the community. The full range of responses is included in appendix 1.

The majority of responses to this 'open' question focused on enhancing the **amenity value of the forest** by developing a wider range of **walks and trails**, together with **cycling/mountain biking routes**. A common theme in that regard was the need to ensure **trails and walks were accessible for all**, as well as having **higher level mountain bike trails**.

There was considerable support for **environmental management, species restoration and using the forest as an educational resource**. There was also some support for **woodland crofts** linked to the forest and of using any income from the forest under community ownership to help provide **affordable housing** elsewhere within the DCT area. Other suggestions related to the scope for **renewable energy initiatives** and to establishing a **hub for outdoor activities**. There was also some support for **small businesses** being based either in the forest or alongside it.

Concerns about Community Ownership of the Forest

49% of the overall sample of respondents indicated they had concerns about community ownership of the forest while 52% indicated that they did not. Table 12 shows that a majority of survey respondents in Orbost, Feorlig, Vatten and Roag had concerns in that regard, as did 50% of respondents from Dunvegan.

Township	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	11	50.00	11	50.00
Orbost	6	75.00	2	25.00
Harlosh	10	45.45	12	54.55
Feorlig	4	66.67	2	33.33
Vatten	2	66.67	1	33.33
Roag	8	57.14	6	42.86
Herebost	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0
Claigan	0	0	1	100.00
Uiginish	0	0	2	100.00

The main issues of concern related to the potential financial cost of purchasing and managing the forest under community ownership, as well as the risks of overdeveloping the area to the detriment of its perceived 'special' characteristics as a landscape. The large scale of the asset was also raised as an issue of concern, as was the capacity of the community to manage it effectively. Other highlighted issues included the need for good governance of the forest under community ownership and ensuring that Orbost residents were able to have a say in that, given their close proximity to it. The perceived inadequacy of the current physical infrastructure, especially road access was also highlighted as a concern.

Community Meeting to Present Study Findings

A second online community meeting was held on May 10th 2021 attended by 25-30 people, to present the study's findings and get participants' views on development options and related issues. A presentation by the consultants outlining the various elements of the study was followed by a question-and-answer session on various issues raised in the presentation. Much of the discussion focused on the issues of access and the need for a balanced approach to development options, as well as financial issues. Specific questions were asked in relation to the layout and location of a potential new road to divert traffic away from the settlement and as to whether the cost of the road had been incorporated into the outline financial projections prepared by the consultants.

Summary

The findings from all three elements of the community consultation process indicate considerable support for community ownership of Orbost Forest in principle. A consistent theme to emerge from the consultations is the need to ensure that any development of the forest under community ownership is undertaken in a balanced and sustainable way.

There is considerable support for enhancing the forest's amenity and environmental value via paths management and development, together with native species restoration. There is some support for woodland crofts, renewable energy initiatives and small-scale woodland businesses being developed in the forest. However, the levels of support for such initiatives vary within townships in the DCT area. Aside from the need for a balanced approach to development, other concerns relate to the scale of the asset, community capacity and governance issues. All of these issues will require careful consideration in deciding if and how community ownership of Orbost Forest is to be taken forward.

5. Orbst Forest

Introduction

Orbst forest is on the Duirinish Peninsula, 4 miles south of Dunvegan on the Isle of Skye and access to the woodland is by rough track from an unclassified road which joins the B884 from Lonmore on the A836, or via Roag, again from the A836. The forest extends to some 612 hectares with most bounded to the north, south and west by Orbst Estate, and to the east by Loch Bracadale and Loch Bharcasaig. There is a small outlying woodland, Cruachan, which is 8.7 hectares in area, and which is enclosed on three sides by Orbst Farm and the unclassified Orbst-Dunvegan road to the east.

The forest is constrained by poor access, with a single-track entrance, which is rough, not well maintained and generally unsuitable for timber extraction by timber lorries, nor is it suitable for transporting large harvesting machinery.

How has the forest developed?

As above, the total land area of Orbst Forest extends to some 614.61 hectares of land, within which it is estimated that 422 hectares is wooded¹⁰. The land was owned and afforested by the Forestry Commission who planted a mixed conifer wood from the shores of Loch Bharcasaig, up Gleann Bharcasaig between 1957 to 1961. This section of forest contains a wide range of conifer species – Noble fir, Sitka spruce, Lodgepole pine, Scots pine – which have been planted in small, discrete areas, which are unusual in planting design and which would not be considered as viable by today's industrial forest sector. This oldest section has suffered from windblow – up to 30% of the area- and from the fungal disease *Phytophthora ramorum*, which kills larch. Marine extraction of timber by barge was done in 2002, using the beach at Bharcasaig as the timber handling point; and diseased larch was felled by Tilhill contractors and left in situ in 2018. It is intended that the felled larch will be extracted when the next felling and extraction occurs.

The sections felled and extracted by the Commission were restocked (replanted) and the growth of trees has been patchy and impacted by heavy deer browsing and potential nutrient deficiencies.

The Commission planted a less diverse section of commercial conifer comprising Sitka spruce and Lodgepole pine in intimate mixture north of Beinn na Moine from 1990 to 1992, some of which failed, and much of which has grown more slowly than the original, more sheltered conifer stands. This is because the 1990s planting was on more exposed land and higher altitude planting has grown patchily with Sitka yield classes between 12 and 16. None of this planting has been thinned.

New native woodland was planted at Brandarsaig and Idrigil in 2004, extending to some 80 hectares (check), some of which was part funded by carbon credits- the Joe Strummer, Rebel's Wood – and much of which appears to have failed, possibly due to heavy deer browsing. In 2014 the small outlying woodland at Cruachan, adjacent to Orbst Farm, was clearfelled and restocked with broadleaves.

How has the forest been managed?

The forest appears to have been managed on the principle of minimal care and maintenance (or managed neglect), with intermittent bursts of activity. This may be for a number of reasons – HIE's objectives for managing the site were and are unclear, the forest is remote, difficult to access and has a number of mitigating factors such as very high deer numbers, a long perimeter fence, lack of

¹⁰ Orbst Woodlands Long Term Forest Plan, 2019-2038

forest thinning (which may relate to the management objectives and the access), and an apparent lack of willingness to actively manage and invest in the property by the owner.

Some of the management activities undertaken since HIE bought the property from the Forestry Commission in 1997,

- The preparation and approval of a Long-Term Forest Plan
- New native woodland planting (Brandarsaig and Idrigil),
- beating up, replacing dead trees on restocking or new planting sites
- fence repair, to the perimeter fence (minimal and /or unquantified)
- new internal fencing (north to south across the Gleann Bharcasaig section estimated at 2km)
- deer management (intensive cull of 90+ deer)
- phytosanitary felling (larch), and
- clearfelling and restocking (Cruachan)

Tilhill act as forest managers and their remit is to manage the forest on behalf of HIE, dealing with day to day management of the forest, preparing reports and budgets for necessary works, preparing and submitting grant applications and claims to Scottish Forestry. They also deal with matters arising, liaise with statutory bodies on matters such as deer control, and tree health. Carry out regular inspections, instructing and supervising operations.

What are the constraint and liabilities?

As discussed above there are a few constraints on what might be termed, normal forest management, or good silviculture, lack of forest management objectives being foremost amongst these.

Access

It is difficult to rationalise why the forest owner has not made a serious effort to explore the possibility of a new road access, especially as they, HIE, own and control the adjacent land on Orbost Estate, and would therefore be ideally placed to negotiate an improved new access with Highland Council and the local communities. Good road access would make a large difference to the range, intensity and costs of forest management and could facilitate a suite of rural development opportunities as well as reducing pressure on the existing track, taking people and vehicles away from the vicinity of Orbost Farm and Orbost House.

The realities of clearfelling and timber extraction done using marine transport narrows the options for management in the forest – it is costly and requires significant upfront investment - and leads to clear felling on a large scale, with the current Long Term Forest Plan (LTFP) detailing two fellings of some 90 and 40 hectares, effectively removing all the original planting in two stages.

Deer

Deer numbers in Scotland and the Isle of Skye are at historically high levels and forestry using native broadleaved species or what are termed diverse conifers, anything that is not Sitka spruce, is not possible unless the plants are fully protected by a deer fence or by a combination of deer fence and rigorous deer management. The historic arrangement of letting the deer stalking to an interested

individual, as has been the case until comparatively recently at Orbost, effectively removes control from the forestry interests and relies on the deer stalker 1. Having deer management interests that align with the forest manager, i.e. zero tolerance for deer browsing, and 2. Maintaining constant pressure on deer numbers such that they are at a level where damage to growing trees is minimal. The bulk of HIEs tenure at Orbost has been characterised by a lack of deer control.

Latterly, Tilhill brought in external deerstalkers to reduce deer numbers, this worked in that the deer cull was impressively high but somewhat backfired by provoking local antipathy, and a narrative that deer parts were left strewn across the forest, especially close to public access. The areas of restocking on previously felled areas and areas of new native woodland planting have to a greater or lesser degree failed in large part due to deer browsing.

Biodiversity

The forest biodiversity is, to a large extent, impacted by high deer numbers. More browsing, less growth of woodland herb species, less forest and plant structure (shrub and scrub layers) less opportunities for small mammals and no opportunities to recruit new natural regeneration of native tree species from the very small remnant woodland in steep and inaccessible (for deer) gorges and cliffs. The two key species resident in Orbost appear to be Otter, whose presence constrained previous Forestry Commission harvesting efforts, and nest sites for the White Tailed Sea eagle, which is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981. The Sea eagle is reputed to have a number of nest sites within the forest, possibly in the west of the Gleann Bharcasaig and in the North and South sections of the original planting. During nesting season, from February the 1st to August the 31st, forestry operations may be avoided or severely restricted to a distance of between 250m to 500m of the nest site (see section x for further detail) .

Infrastructure

The forest infrastructure at Orbost such as the fences and the forest track are not in a good state of repair. The boundary fence is porous and, in some places, non-existent, with gates that do not close, and the track is rutted, potholed and whilst navigable in a 4 wheel drive vehicle or quad bike it is not a great advert for health and safety. The internal deer fence (what was seen) is in reasonable repair but has a baffling absence of deer gates to allow access to the upper parts of Gleann Bharcasaig.

Forest age and structure

The forest is a mixed bag, with three distinct sections,

1. the oldest diverse conifer planting affected by windblow and *Phytophthora ramorum*.
2. the younger mixed conifer block which has lower growth rates and is unthinned, and
3. the rather patchy native woodland planting which is still under a Woodland Grant Scheme.

The Gleann Bharcasaig section is beyond what is termed as terminal height, the height at which trees will start to fall over in high winds, and it has experienced some 20-30% windblow throughout the crop. Windblow is difficult to deal with, it is best dealt with by machine (on lower slopes) and is dangerous for motor manual felling. There is a risk that further outbreaks of *Phytophthora ramorum* will require intervention – the last outbreak incurred costs of £7k for the transport of timber processors- which may be costly and logistically difficult.

The central section north of Beinn na Moine is 30 plus years old and should, in a well-managed forest, have been thinned at least once. This has not been done, presumably for reasons of access and without some form of intervention this crop will have the same fate as most industrial forests in

Scotland, to all be clearfelled in one go at age 30-50. This forest crop has an intimate mixture which includes Lodgepole pine, which may be susceptible to Red Band Needle Blight or Dothistroma. This disease, whilst serious for pine species, does not require sanitation felling in the same way that larch and *Phytothera* do.

The native woodland area at Idrigil and Bandersaig is not established and is still under threat from deer browsing. Red deer will browse up to and beyond head height and the fate of this section is still indeterminate.

What are the opportunities at Orbost?

Opportunities to do much beyond large scale clearfelling are constrained by lack of road access; if a road is constructed a range of opportunities present themselves.

Alternative forest management - In the Gleann Bharcasaig section much of the windblow that is currently an issue could become a resource. It has value as a habitat, with lots of dead standing timber for fungal, invertebrate and animal colonisation, however the forest has an overabundance, and it could have other uses. Windblow can be valuable as a source of dry/drier timber for use as fuel wood. Normal conifer crops are approximately 50% (or higher) in water content and require seasoning or drying before use as a fuelwood, however standing dead timber can have a much lower moisture content, making it perfect for harvesting as firewood. This option has been tentatively discussed with a local firewood supplier.

Managing this section of forest in a more sensitive manner than large scale clearfelling has its risks, the greatest being creating even more windblow. However, there are windfirm edges (green edges) in the forest and the mixed nature of discrete pockets of different tree species may make patch felling or continual thinning a little less risky and provide opportunities to maintain the basic feel and look of the forest. As well as yielding a continual stream of timber and revenue. Alternative systems, such as Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) or Low Impact Silvicultural Systems, are not widely practiced by industrial forest managers in Scotland, not because foresters are not capable, more that the short-term financial imperative that drives industrial forestry does not allow for complexity or intensive management. One advantage of choosing a lower intensity system is that there is not such a requirement for restocking (replanting). Small areas of clear fell (patches/coupes) or continual thinning can result in the regeneration of small trees from surrounding seed trees – with the deer caveat – thus removing the costs and logistics of replanting. Additionally, lower levels of forestry activity would mean that Sea eagles were less vulnerable to disturbance from harvesting and less prone to losing potential nest sites through large scale clear felling.

The younger conifer mix of Sitka spruce and Lodgepole pine in the central section, aged around 30 plus years old, could be thinned, line thinned, herring bone patterned thinning or a more costly and less prescriptive method such as feller select thinning. The risks are as above, that opening a crop on exposed areas may result in windthrow, however from observation and the lower yield class of the crop¹¹ - trees not growing very fast – may mean that there is yet an opportunity to get in and actively manage the stands.

Forest enterprises

Good access to the forest gives scope for carrying out small scale timber utilisation – with a mobile sawmill and to provide forest-based training for young people – in chainsaw, scrub cutting, etc. There is a significant quantity of standing larch in the forest, as well as some that has already been

¹¹ From the LTFP

felled, which could be processed into usable timber, such as external cladding (all bark removed) and timber beams for construction. Cut timber could be used to build a forest store/wet weather working facility which could be furnished with solar/micro-hydro power, which in turn could be used to dry processed timber. A forest building provides a base for local young people who can be trained to LANTRA certificate standard in basic rural skills, thus providing them with improved employability skills.

6. Broader Development Opportunities

The purchase of the forest would allow the community to carry out a broader range of activities than simply those immediately linked to growing and felling timber. This section considers a range of opportunities that would allow more people to be involved in receiving the benefits of forest ownership. The extent of existing infrastructure is considered first of all, followed by opportunities to create woodland crofts, wood lots and housing. These are then followed by the opportunities for nature conservation, improving access and sensitive tourism development.

Infrastructure

Access to Orbost is served by 2 single track roads from Dunvegan which meet approximately 200m north of the farmyard. The northerly route leaves the B884 to Glendale and abuts the boundary of Cruachan wood for approximately 600m as it approaches Orbost. The public road becomes a private farm and forestry access track from the farmyard.

There is an electricity pole with transformer approximately 100m north of the junction of the 2 routes to Dunvegan and an electricity line runs through the farm all the way to Bharcasaig Bay serving a number of private properties. The line terminates on land that is currently not for sale as it is part of the farm tenancy. However, it does afford the opportunity for the line to be extended into the forest, if need be.

Existing properties in Orbost are served by a public water supply which we understand comes from Dunvegan via the Glendale road.

Communities purchase forests for a wide range of reasons other than for simply managing the timber resource. These include providing employment and housing opportunities and developing the economy of the area.

As noted in the consultation section initial support for some income generating developments was significantly lower than for other issues such as promoting public access. However, UCT may find that support for specific projects will be higher once their size, location and scope is identified. All of the elements discussed below were proposed during the consultation process.

Forest Crofts

Forest Crofts are a relatively recent development in Scotland. Individuals take on the crofting tenancy of an area of open ground and/or woodland. Similar models are common the world over, where it might be more commonly described as 'family forestry', typically defined as small scale forestry, based on personal involvement and strong stewardship values. There may also be scope to introduce an individual who has the necessary skills to manage the community forest. Support and advice is available from the woodland croft project¹².

Cruachan Wood and the larger Orbost forest both have the potential for new croft creation. Cruachan Wood could be divided into 3 or 4 small parcels and tenancies given to individuals. There are some locations here that could favour the building of individual houses (see Housing below). Crofts could also be created in the main forest. Normally individuals would seek to build their own homes on their crofts. These can be well hidden in a larger forest, although in this case there the issues of sea eagle presence and shared access to be taken into account.

¹² <http://woodlandcrofts.org.cp-27.webhostbox.net/>

An alternative could be to create crofts in the forest but to allow people to build houses on land up at the main settlement. If DCT are minded to pursue such a scenario it would be sensible to request the opportunity to purchase a small additional area of land from HIE for the purpose of providing house sites for forest crofters.

Crofting law is a distinct (and complex) body of law within the Scottish legal system. New croft tenancies can be created under the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993. This would then bring the land designated under the whole raft of crofting law, including the right to 50% of any development value of the croft going to the tenant on future sales of land resumed from the croft by the landlord for another purpose. Forest crofts are a relatively new phenomenon but a number of groups e.g. North West Mull Community Woodland Company (NWMWC) now have experience of creating them, and one of the new crofters has a social media presence¹³.

Standard tenancies allow for the right to buy the croft, the right to a statutory house site and the right to assign the croft amongst other provisions. It is therefore important that any community group takes legal advice when creating crofts and takes the opportunity to safeguard community rights in the leases. Leases should exclude the right to buy the croft and could also exclude the right to assign, the right to compensation for resumption or compulsory purchase and the right to a statutory house site if desired. Excluding the right to assign would prevent tenants from selling their lease to another party, usually for a price equal to or greater than the value of a house site. This would prevent profiteering and also allow the community body to retain the power to approve future tenants. (A policy decision to favour transfer from parent to child where the child was living and working in the area could allow for a normal succession without risking absentee heirs selling the tenancy to the highest bidder). Excluding the right to compensation would secure 100% of any sale price of land to be developed for the community. Excluding the right to a statutory house site would allow the company to provide a house site for tenants with burdens attached requiring residency. It is not possible to attach these to statutory house sites. Consequently, at any point after purchase, the plot/ house can be sold to any individual with no requirement to live locally.

The development of Forest Crofts will require an (uncosted) amount of development time to satisfy the legal requirements, to locate and define the sites, and to advertise for and select tenants. Further, they will not generate much income for the community. Forest Crofts can either be developed almost entirely because of the social benefits that they can deliver, or a capital sum can be required at entry.

Wood Lots

Woodlots are also recently introduced to Scotland, but they are common in other countries, such as Canada. A woodlot is a small area of woodland, typically less than 20 hectares, that is managed by a Woodlot Licence Holder using small scale forestry techniques according to an agreed Allowable Annual Cut, with a fee which is based on the quantity to be cut. The Woodlot provides an opportunity for the landowner to get areas of forestry into management and to generate a modest return¹⁴. A simpler version could also be practised which allowed individual householders with the relevant skills to cut trees for their own household consumption.

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/Woodland-Crofter-695815143816832/>

¹⁴ <https://www.scottishwoodlotassociation.co.uk/>

Woodlot holders can make the most difference in relatively young crops where there are greater opportunities to thin trees without greatly increasing the risk of windblow. As with the forest crofts, a Woodlot holder might also have the skills to manage the community forest, especially as a Woodlot would only be issued to an individual or group of individuals who have the necessary forest management experience.

Woodlots are a new concept in Scotland, and each one is different. It is not therefore possible to produce robust financial information on the impact of woodlots. There will be development costs associated in establishing the woodlots (and the SWA have support available to help with this), and the income generated will depend on the amount of timber that any woodlot holder is allowed to fell.

Housing

There are a range of options open for delivering new housing opportunities in Achnamara:

1. **Community-led.** The Scottish Government's Rural Housing Fund and Island Housing Funds are open to community groups to apply for grants for conducting feasibility studies and a combination of grants and loans to deliver building projects. There is considerable practical support available for community groups looking to develop their own housing from bodies such as Rural Housing Scotland¹⁵ and the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust (see 3 below)
2. **Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association¹⁶.** The association already owns and manages Cruachan cottages in Orbst. It is understood that LSHA own a site that could take a further 2 units opposite these cottages. The local community could work with LSHA to see this site developed or to identify another suitable location and work up a project. SLHA would purchase the site from the community and build units for rent or for purchase under a shared equity approach. The key advantages of this approach are that the risks and responsibilities of the project and subsequent tenant management lie with SLHA rather than the community. The completed houses would however be under the control of the housing association, rather than the local community.
3. **Communities Housing Trust¹⁷.** CHT (formerly known as Highland Small Communities Housing Trust) was established to fill in the gaps that housing associations found it difficult to address. CHT has come up with a number of innovative housing projects and has delivered shared equity and rent to buy projects which enables those on modest incomes to buy a property over a period of time.
4. **Self-build.** The community could release plots of land for people to build their own houses. Combined with legal burdens to ensure future residence this option can deliver new housing at no cost to the community and can allow individuals to build houses tailored to their own needs and budgets. If crofts are created, it would enable application to be made to the means-tested Croft Housing Grant Scheme which can award up to £38,000 towards the cost of a new-build.

¹⁵ <http://ruralhousingscotland.org/>

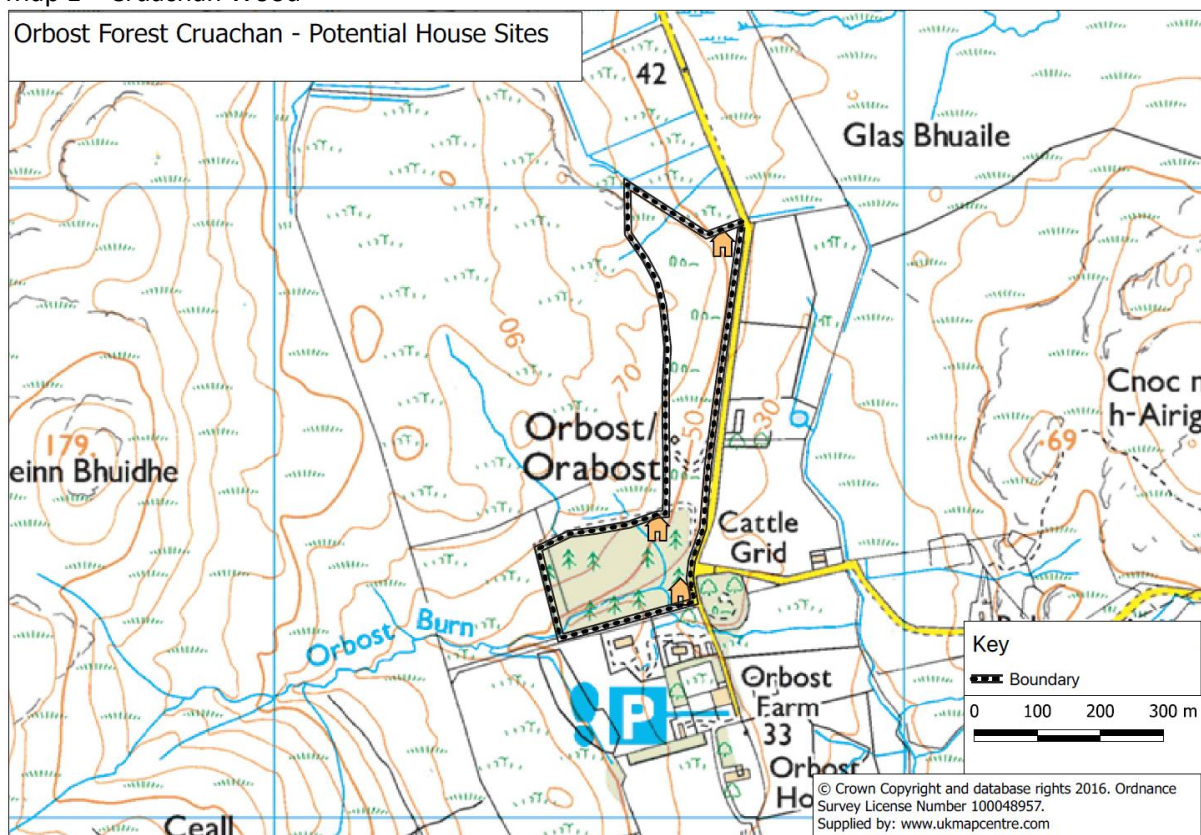
¹⁶ [Lochalsh & Skye Housing Association \(lsha.co.uk\)](http://lsha.co.uk)

¹⁷ [Communities Housing Trust - Communities Housing Trust \(chtrust.co.uk\)](http://chtrust.co.uk)

Approaching from Dunvegan most of the land along the narrow strip of Cruachan Wood rises steeply from the roadside and would therefore be challenging for housebuilding. However, there is an area of ground at the northern tip of Cruachan wood adjacent to the road which is flat enough to create one or two house sites at Grid Ref: NG257439 (Map 1). The water supply should be adjacent to the road, whereas the nearest electricity cable is likely to be about 300m away.

At the southern end of Cruachan Wood there is a flat area bounded by the roadside wall on the east and a watercourse on the west (grid ref: NG257434. If this area is not prone to the watercourse overflowing (which it appears not to be) a house could potentially be constructed there. Alternatively, there is an existing farm access that follows the northern boundary of this section of the wood. The use of that access may enable the construction of one or two houses slightly higher up the hill, within the wood. The viability of this approach has already been demonstrated by the property constructed approximately 150m further north on the same side of the road.

Map 1 – Cruachan Wood



Individual house sites do not lend themselves to being developed for social housing. However, they could be developed by individuals as part of a plan to create woodland crofts out of Cruachan wood.

It would be possible to construct a small number of houses in the Orbost Forest itself, close to the low ground at Bharcasaig bay. The electricity line could be extended into the forest to deliver power. This would be a less favourable option however to developing sites at Cruachan Wood because of the long private access route through the farm, the need to provide a private water supply and the consideration that would need to be given to any additional impact upon the Sea Eagle presence.

Nature Conservation

Orbost is considered to be a special place by local people and is valued for its scenery, sandy beach and mosaic of forest, farmland and hill ground reaching up to Macleod's Tables. This section considers opportunities for the community to enhance the value of nature, educate locals and visitors about it and increase the benefit to the local community from having a valuable resource on its doorstep.

Although highly valued locally there are no national or international designations on the land incorporating the forest or adjoining ground. It is adjacent however to protected areas. The sea surrounding the peninsula is part of the Inner Hebrides and the Minches Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which is designated for harbour porpoises. The area affords excellent views of The Cuillin Hills National Scenic Area which is also designated a Special Protection Area (SPA) for hosting 8 breeding pairs of golden eagles.

The most important conservation interest in the forest is the presence of a pair of sea eagles, also known as white-tailed eagles. They are the UK's largest bird of prey, with a wingspan of up to 2.5m. Following their reintroduction to Scotland on the Isle of Rum in the 1970's the territory in Orbost was the 3rd to become occupied in Skye in the 1980s. The birds build eyries in mature trees and therefore mature forestry plantations can be attractive, particularly in the absence of alternative trees.

Sea eagles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Nature Conservation Scotland Act 2004. Breaches of the law can result on fines up to £5,000 and/or a prison sentence of 6 months.

Sea eagles and forestry

The presence of white-tailed eagles has implications for forest management which are helpfully addressed in the publication "Managing forests for white-tailed eagles"¹⁸ produced by Forestry Commission Scotland in 2011. The guidance emphasises the protection in law that the birds have, the risks of specific forestry operations at certain times of year and how to manage and mitigate potential impacts.

Core to the guidance is the provision of a 500m protection zone around nests. During the period 1st February to 31st August. In the Inner Zone (within 250m of the nest) most activities should normally be avoided during this time. In the Outer Zone (250m-500m) limited activities of most work is possible, including felling and other machinery linked operations. These limitations are not blanket ones and site specific solutions can be considered. The guidance states *"If the measures recommended in the tables do not seem appropriate in the context of your site or operation, seek advice from SNH on whether your circumstances (e.g. local topography, the nature of your operation) mean that alternative prescriptions would be suitable."*

Roost sites are not protected but it is illegal to harass white-tailed eagles while roosting. Therefore *"...it is not illegal to thin or fell a roost site as part of a legitimate silvicultural operation. If work near a roost site is necessary, a reasonable precaution to avoid a risk of harassing white-tailed eagles would be to avoid forestry operations, activities or recreational events within 250 m of an active roost site during the period from two hours before sunset until two hours after sunrise."*

¹⁸ Managing forests for white-tailed eagles - Forest Research

It is recommended that forest managers develop nest management plans in consultation with SNH. *In extremis* this can include the removal of trees with nests “*If wind blow risk makes clear felling the only option for the site, the management plan should include the provision of two or three alternative sites as close as possible...*”. The guidance goes on to give 2 nest plan examples – one of which involves constructing two artificial nests and the other keeping a 2ha stand of trees as a long-term retention. It states clearly though that “*... providing nest sites does not allow you to destroy existing nests built by white-tailed eagles.*”

This guidance, and discussions with the local RSPB representative suggest that limitations on felling and general operations are significantly less over the long term than DCT had been led to believe. In addition, community ownership would offer greater opportunities for local people to be involved in managing white-tailed eagles and improving their habitat.

Sea eagles and people

They are impressive birds to see in flight and are very appealing to young people and to visitors who have not experienced them elsewhere.

Local communities can benefit from enabling visitors to experience eagles in a controlled way. Communities on Rum have developed viewing platforms and special tours that require a trip in a minibus along lengthy forest tracks to arrive at the viewing site. This form of visit has the advantage of generating revenue for local guides but also limiting self-guided trips because the distances involved in walking are quite lengthy. That particular form of viewing may not be appropriate in Orbst but the principles underlying it could be used to generate income through guided walks led to a specific location from which the sea eagles can be observed.

The North Harris Trust is a community owned estate on the Isle of Harris. It has created a golden eagle observatory from which eagles can be observed in flight most days. It acts as a location to which people can go (thereby limiting the attraction of more sensitive spots) and provides shelter for them while they are there. DCT could look to create a similar structure in the area beyond the mature forest which would both enable people to view eagles while they were foraging but also provide a place of shelter from which to enjoy the view of the coastline heading south from Dunvegan and over to the Cuillin.

Access & Tourism

Residents of Skye know only too well that tourism brings both benefits and disadvantages. It can generate income for local businesses and the economy but also lead to large numbers of people descending on specific locations, causing problems with parking and littering. Local residents have emphasised the value they place on Orbst as a beautiful place that does not get overwhelmed. Therefore any ‘developments’ at Orbst would need to be carried out carefully in order to avoid losing its innate qualities.

Tourism numbers can be managed in part by limiting available parking and by not supporting unauthorised vehicular access to the beach. Several residents expressed concerns over incidents such as a group of several cars driving down to the beach and camping for several days and occasional individuals taking large campervans down the road. Taken in isolation, such incidents can be minor but collectively they have the effect of diminishing the experience for others who walk to the beach and forest. They also risk setting precedents that are circulated on social media and camping websites creating greater problems in the future.

The law is clear that no-one has a right to take a vehicle on to private land without the owner's permission. However, enforcing the law can sometimes be a challenge. The simplest way is to put a gate on a road and, if necessary, add a lock to it. That however can inconvenience those who have a right to use the road such as residents and workers. Ultimately any problems are best addressed by agreement between users and the landowner. This is not an issue that DCT would directly be responsible for because the access road will not be in DCT's ownership if it purchases the forest, but it will have a deed of servitude giving right of access granted by HIE.

The informal use of the farmyard for car parking has worked up until the present time, although there have been issues. In order to stop people using the yard as a toilet the farm tenant has made a portacabin toilet available at his own expense. At busy times there can be congestion which can impede ordinary activities by local people. It is also inherently risky to park in a farmyard as moving farm vehicles carrying loads such as bales or handling equipment can have poor visibility. Therefore, there is the risk of accident, with young children being a particular concern.

It would be possible to create a small car park on the low-lying ground in the Cruachan woodland, immediately opposite the junction with the road to Roag. This would formalise parking and make it safer. However, it would only work if cars were banned from parking up at the farmyard and any found transgressing were pointed back to the new car park. The additional 200m of distance for people coming for a walk should be acceptable. Similar schemes in areas where parking has been limited have generally been well accepted where there is a viable alternative.

If the community were to create a new road access for the purpose of timber extraction (See Section 7) it would be possible to create a car park somewhere along the length of that road. This would have the benefit of removing vehicles from Orbost itself. However, the siting of any new provision would need to be considered carefully to avoid making the forest too accessible and risking undue disturbance to the sea eagles. At the same time, a car park too far away would encourage some people to continue using the Orbost farmyard for parking. The creation of a forest road would create a 4km circular walk to Bharcasaig bay and back. Any new provision would require agreement with HIE in consultation with the farm tenant.

Path Improvement

The existing forest track from Glen Bharcasaig is in good condition for walkers for about 1.5km until it switches to a simple path for the rest of the route southwards. In places this is poorly drained and badly eroded as a result. Therefore, it would benefit from work to improve its condition. Where possible walkers like circular routes to add to the interest of a trip, as opposed to a simple walk out and back. It would not be wise to try to create a circular route in Glen Bharcasaig because of the resident sea eagle interest. However, the land around Forse is an open bowl which offers good views towards the Cuillin and the creation of a loop may be possible in the longer term there. There is an existing track shown on the OS map that heads up to an access to the open hill at Grid Ref NG 246407. Further south there is a firebreak in the plantings that could allow a path to be created, rejoining the existing path near Beinn na Moine at Grid ref: NG 250398.

These improvements could be made with cyclists in mind too. Demand is no longer just for challenging downhill mountain bike routes but there is an increasing demand for more moderate trail routes as well. DCT has been working with the Skye Cycle Network to consult on improving cycle access and safety in the Dunvegan area. There is an opportunity to link into this work and develop routes for cyclists through the forest and beyond. The OS mapping shows a route following the coast from Orbost to Ramasaig at the end of the Glendale road. There may be the potential to improve this as a joint project in conjunction with the Glendale Trust. Improving cycling opportunities could create opportunities for cycle hire/repair or other businesses in the longer term.

Many community trusts have carried out access improvements for their local communities and have been able to raise funds from public sources and private trusts to cover most, or all of the costs involved.

Tourism Accommodation

A forest of the size of Orbost offers the opportunity for a range of uses which it is possible to separate by distance so that users do not interfere with one another's enjoyment of the forest. Providing a limited amount of tourism accommodation has the potential to provide a steady income stream that can help to support activities that are beneficial to the community such as maintaining paths and training young people in rural skills.

The use of pods/cabins/shepherd's huts has increased markedly in recent years and are a low capital way of entering the tourism accommodation market for those who have access to land. When pods were introduced, they were very much aimed at the budget end of the market, such as walkers or cyclists who would normally stay in a tent. In recent years they have increasingly gone upmarket seeking to offer a facility that is close to that offered by traditional self-catering accommodation. Serving the more basic end of the market may be appropriate at this site for 2 reasons: First, the ethos that the community is seeking to adopt is one of sustainable living and respect for the environment. To that end simple facilities would require fewer resources and could be marketed on the basis of a simple experience in the woods – not bringing luxury with you. Secondly, while the demand for accommodation seems to be far greater than supply the community would want to be seen to be avoiding unnecessary competition with other local businesses. The existing business in Orbost offering similar accommodation is already targeting the higher end of the market.

A cluster of 4 pods/cabins could be serviced by an extra pod containing toilet and shower facilities. There would be potential to locate the cluster somewhere in the trees beyond Bharcasaig Bay. Electricity could be supplied via an underground cable from the existing line, with water needing to be sourced from a watercourse and treated using a private system. Access for vehicles could either be via the existing track or via the new forest track as envisaged in 2 of the woodland development options. If the former, while there would be increased use of the track, there would also be an increased contribution to maintenance.

A key consideration in making any decision on the siting of holiday accommodation would be the potential impact upon the resident sea eagle pair. Therefore, as part of any consideration of such an option DCT would want to discuss any proposal with NatureScot and RSPB.

Community Renewables

Community groups across Scotland have successfully developed renewable energy schemes and incorporated renewables into buildings they have constructed over the past 20 years. There was some interest expressed in this during the community consultation event.

Micro Hydro

A number of communities have successfully developed hydro schemes with ones currently being installed in Raasay and Sleat. These have developed with assistance from the Feed-In Tariff (FIT) regime operated by the UK Government. The scheme is now closed to new applications but continues to operate for those who have already installed renewable energy schemes.

Under the FIT regime the owner of a renewables installation is paid a feed-in tariff rate for each kilowatt hour (or unit) of electricity that is produced. The FIT rate varies according to the type of renewables technology, the size of the installation and the date on which it was commissioned. At the beginning of the scheme the rates were high to encourage investment and create a bigger market for renewables. This, in turn, was expected to create efficiencies in production of renewables equipment that would reduce unit costs.

This approach worked particularly well for solar PV where installation costs of £17-20,000 for a 4kw installation subsequently fell to c.£5,000 over a 5-year period as mass production took effect. The same effect has not occurred with hydro. Each hydro system has to be individually designed to take account of the particular local conditions and therefore capital costs have not reduced in the same way as for solar or wind.

In the absence of FIT payments it is much more difficult to create a viable business model for a new micro-hydro scheme. There can be some offsetting of the loss of FIT income through the sale of electricity direct to a business that has a high energy demand, but as a rule, not enough to compensate for the loss of FIT.

The output of a hydro scheme depends upon 2 key factors: the overall flow of water and the head (or vertical distance between the weir and turbine house). The best flow of water in Orbst forest is in the Abhainn Bharcasaig. However, the gradient in the glen is relatively shallow rising by only about 40m over a 1km distance. A head of 80-100m over a similar distance would create 2 to 2.5 times more power. As a relatively high cost and low output site it is likely that a scheme in Glen Bharcasaig would require a considerable level of subsidy.

We are not aware of any community micro-hydro schemes currently being planned. However, it is possible that a future government will introduce an alternative regime that is favourable to community development, in which case further consideration can be given to assets in community ownership.

Wind

Forests are generally not amenable to the development of wind energy generation and some schemes have involved the removal of tree cover to maximise flow of wind to the turbines. Wind turbines produce best when situated on the summit of a hill or ridge and can receive wind from all directions.

The land in Orbst is generally easterly facing and so is protected from the wind (hence the reason for planting trees) so the area is generally not favourable to wind energy development.

Solar

As noted above the costs of solar PV have fallen dramatically in recent times. In some cases large solar farms are now viable without subsidy but smaller ones are not. We are aware of a study for a community group elsewhere in Scotland which demonstrated viability for a 5MW scheme on a favourable site (easy access, available grid connection, gently sloping south facing land). These conditions do not apply in Orbst .

While a commercial scheme is unlikely to be viable in Orbst building level solar PV is becoming more common and can be helpful in providing power. Designing a building for drying sawn timber with a south facing roof and incorporating solar PV could enable much of the drying to be carried out with minimal need to use grid electricity.

7. Orbost Forest Community Management Scenarios

Introduction

The scenarios outlined below are intended to inform the Dunvegan Community Trust in their deliberations regarding the purchase of Orbost Forest from Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and to present options for managing the forest for timber revenue, sustainable forest management, local employment, visitor management and local development opportunities. The financial projections in the accompanying spreadsheets are estimates, with costs and revenues extrapolated from other forest management situations and from discussions with local fuel wood and national timber buyers.

Orbost Forest is a very particular forest in a rather unusual setting with constrained access and as such the financial projections are illustrative and should not be regarded as definitive, rather seen as rough guides to what could be done with the forest and its access.

Orbost forest scenarios

Three scenario types were prepared as examples of what forest management may look like under different scales and intensities of management and to try and quantify potential socio-economic benefits – in this case employment and revenue - which may accrue from community management of Orbost Forest. It is worth stressing that there are many permutations within and between these scenarios and as such they are flexible and not set in stone. The scenarios differ in scale and types of forest management,

1. A High Impact Scenario, with large scale forest removals through clearfelling, as outlined in the current Long Term Forest Plan (LTFP) prepared by Tilhill Forestry Ltd on behalf of HIE.
2. A Moderate Impact Scenario, where the forest is managed with smaller felling coupes.
3. A Low Impact Scenario, where the forest is managed on a continual thinning regime, mimicking a Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) or Low Impact Silvicultural System (LISS).

A cautionary word. Whilst Scenario 1. would have significant landscape and environmental consequences and could risk damaging the feel, appearance, and biodiversity of the forest, Scenarios 2 & 3 have a high risk of wind damage to the forest, which may not necessarily result in significant landscape or environmental consequences.

Marine timber extraction

Scenario 1 is predicated on large scale timber felling and removal, with maritime timber transport by barge, converted ferry or landing craft. The techniques for marine timber transport include.

- Running landing craft on to Bharcasaig beach which can accommodate two timber lorries, which are loaded on the beach, run back on the landing craft, then discharge at a pier or a slip, such as at Carbost¹⁹, after which the timber moves by road to its destination, such as BSW at Corpach.
- A converted ferry (the Red Princess) which can take circa 700 tonnes of timber can be moored to a concrete pier²⁰. Such a pier would cost a six-figure sum to install and may be eligible for a Timber Transport Fund grant. The ferry would travel to the BSW mill at Corpach or beyond.

¹⁹ [Ferguson Shipping & Distribution Scotland & Ireland, Integrated Transport \(fergusontransport.co.uk\)](http://fergusontransport.co.uk)

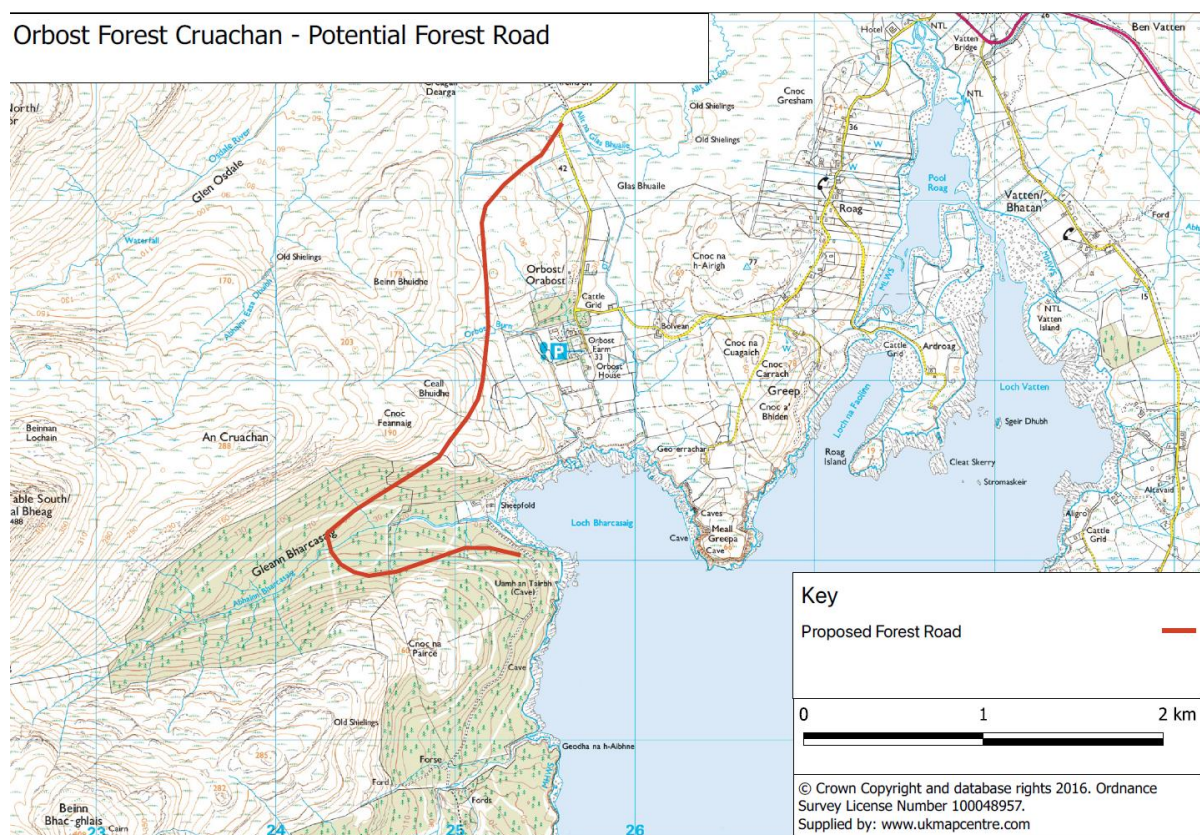
²⁰ [Remote Timber- The Challenge | Tilhill Forestry](#)

The marine option relies on large scale felling and timber removal from the forest, the current LTFP has felling in two stages – approx. 100ha soon (Phase 1) and a further 50ha (Phase 3) beyond 2038. It was mooted to HIE, by an independent consultant, that the most cost-effective management option for Orbost forest was to remove all merchantable timber in one felling operation, which would entail felling approximately 150 hectares of forest, effectively Phase 1 and Phase 3 of the Tilhill LTFP combined.

New forest road

Scenarios 2 and 3 are reliant on the construction of a new forest road, potentially from the corner of the unclassified road (NG256445), across hill ground on Orbost Estate, below and east of Beinn Bhuidhe, to access the forest south of Cnoc Feannaig (Map 2). This would be a Category 1a forest road, capable of taking timber lorries, including passing places, and turning bays.

Map 2: Indicative route for new forest road



In the event of a new forest road being built it is likely that Highland Council would wish improvements to be made to the single-track road from Orbost to Lonmore via the short section of B884, and an allowance has been made in the costings for new passing places and surface improvements works. Such an access would cost a six-figure sum, currently estimated at less than half a million pounds of which 50% may be available through the Timber Transport Fund funding from the Scottish Government. The TTF made an award in the north of Skye in 2016 to create the Waternish – Greshornish haul road, approximately 25% of £280,000²¹.

²¹ [New forest road removes timber lorries from Skye route | Press and Journal](#)

The Orbst to Lonmore section of road is designated as a Consultation Route by the Timber Transport Forum²², and as such, at the discretion of the local authority, it may be used for timber transport²³.

Wood fuel

Based on discussions with a local wood fuel supplier on Skye and estimates of the scale of timber he requires annually a new forest road would allow for the sale of 1000t timber for local firewood supply.

Windblown trees are in, some respects, good for firewood due to its greater calorific value as a result of reduced moisture content, which could suit community's interests, realising money for dry timber that is unsuitable for timber processing, but is ideal for firewood supply.

Employment

All three scenarios include part time workers – a forester/project officer, a forest craftsman and an administrator – with time input for all three posts increasing from lowest in Scenario 1 to highest in Scenario 3. This reflects the more complex nature of forest management in Scenarios 2 and 3 and the inclusion of fence repair and rural skills training courses in these two scenarios.

New native woodland

New woodland creation is possible on the open hill ground within the Orbst Forest land holding, as at Idrigill and Brandarsaig, and each of the three scenarios has a notional 20 hectares of new native woodland creation included. New native woodland planting can attract carbon credits, as was the case with Joe Strummer's Rebel Wood at Brandarsaig (estimated at £26,000), and a line could be added to the financial projections with estimates of potential carbon income if the community were supportive.

Sea eagles

The impact of Sea eagles and their nests on the clearfell harvesting operations is unclear. It is anticipated that clearfell harvesting will not be carried out within a 250 metre radius of the nests and timber harvesting may need to be scheduled to coincide when eagles are not in residence.

Scenarios

Scenario 1 - High Impact

This scenario would result in the most significant physical and visual impact to the forest, with some 100 hectares of forest being clearfelled in Phase 1 and timber transported off site as a Standing Sale. Whilst this option is the most drastic in respect of forest disturbance it does not require the construction of a new forest road, it avoids the risks of windblow in the older stands of trees but it does incur significant restocking (replanting costs).

Some of the assumptions used in the scenario modelling are:

- No new access into the Orbst forest i.e., the existing track is a limiting factor in terms of vehicle access and timber removals.

²² [Agreed Route Map for Timber Transport Forum \(arcgis.com\)](#)

²³ Recognised as key to timber extraction but which are not up to Agreed Route standard. Consultation with Local Authority is required and it may be necessary to agree limits of timing, allowable tonnage etc. before the route can be used. B-roads and minor roads are classified as Consultation Routes by default unless covered by one of the other TTG classifications below.

- All movements relating to timber felling and extraction will be by large machine (processors and forwarders) within Orbost Forest and thence by marine transport from the beach in Bharcasaig Bay.
- Two part time (p/t) posts created and a potential third p/t post, relating to forest management which could be contracted to a forest management company such as Tilhill.
- One p/t post for a forest craftsperson, to carry out forest maintenance, management and timber related work.
- The existing access upgraded and a small car park, with signage installed locally, say at Cruachan wood.
- Firewood sale to a local firewood wholesaler would not be possible due to the state of the existing access track and the presumption against timber lorry movements along it.
- Capital equipment, including a mobile sawmill purchased for processing larch into cladding and beams - can be used to produce material for the Forestry Building.
- A timber building erected in the forest to act as a forest store for tools, sawn timber and as a wet weather working alternative for the forest craftsperson.
- Restocking costs for native broadleaved planting, protected from deer by careful deer management.
- Timber income, from Standing Sale, based on estimates derived from local timber harvesting company and whilst current may not apply in two / three years.
- 20ha of new native woodland created.

Scenario 2 - Moderate Impact

This scenario is based on small scale patch felling within the forest, carried out over two-time tranches – 2022 to 2027 and from 2032 to 2042. The first 5-year felling period has annual felling areas of 10 hectares, this may be more than one felling coupe, and the second tranche, spread over 11 years of 5 hectares per annum, may also be composed of smaller coupes.

This scenario is higher risk than the High Impact Scenario, in that the use of small felling coupes in an already windblown forest, may exacerbate wind blow and potentially compromise the standing timber value. However, there are wind firm edges within Orbost forest and because of the manner in which the forest was planted, in small coupes of different species, it is possible that windblow may not markedly increase.

Some of the assumptions used in the scenario modelling are:

- A new access into the Orbost forest which accommodates timber lorries.
- Timber lorry movement is at the discretion of Highland Council and may rely on an upgrade to the Orbost-Lonmore public road (bigger lay bys and resurfacing).
- Three part time (p/t) posts created, with a Project Officer to deal with forest management and oversee a young people's rural skills training and volunteering.
- A forest craftsperson post at 3 days per week, tasks include forest maintenance such as fence repair, general forest management and timber related work as well as input to the Rural Skills training and volunteering.
- The existing forest track is upgraded (within the forest).

- Firewood sale to a local firewood wholesaler estimated to total 1,000 tonnes per annum starting in year 2. The first 5 years of supply from areas of windblow, which contain wood of lower moisture content than standing timber, and which may not require a felling licence.
- Capital equipment, including a mobile sawmill purchased for processing larch into cladding and beams which can be used to produce material for the Forestry Building.
- A timber building is erected in the forest to act as a forest store for tools, sawn timber and as a wet weather working alternative for the forest craftsman and trainees.
- Restocking costs exceed £300k worth of native broadleaved planting, protected from deer by careful deer management and fence repair.
- The first tranche of patch felling for timber sales estimated at 10ha per annum (2023-2027), an additional 5ha per annum of windblow for firewood; the second tranche of felling for timber of smaller coupes – 5 hectares in total per annum- from 2032-2042. Firewood fellings undertaken annually.
- 20ha of new native woodland created.

Scenario 3 - Low Impact

This scenario is based on a Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) or Low Impact Silviculture (LISS) management system whereby the forest is continuously thinned year on year, as opposed to areas of clearfelling.

This scenario, as with the Moderate Impact Scenario, is higher risk than the High Impact Scenario. Thinning trees results in more wind turbulence across the forest canopy (more space between trees) and this may result in more windblow, although it may be a risk the community are willing to accept. The advantage of this scenario is that thinning does not result in large new clearings in the forest, does not disturb wildlife, such as Sea eagles, to the same extent as clear felling and provides a more smoothed (annual) income stream than the irregular lumps of income through clearfell. It also means that there are no large restocking costs, relying on a mixture of regeneration and underplanting at low densities.

Some of the assumptions used in the scenario modelling are:

- New access into the Orbst forest which accommodates timber lorries.
- Timber lorry movement is at the discretion of Highland Council and may rely on an upgrade to the Orbst-Lonmore public road.
- Three part time (p/t) posts created, with a Project Officer to deal with forest management and oversee a young people's rural skills training and volunteering.
- The forest craftsman post 3 days per week, tasks include forest maintenance such as fence repair, general forest management and timber related work as well as input to the Rural Skills training and volunteering.
- The existing forest track upgraded (within the forest).

- Firewood sale to a local firewood wholesaler estimated to total 1,000 tonnes per annum starting in year 2. The first 5 years of supply from areas of windblow, which contain wood of lower moisture content than standing timber, and which do not require a felling licence.
- Capital equipment, including a mobile sawmill purchased for processing larch into cladding and beams, which can be used to construct the Forestry Building.
- A timber building erected in the forest to act as a forest store for tools, sawn timber and as a wet weather working alternative for the forest craftsperson and trainees.
- Underplanting of native broadleaves, with careful deer management and regular fence repair. Natural regeneration may include Sitka spruce, larch, Noble fir and pine species.
- Forest management comprising continuous thinning – estimated at 30% of the standing crop (this will vary depending on site conditions and stand age/stability). Thinning for timber sales likely include an area of 20ha, felling for firewood for the first five years in areas of windblow.
- 20ha of new native woodland created.

Note

As mentioned above, there are permutations within and between these scenarios and there is a further relevant scenario, not described, which is that the forest is bought and then left relatively unmanaged by the community. This scenario has been discussed with the community and it was advised that such a strategy would be unlikely to gain the support of the Scottish Land Fund or other potential funders (who would want to see active management for community benefit) and therefore has not been presented.

Liabilities

There are a few liabilities that the community should be aware of – these liabilities exist regardless of the different scenarios above.

1. Outstanding restocking obligations in Cpts. 6 and 4. There is a legal obligation for felled forest to be replanted and the stocking post felling in these cpts. have suffered from heavy deer browsing and potential nutrient deficiencies. Scottish Forestry, the legal forestry authority, have the power to insist on full restocking to meet their Felling Licence contract.
2. There has been significant failure across the new native woodland planting at Idrigil and Brandersaig. As above, Scottish Forestry have the power to either a. insist that the area is fully stocked, as per the original Woodland Grant Scheme, or b. for the landowner to repay the original grant for the failed areas.
3. As per the above new native woodland planting. There is a signed carbon crediting contract with Future Forests, now the Carbon Neutral Company, which is akin to a land burden, and it contains legally enforceable obligations on the forest owner to ensure that some 80 hectares of new native woodland is established and grows to maturity over a 99-year period. Failure to do so will result in the forest owner being obliged to supply a similar quantity of woodland based carbon credits from another site in the locality. The sum paid to HIE was £34,275.00 plus VAT.

Discussion

In deciding which, (if any) scenario to pursue the community will want to consider what its long term objectives will be, what value it places upon different opportunities, and the likelihood of being able to successfully raise funds to purchase and then sustainably manage the forest.

As mentioned above, there are permutations within and between these scenarios and there is a further relevant scenario, not described above, which is that the forest is bought and then left relatively unmanaged by the community. This scenario was discussed with the community and it was advised that such a strategy would be highly unlikely to receive support from the Scottish Land Fund or other potential funders and therefore has not been presented. To receive funding from SLF the community will have to demonstrate active management and increased community benefit in proportion to the amount of public funding received.

Scenario 1 will result in approximately 0.7 full time equivalent (fte) posts being created, a shed for tools and drying timber being constructed and approximately 20ha of new woodland being planted.

Scenarios 2 & 3 would create increased employment of 1.2 and 1.4 ftes respectively. Each of these scenarios would also create new training opportunities for 2-4 local young people, provide 1000t of firewood per year for the local market and improve access to the site. Improved access would also allow the use of the forest as a forest school for children from Dunvegan Primary School. Both of these scenarios are predicated upon the construction of a new road access to the forest that bypasses the current settlement.

Over and above the core forestry activities the provision of forest crofts and housing opportunities would enhance the benefits arising within the local community. These are likely to arise to a greater extent with Scenarios 2 & 3 where quality access enables easier working within the forest. The full benefits of potential community ownership are considered in more detail in the next Section.

8. Benefits of Community Ownership

The potential benefits of community ownership, as opposed to the current model (whether operated by HIE or a future private owner) are manifold. The overarching benefit is community control to ensure that the forest is managed to deliver sustainable (in economic, environmental and social terms) community and wider public benefits²⁴. Subsidiary benefits that would arise from this approach in Orbst include:

- Avoidance of absentee landowner neglect
- Move away from clear felling to continuous cover forestry. This will create a better forest mosaic and avoid the severe landscape impacts associated with clear felling.
- Improved diversity of tree species
- Enhanced carbon storage over a longer time period with continual tree cover. A greater volume of tree biomass maintains a large carbon sink on site
- Enhanced habitat for sea eagles and community empowerment in their management
- A more sustainably managed habitat beneficial for a wider range of plant and animal species
- The supply of 1000t of timber/year to a local business of higher calorific value logs at a lower moisture content, reducing drying needs. This will result in reduced carbon emissions.
- The purchase by local people of drier fuelwood with reduced road miles, higher calorific value, and reduced particulate emissions. This results in more efficient heating and reduced emissions.
- The creation of new woodland crofts and new housing opportunities for local people
- New employment and training opportunities
- Improved access for local people and visitors to the forest and to Macleod's Tables.

²⁴ See for example: New report reveals leading role played by community landowners in tackling the Climate Emergency (communitylandscotland.org.uk)

9. Financial summary

Three scenarios have been considered on the basis of differing levels of impact:

- High - Phase 1 felling in 2023 as per Tilhill (97.5ha Gross area), and in 2038 (43.22ha Gross area) maritime extraction, no firewood sales, no new road, use of existing track
- Medium - Patch clearfell, new road, training, small scale timber processing and firewood sales
- Low - Continual thinning, new road, training, small scale timber processing and firewood sales

Scenario 1 has been considered in terms of whether it relates to the existing forestry, new forestry activity and other new activities, but scenarios 2 & 3 are significantly different from the existing forestry that this element has been removed from the projections. The overall position is summarised in Table 13 below:

Table 13: Financial Summary

21 YEAR POSITION	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
Impact	High	Medium	Low
Income	721,639	3,202,406	3,808,339
Expenditure	1,009,762	2,850,695	3,284,298
Net surplus	(288,123)	351,711	524,041
DCT Contribution	306,000	-	-
Remaining surplus	17,877	351,711	524,041

Scenario 1 requires an ongoing subsidy towards the operation of the Orbost forest, but the other scenarios do not require a subsidy and are both financially viable.

In both scenarios 2 & 3 there is a need for a cashflow facility, particularly in the initial stage of the project to cover the cost of installing a road. Triodos Bank have experience of lending to community groups in these circumstances.

Assumptions for the illustrative scenarios are included on the spreadsheet for each scenario with 2% annual inflation factored into both costs and income (but not grants).

10. Skills Audit of Trust directors

Skills Survey of DCT Board Members

This section presents and discusses findings from the skills survey that was conducted as part of the feasibility study. The purpose of the survey was to analyse what skills exist within the Trust's Board to manage the development of Orbost Forest under community ownership. The online survey was sent to all Directors and a total of 8 responses were received.

Time Commitment to support the Trust's work regarding the assets

Respondents were asked to indicate what time commitment they would be willing to give to the Trust regarding the purchase and development of Orbost Forest. Table 14 below shows survey responses in that regard.

Attend some meetings	5 (62.50%)
Attend all meetings	2 (25%)
+ less than 1 hour per week	1 (12.50%)
+ 1-3 hours per week	4 (50%)
+ 3-6 hours per week	1 (12.50%)
+ more than 6 hours per week	0
Unable to give any time commitment at all	1 (12.50%)

As the table shows, there is a willingness on the part of respondents to make substantial time commitments to assist in taking a buyout of the forest forward over the next 6 to 12 months. Five respondents are prepared to attend some meetings. Two respondents indicate they would be prepared to attend all meetings and four indicated they would be prepared to spend an additional 1-3 hours per week. One respondent indicated that they will not be able to give any time commitment at all but would help where they could with specific skills if the Board lacks capacity.

The above survey findings indicate that the Trust's Board are prepared to commit a substantial amount of time to the purchase and development of the forest.

Profile of Respondents' Skills

The main part of the survey focused on identifying respondents' strengths and weaknesses regarding a range of generic and specific management and development skills of relevance to community ownership of the forest. The survey results in that regard are presented in table 15 and discussed below.

The table uses a 'traffic light' coding system to illustrate the level of skills regarding each category depending on responses. Categories marked in **green** have been identified by one or more respondents as one of their primary skills areas. Categories marked in **amber** have been identified by one or more respondents as an area where they have a basic knowledge (in the absence of any respondents identifying the category as a primary skills area). Categories marked in **red** have been identified by all respondents as areas where they have no expertise.

Table 15: Skills Survey Responses

Skills Area	No expertise	Basic knowledge	A primary skills area
Project development	4	1	1
Project management	4	1	1
Managing a business	2	3	2
Managing staff	1	3	2
Chairing/Facilitating meetings	3	1	2
Community consultation and engagement	3	2	1
HR issues (employment law, employment contracts, recruitment etc)	3	2	1
Managing consultants	4	1	1
Running a campaign	3	2	1
Use of computer packages (Word, Excel etc)	0	4	3
Designing websites	3	2	1
Using social media	0	3	3
Marketing/PR on behalf of a business organisation	4	0	2
Representing an organisation to elected Council Members, MSPs etc.	5	1	0
Using and running IT systems above the level of a single PC	3	3	0
Working with public sector organisations	3	3	0
Preparing business plans and strategies	4	2	0
Lease/Wayleave contract negotiations	5	1	0
Preparing financial accounts	2	4	0
Charities and Companies House Returns	5	1	0
Renewable energy development	5	1	0
Woodlands crofts development	5	1	0
Hutting	4	2	0
Developing pods/cabins	4	2	0
Small-scale timber extraction	6	0	0
Large-scale timber extraction	6	0	0
Woodland development	6	0	0
Native woodland species restoration	6	0	0
Forest schools/classrooms	6	0	0
Access and interpretation	6	0	0
Housing development	6	0	0
Developing mountain bike trails	6	0	0
Conveyancing/legal aspects of Land and/or Asset Purchase	6	0	0

These colour-coding classifications are basic and the sample size of respondents is small. Nevertheless, they provide a clear indication of where collective strengths and weaknesses lie in terms of relevant skills for managing and developing the forest, should the Trust decide to purchase it. It should also be noted that there will be other skills and experience within the community which may be available for the Trust to draw upon following a successful purchase of the forest.

The survey results indicate that respondents have a high level of capacity in relation to a number of generic and specialist skills categories of relevance to the management and development of assets. At least one respondent identified the following as among their primary skills: *'project development and management'*; *'managing a business'*; *'managing staff'*; *'chairing/facilitating meetings'*; *'community consultation and engagement'*; *'human resources'*; *'managing consultants'*; *'running a campaign'*; *'use of computer packages'*; *'designing websites'*; *'using social media'*; and *'marketing/PR on behalf of a business organisation'*.

At least one respondent indicated that they had basic knowledge in relation to the following skills areas: *'organisational representation'*; *'IT systems'*; *'working with public sector organisations'*; *'preparing business plans and strategies'*; *'preparing financial accounts'*; *'charities and company house returns'*; *'renewable energy development'*; *'woodland crofts development'*; *'hutting'*; and *'pods/cabins' development'*.

No respondents identifying as having any expertise in relation to *'large or small-scale timber extraction'*; *'woodland development'*; *'native woodland species restoration'*; *'forest schools/classrooms'*; *'access and interpretation'*; *'housing development'*; *'developing mountain bike trails'* and *'conveyancing/legal aspects of land and/or asset purchase'*.

In addition to the above, one respondent stated on response to an 'open' question that they perceived the Trust to have skills gaps in relation to "woodland experience, community engagement [and] project support".

Summary

The skills survey indicates that the Trust's Board is relatively well positioned in relation to several generic skills areas of relevance to managing land assets and has some capacity in relation to a range of other relevant areas, including *'renewable energy development'*, *'woodland crofts development'*, *'hutting'*, and *'pods/cabins' development'*. In contrast, the Board lacks expertise in relation to a range of other possible development options.

It is important to note that other communities have bought woodland without necessarily having forestry experience on their Trust's boards. It should also be noted that in the private sector there is no requirement for forestry expertise prior to purchase of a woodland. Moreover, several development options that may be pursued under community ownership of the forest could involve the Trust, as landowner, performing *'enabling'* or *'partnership'* roles rather than engaging in direct delivery itself. In turn, that may have favourable implications for the levels of skills capacity that the Board might require, depending on the nature of the developments.

The following actions are recommended in order to enable the Board to address skills gaps and enable successful community purchase and development of the forest:

- Recruiting new Board members (either local or non-resident) to augment the skills of existing members, particularly in the area of woodland management;
- Arranging skills training for all Board members in relation to identified areas of need;
- Establishing short-term thematic or topic-specific working groups drawing on wider expertise and capacity within the community;
- Early recruitment of specialist development staff to manage the Trust's activities in relation to core development areas after a buyout is successfully concluded.

11. Purchase Strategy

This study has shown that there are significant community benefits to be gained from community ownership of Orbost Forest. However, there are also risks and if the community wishes to proceed with a purchase DCT will need to approach purchase and development carefully. This will ensure that the potential benefits are achieved and the risks minimised.

The following is an indicative strategy for achieving a successful purchase:

1. **Ensure No Contractual Liabilities.** As outlined earlier in the report there is the potential for liabilities arising under existing planting contracts following inspections which are due in May. DCT should only agree to a purchase once HIE can demonstrate that potential liabilities have been discharged or subject to HIE agreeing to fulfil any contractual obligations at its own expense.
2. **Seek a Valuation Adjustment.** One possible outcome of HIE negotiating with Scottish forestry regarding existing obligations is that grant funds awarded are repaid for specific areas, rather than replanting occurring. In such a case DCT should request that the areas recognised as unplanted or as failed are no longer included in the valuation.
3. **Negotiate additional rights.** Scenarios 2 & 3 are not achievable unless DCT has the right to construct a new forest road over the remainder of the HIE estate. Therefore, DCT should seek a Deed of Servitude to allow this to happen. If DCT wishes to create a significant number of crofts the option to purchase a site for houses for new crofters would be beneficial.
4. **Negotiate a Discount.** DCT should ask HIE for a discount on the purchase price based on an assessment of the social and environmental benefits that community ownership will deliver.
5. **Apply to purchase using a Community Asset transfer request.** If DCT uses this mechanism and HIE refuses a sale DCT would have a statutory right of appeal.
6. **Apply for Scottish Land Fund funding for site purchase.** This could be carried out parallel to steps 1 to 5. However, an application will not be considered by the committee for approval until the CAT request has been approved by HIE. Application to approval may take 6 months or longer depending upon negotiations with HIE.

12. Funding Sources for Acquisition and Development

Acquisition

The main source of public funding for purchase of Orbost Forest will be the **Scottish Land Fund**, which has a £10 million annual budget to support community purchases of land and associated eligible assets. It can provide up to 95% of eligible purchase costs. However, any application for funding of over £1 million has to be approved by the relevant Scottish Government Minister and a grant greater than £1m is only made in exceptional circumstances. During the last programme cycle only one award of more than £1m was made, going to the North West Mull Community Woodland Company (NWMWCW) for its purchase of the Isle of Ulva. This occurred during the early part of the programme when demands on funds were relatively low. Pressure on funds increased in later years and other requests over £1m were declined.

It is difficult to envisage a new SLF committee awarding more than £1m for the purchase of Orbost forest taking into account the facts that the local community is not on the point of collapse (as Ulva was), and that there are no nationally important conservation designations on the site. A potentially significant purchase funding gap means that DCT will have to explore alternative means to bridge that gap. The first option will be to seek a discount from the seller, Highlands & Islands Enterprise. In considering a discount HIE will take into account issues such as the benefits to arise from community ownership (See section 8) and value to the taxpayer.

Other options are:

Crowdfunding: This is delivered through a range of online platforms including Crowdfunder, Kickstarter and Indiegogo and involves seeking donations from a wide range of people. Some appeals are highly successful, others less so. The concepts of community ownership, conservation management and native woodland planting have the potential to appeal to a wide constituency. Purchase of an existing Sitka dominated plantation forest is likely to be less appealing, even where a transition to a mixed native forest is planned. The most successful appeals make intelligent use of social media to highlight their cause and spread its message far and wide. Such an appeal could be used both to arrange funding for capital purchase and to provide some capital for investment in the estate.

Philanthropy: DCT could seek significant capital donations from individuals who have a connection to the area or who have a particular interest in community-led regeneration of landscapes. Such donations cannot be relied upon and can be unpredictable, but one or more philanthropic donations can make the difference between successful purchase and failure.

Development Funding

The purchase of Orbost Forest is not an end in itself. Consequently, significant resources are going to be required to develop the forest resource. The first priority must be to attract funding to enhance the capacity of DCT to develop the forest, via employment of a Forester/Project officer. The second priority is to attract capital to deliver developments. The following are potential funding sources in relation to one or both of these priorities:

The **Scottish Land Fund** allows for a total of £100,000 in revenue funding per applicant over the period of its project. This includes funding given for technical assistance at the pre-acquisition stage

for a maximum of £30,000. The revenue funding may be available for employing staff, training costs, and early items such as insurance.

Scottish Government Regeneration Capital Grant Fund. This fund has been running for some years now and is administered through local authorities. It favours projects with strong community input and community-led projects have been successful in securing funding in recent years. In 2020 Raasay Development Trust secured £442,858 from this fund for a community pontoon project.

Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. The Scottish Government established this fund²⁵, administered by VisitScotland, to assist areas where infrastructure is struggling to cope with tourism pressures. Only local authorities can apply for the funding, but community groups can apply to their local authority for inclusion in an application. Improved parking provision is a common aim of many applications.

Private Grant Making Trusts. There are a wide range of grant making trusts that award funding to community groups and charities delivering socially beneficial projects. Each trust has its own criteria and therefore different trusts will support different projects. A facility to help identify suitable options for any given project is found at <https://fundingscotland.com/>

²⁵ <https://www.visitscotland.org/supporting-your-business/funding/rural-tourism-infrastructure-fund>

Appendix 1 - Community Consultation Survey Findings

This appendix presents the full findings from the community survey conducted between March 14th - 28th 2021.

Number of Responses and Profile of Respondents

The overall number of respondents was 119 with the majority of responses (95) coming from residents of townships in the Dunvegan Community Trust (DCT) area. The response rate by place of residence is shown in table 1.

Township	N	%
Dunvegan	30	25.21
Orbost	9	7.56
Harlosh	25	21.01
Feorlig	7	5.88
Vatten	3	2.52
Roag	17	14.29
Herebost	1	0.84
Horneval	0	0
Greep	0	0
Claigan	1	0.84
Uiginish	2	1.68
Other	24	20.17

'Other' places where respondents resided were mainly located Skye and included: Waternish (2 responses); Torvaig; Ullinish; Struan (3 responses); Ose (2 responses); Kilmuir; Totaig; Edinbane; Portree; Skeabost; Glendale; Fiskavaig; Skinidin; Colbost; and Roskhill. Three respondents resided in Inverness; Edinburgh; and Granton on Spey respectively. One respondent resided in Malvern and Orbost.

Table 2 shows that 20.17% of respondents were members of Dunvegan Community Trust.

	N	%
Yes	24	20.17
No	94	79.83

Table 3 shows that, of those respondents who answered the question regarding their gender, 51.43% were female and 43.81% were male.

	N	%
Female	54	51.43
Male	46	43.81
Other	0	0
Prefer not to say	5	4.76

Table 4 shows that a significant majority of respondents were in the 40-65 years age range. The next highest number of respondents was in the 20-39 years age range. Only 1 person in the 16-19 years age range responded to the survey.

	N	%
16-19	1	0.95
20-39	24	22.86
40-65	60	57.14
Over 65	17	16.19
Prefer not to say	3	2.86

Respondents' Levels of Support for Community Ownership of the Forest

Table 5 shows the overall level of support of community ownership of Orbost Forest in principle.

	N	%
Yes	65	61.90
No	20	19.05
Undecided	20	19.05

Table 6 shows the profile of support for community ownership of the Forest in principle, by townships in the DCT area.

Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	11	50.00	9	40.91	2	9.09	22	100
Orbost	7	77.78	1	11.11	1	12.50	9	100
Harlosh	14	60.87	4	17.39	5	21.74	23	100
Feorlig	2	28.57	1	14.29	4	57.14	7	100
Vatten	1	33.33	1	33.33	1	33.33	3	100
Roag	10	66.67	3	20.00	2	13.33	15	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claigan	1	100.00	0	0	0	0	1	100
Uiginish	2	100.00	0	0	0	0	2	100

Respondents Levels of Support for Specific Development Options

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they were 'supportive', 'unsupportive' or 'undecided' in principle about a number of potential development options in relation to the forest under community ownership. The results are presented in Tables 7 -22 below.

Table 7 shows the overall level of support in principle for a small number of woodland crofts in the forest.

	N	%
Yes	50	48.08
No	26	25.00
Undecided	28	26.92

Table 8 shows the profile of support in principle for a small number of woodland crofts in the forest by townships in the DCT area.

Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	8	36.36	10	45.45	4	18.18	22	100
Orbost	2	22.22	4	44.44	3	33.33	9	100
Harlosh	12	52.17	4	17.39	7	30.43	23	100
Feorlig	6	85.71	1	14.29	0	0	7	100
Vatten	2	66.67	1	33.33	0	0	3	100
Roag	9	60.00	3	20.00	3	20.00	15	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Claigan	0	0	0	0	1	100.00	1	100
Uiginish	2	100.00	0	0	0	0	2	100
Other	9	40.91	3	13.64	10	45.45	22	100

Table 9 shows the overall level of support in principle for using the forest for outdoor education.

	N	%
Yes	83	81.37
No	13	12.75
Undecided	6	5.88

Table 10 shows the profile of support in principle for using the forest for outdoor education, by townships in the DCT area.

Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	14	63.64	5	22.73	3	13.64	22	100
Orbost	8	88.89	1	11.11	0	0	9	100
Harlosh	19	86.36	2	9.09	1	4.55	22	100
Feorlig	5	71.43	1	14.29	1	14.29	7	100
Vatten	2	66.67	1	33.33	0	0	3	100
Roag	13	86.67	2	13.33	0	0	15	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claigan	1	100.00	0	0	0	0	1	100
Uiginish	2	100.00	0	0	0	0	2	100
Other	19	90.48	1	4.76	1	4/76	21	100

Table 11 shows the overall level of support in principle for developing small-scale renewable energy schemes in the forest.

	N	%
Yes	69	67.65
No	19	18.63
Undecided	14	13.73

Table 12 shows the profile of support in principle for developing small-scale renewable energy schemes in the forest, by townships in the DCT area.

Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	13	59.09	9	40.91	0	0	22	100
Orbost	6	66.67	2	22.22	1	11.11	9	100
Harlosh	14	66.67	2	9.52	5	23.81	21	100
Feorlig	5	71.43	1	14.29	1	14.29	7	100
Vatten	1	33.33	1	33.33	1	33.33	3	100
Roag	11	73.33	3	20.00	1	6.67	15	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claigan	0	0	0	0	1	100.00	1	100
Uiginish	2	100.00	0	0	0	0	2	100
Other	17	77.27	1	4.55	4	18.18	22	100

Table 13 shows the overall level of support in principle for small-scale timber harvesting in the forest.

Table 13: Supportive of small-scale timber harvesting (N=102)		
	N	%
Yes	63	61.76
No	25	24.51
Undecided	14	13.73

Table 14 shows the profile of support in principle for small-scale timber harvesting in the forest, by townships in the DCT area.

Table 14: Supportive of small-scale timber harvesting (N=102)								
Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	11	50.00	9	49.91	2	9.09	22	100
Orbost	7	77.78	1	11.11	1	11.11	9	100
Harlosh	11	50.00	5	22.73	6	27.27	22	100
Feorlig	3	42.86	2	28.57	2	28.57	7	100
Vatten	1	33.33	2	66.67	0	0	3	100
Roag	10	66.67	5	33.33	0	0	15	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claigan	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	100
Uiginish	2	100.00	0	0	0	0	2	100
Other	18	85.71	1	4.76	2	9.52	21	100

Table 15 shows the overall level of support in principle for large-scale timber harvesting in the forest.

Table 15: Supportive of large-scale timber harvesting (N=102)		
	N	%
Yes	13	12.75
No	58	56.86
Undecided	31	30.39

Table 16 shows the profile of support in principle for large-scale timber in the forest, by townships in the DCT area.

Table 16: Supportive of large-scale timber harvesting (N=102)								
Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	5	27.73	12	54.55	5	27.73	22	100
Orbost	3	33.33	5	55.56	1	11.11	9	100
Harlosh	1	4.55	13	59.09	8	36.36	22	100
Feorlig	0	0	6	85.71	1	14.29	7	100
Vatten	0	0	3	100.00	0	0	3	100
Roag	1	7.14	8	57.14	5	35.71	14	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claigan	0	0	0	0	1	100.00	1	100
Uiginish	0	0	0	0	2	100.00	2	100
Other	3	13.64	11	50.00	8	36.36	22	100

Table 17 shows the overall level of support in principle for restoring native woodland in the forest.

Table 17: Supportive of restoring native woodland species (N=102)		
	N	%
Yes	83	81.37
No	11	10.78
Undecided	8	7.84

Table 18 shows the profile of support in principle for restoring native woodland species in the forest, by townships in the DCT area.

Table 18: Supportive of restoring native woodland species (N=102)								
Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	16	72.73	4	18.18	2	9.09	22	100
Orbost	8	88.89	1	11.11	0	0	9	100
Harlosh	19	90.48	0	0	2	9.52	21	100
Feorlig	4	57.14	2	28.57	1	14.29	7	100
Vatten	2	66.67	0	0	1	33.33	3	100
Roag	11	73.33	2	13.33	2	13.33	15	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claigan	1	100.00	0	0	0	0	1	100
Uiginish	2	100.00	0	0	0	0	2	100
Other	20	90.91	2	9.09	0	0	22	100

Table 19 shows the overall level of support in principle for enabling small woodland-based businesses to operate in forest.

	N	%
Yes	68	66.02
No	19	18.45
Undecided	16	15.53

Table 20 shows the profile of support in principle for enabling small woodland-based businesses to operate in forest, by townships in the DCT area.

Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	11	50.00	9	40.91	2	9.09	22	100
Orbost	4	44.44	3	33.33	2	22.22	9	100
Harlosh	16	72.73	1	4.55	5	22.73	22	100
Feorlig	5	71.43	1	14.29	1	14.29	7	100
Vatten	2	66.67	1	33.33	0	0	3	100
Roag	10	66.67	3	20.00	2	13.33	15	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claigan	0	0	0	0	1	100	1	100
Uiginish	2	100.00	0	0	0	0	2	100
Other	18	81.82	1	4.55	3	13.64	22	100

Table 21 shows the overall level of support in principle for paths maintenance and development in the forest.

	N	%
Yes	82	80.39
No	12	11.76
Undecided	8	7.84

Table 22 shows the profile of support in principle for paths maintenance and development in the forest, by townships in the DCT area.

Township	Yes		No		Undecided		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	16	76.19	3	14.29	2	9.52	21	100
Orbost	7	77.78	1	11.11	1	11.11	9	100
Harlosh	18	81.82	2	9.09	2	9.09	22	100
Feorlig	4	57.14	2	28.57	1	14.29	7	100
Vatten	2	66.67	1	33.33	0	0	3	100
Roag	13	86.67	2	13.33	0	0	15	100
Herebost	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claigan	1	100.00	0	0	0	0	1	100
Uiginish	2	100.00	0	0	0	0	2	100
Other	19	86.36	1	4.55	2	9.09	22	100

Development Suggestions: 'Open' Responses

Survey respondents were also invited to provide suggestions for managing and/or developing the forest under community ownership in ways that would benefit the community. Their verbatim responses are detailed below.

- Creation of a “remarkable arboretum“ along side the forest itself (education and conservation) Skye is astonishingly short in Nurseries, why not create one ? More accessible paths to the tables notably, but also throughout the forests and moors.
- In the community led estates in Sutherland ... small hydro electric plants have been installed to generate power for local use ... I wonder if this is an option ... Not sure I know enough about the scheme to make proper suggestions about management but effect commercial partnerships, strong local representation plus clear project focussed leadership which has the freedom to innovate within a framework of local responsibility ...
- I could see bike trails set up in the estate,i am sure Danny would be able to advise on the feasibility of that.
- Ive seen Trees for Life involved with helping out & managing on other forest schemes across the Highlands - I wondered if they may offer any future support with managing a forest as large as Orbost? Forest School for school kids
- I would like to see more active tourism opportunities, such as mountain bike/off road cycling.

- Local amenity for recreational use, e.g., pathways opened up, cycling tracks. Woodland crofts.
- Guided walks and cycle trails
- Wildlife and/or conservation centre (sea eagles?)? Education centre? Bothy / bothies?
- I would like to see conservation of the area prioritised and a plan in place to protect the unique and diverse ecosystems of the area and sustain them for future generations. My own experience walking and exploring in the area has opened up my mind to the vast number of lichen and bird species there, but I know there will be many more unique and precious habitats for flora, fauna and coastal marine life that require delicate nurturing if they are to survive. It is the wildness of the area that I treasure most, and the peace it offers, when so much of Skye has become over-touristed and been poorly maintained as a result. I would like to see a focus on environmental education and accessibility - offering accessible paths for buggy and wheelchair users, or those with limited mobility, in addition to wild trails which would open up more of the area for exploration would be of great benefit to the community. Beach and forest schools would create opportunities for learning for children and adults in the local community all year round and visitors in the spring and summer months. These activities would also provide ways in which to monitor and evaluate the impact of the humans on the landscape and help maintain and sustain the environment and natural habitats. I understand that maintenance of the forest is necessary, but I have seen the effect of logging in the area over the years and I would be sad to see the land valued in that way. There is much more to this part of Skye that is not quantifiable in monetary terms. I feel that there are pockets of space before Orbst Farm that have the potential to be developed into a community hub for education, gathering and entertainment, that could offer a starting point for walkers and local activities - this would discourage drivers to take cars down the track to the beach, creating potentially dangerous congestion and damaging the road (such as it is). There is also great potential for the area to be utilised more for creative projects, such as film-making, artist retreats, art education, community mental health projects. Although I am not in favour of permanent residences being built in the woods, a well thought out bothy would be a very valuable asset for such projects and for the community. My concern is for future generations - I don't see how short-term financial gain through harvesting or the selling off of land for development will help the Orbst and Dunvegan communities of the future. The loss of this beautiful landscape would be sorely felt.
- Some cycle routes, or running would be fantastic
- Woodland walks and facilities for residents and visitors including picnic spots (PERHAPS barbecue pits) and maybe even organised camping spots to generate income and relieve the impact of 'wild camping' elsewhere. Maybe even a small fully enclosed area for rent for people to allow their dogs safely off lead.
- Other community models show what can be achieved when communities pull together. I'd like to see a focus on activities that have low environmental impact/high social value For example, bike and walk trails could and should be accessible to those with young families, older people and disabled members of the community, but there is also a need for higher level mountain bike trails for those who wish to pursue it as a sport. Forest school activities is another area I would like to see developed. We need to provide housing for our young people, especially those who have grown up here and have a unique understanding of the

cultural heritage, and others who are open to learning and adapting to the communities they have chosen to become part of. By making it easier for young people to stay and raise families is key. Woodland crofts would be one such idea that would help create those bonds between the environment, the community and the people who live there.

- Community based activity center/hub for arts- this could take the form of a low impact building. that can be used for multiple puposes like running courses, small performances/community events. In France they have great bike wash/potable water and bike maintenance tools permanently available attached to specialized posts (so they don't walk!) I've also seen fantastic fire pit/pizza ovens (for hosting community events/performances/drama) that are available for folk to use as part of picnic areas but also make a congregational space for locals. A little refreshment area for walkers and visitors (manned or unmanned). with information boards about wildlife and the area. Sustainable woodfired kiln. Outdoor learning space - a wooden open aired (midge nets can be fitted) space that can be used for teaching/ small weddings and ceremonies/ There's a great one near Sleat.
- Having [.....] been significantly involved in the original community bid process, I am very acutely aware of the liabilities and economic risks these blocks of forestry carry. I think the proposed bid by DCT would be a practical and financial disaster, unsustainable for many reasons , not least the impossibility of access and the eagle protections, but also the tree disease risks and inherited replanting obligations from failed replanting efforts in the past. There is also a significant deer management issue as the entire fencing for the blocks has consistently failed to repel intrusion by large herds of deer. I believe the trust should look for a more suitable and less risky block of woodland on which to implement their plans, which in principle are good, but Orbst is not the location on which they could be achieved.
- I would be completely supportive of this project *if* the construction of some affordable housing at Orbst was part of the plan, even if it was just 2 or 4 properties. I think given how difficult it is for young people to buy a house on Skye (unless they have inherited land or money) it should be part of any large scale community acquisition of land. Living in beautiful spots like Orbst should not just be the reserve of people with inherited wealth.
- There are numerous "soft" tourism ideas that could work from mountain biking to new path networks. This should also generate community funds for a small fee, whatever is decided. Would also hope to see genuine community involvement, not just a nod and everything being decided by the same cabal of local worthies, crofters and community council. The way the farm is being run there is very poor. It should never have been a single person business, reaping all the benefits from what was always supposed to be a community project.
- It would be brilliant to reclaim the woodland as part of the lived-in community. Renewable, or improvement, activities, and environment protection, should be at the heart of any development. There may need to be some trade-off between croft-&-craft and whole-community enjoyment of the asset. Commercial activities should aim to eventually make the project self-supporting. An exciting opportunity for establishing a safe, off-road, outdoor experience for people of all abilities. Walking, pushchair, wheelchair access with associated easy-access parking. Maybe some graded cycle routes, to keep faster cycles away from pedestrians and chair users. In light of recent over-tourism by motorhomes in particular (but also tent, car, and caravan campers) there is great potential for a campground but SPECIFICALLY for a motorhome overnight area - particularly beneficial if it had grey (sink, shower) and black (toilet) waste disposal facilities. This would help to protect the local

environment from irresponsible dumping of waste which, it has to be admitted, is unavoidable due to a lack of facilities. A regular campground for use by the community could facilitate education for both children and adults, and could be offered on a commercial basis for eg star-gazing, photography, or foraging workshops, or contemplative retreats. Extremely, for weddings etc. Possibly some permanent or semi-permanent structures to support sports clubs: markers for orienteering, a sectioned-off area for field archery, etc. Competitions for the above sports. Income from competitors and from spectators and franchised caterers etc.

- It would be good to look at making another access route, road round the back of orbost farm house.. so that another parking area could be made ahead of any developments or improvements that may be made. With any improvements..footfall will increase.. parking at the steading is not sufficient
- It will end up being used by a small clique of tree huggers , (non native).
- I'd be supportive of small businesses like foraging workshops, small businesses targeting walkers, or those that work alongside the forest, but not of one placed in the forest or disrupting it.
- I would be strongly in favour of offering long leases on woodland plots (I'd rather not term them crofts) where modest hutting is permitted. Definitely not for holiday/sub letting, and in the spirit of being weekend escapes for want of a better phrase. Given that half of the forest is 'out-of-bounds' due to wildlife constraints, with the foregoing in mind, and with access issues, it seems infeasible to consider harvesting the mature trees for commercial gain, and any 'deal' with HIE should be on the understanding that the forest is being handed to the community gratis. If HIE insists the mature trees have a harvest value, then let HIE undertake to fell the trees (and replant?). This would effectively take the felled forest out of action while the ground recovers (5 years?) unless there was a will to lease bare plots for hutting. HIE needs to be shown up for the lack of active management counter to what its PR puff says. I do have concerns over any development that may detrimentally affect the quality of life for those who already live in Orbost and nearby. Any development needs to be taken on a gradual basis as there is no evidence the resources will be available to manage it.
- Community funds should be used in areas of Dunvegan underfunded
- Do not pay to employ managers or chop up the land to gift to part time business, invest the money held by trust in Dunvegan for housing & school/sporting facilities. Remove the castle management & take ownership of that estate.
- The land could be community owned and rented in manageable croft sizes. Renters could have an off-grid dwelling (Ben Law style!) on their croft & make an income from felling/selling the existing wood, as well as managing their croft to grow their own veggies/keep livestock etc, or make a fortune selling stocks and shares online. Community ownership would mean that public access along paths etc could be maintained while the land would be managed by the crofters.
- The trust to purchase bicycles and hire them for use in the local area and particularly the Orbost area. The development of a woodland furniture workshop with proceeds going back into the development of footpaths and trails. The potential for a small scale hydro scheme.

- Small businesses with a conservation focus like foraging courses.
- Area for walks and biking. Forest school woodland crofts Potential hydro scheme
- I firmly believe that owning and managing a woodland, building a relationship with it, would benefit the community in many ways that can't yet be predicted. As that relationship develops, it would be good to see chicane mountain bike tracks etc for local teenagers; an accessible walk; potentially bilingual poetry trails showing local poetry, and therapy trails. Also forest or beach school classes. It would be great to have some kind of environmental trail indicating birds and wildlife as well as trees, plants and lichens that would not only inform local people but be of interest to thoughtful visitors and raise environmental awareness. The environmental trail could also include reference to the clearly dramatic geology of the area and Skye's global centrality to primeval climate change. I think there are enough traces of social history in the area potentially to develop a social history trail, famine and diaspora of the nineteenth century and ongoing changes right up to the HIE in the twentieth, making a link through the theme of exile with the many places world wide that now have associations with Orbst. These trails would benefit the community by attracting more thoughtful and interested visitors, bringing in their money and ongoing knowledge about and concern for the island. The ideas from Broadford particularly the provision of free fuel during lockdown to poorer residents with fires, and the Community Fridge were very powerful and have obvious immediate community benefit.
- Keeping it local....linking to education, exercise provision, local tradespeople....
- Is the Orbst forest not already in community ownership or were a hall full of people conned when we were told the Estate was being bought for the community
- I would like to see an area for a large woodland adventure type playground area. Some designated woodland walks and possibly some mountain bike paths and routes.
- Creation of footpaths, mountain bike trails of different difficulty grades, small scale outdoor activities hub/centre, properly built bbq areas with water bowser safety hydrant, log cabin for educational purposes for school trips/days out, view point telescopes with donation box/coin insert - that would be small amount of money towards the community fund, Different management roles could be upkeep of said footpaths/trails, folk to keep eye on welfare of area ie litter, dog poo, camp fires, woodland committee, wardens.
- If we can utilise the forest to earn an income to build affordable housing elsewhere that would be great. Archaeology days, woodland walks, upkeep of road, nature reserve, community woodland playground and learning centre, replanting of native forest, reestablishment of old school building and history,
- Mountain bike trails and path network for walkers also. Good for physical health and mental health.
- Money would be better spent on a decent outdoor area for the local children. If there was profit to be made the surely it would have been made by now. Absolutely waste of time!
- Establish endangered crafts such as wood crafts.Stone dyke building . Weaving. Spinning. Arans. In a teaching environment. Such as a college. Teach useful crofting and small holding skills.

- I believe that some small scale renewable energy schemes would be beneficial to the community. The success of the recent Raasay Hydro Scheme indicates what can be done. Affordable housing ring fenced for locals would be great if the road can be suitably improved.
- Picnic areas, nature trails, non mechanical harvesting using horses. Encouraging wildlife habitats and involve school children. Lookout areas for sea life, otter hides, eagles etc
- As long as developments created jobs and there was a preference for locals getting any crofts which were developed, use of commercial units etc.
- A place where people could walk their dogs without any sheep around would be fab!
- Cycle paths,kids play area,zip wire s.educational wood crafts.small saw mill.what is a woodland croft? More info re this needed...fun park in the wood,like landmark at carbridge(doesn't have to be as big). ?hydro operated saw.

Concerns about Community Ownership of Orbst Forest

Respondents were also asked to indicate whether they had any concerns about community ownership of Orbst Forest. Table 23 shows the overall responses to that question.

	N	%
Yes	48	48.48
No	51	51.52

Table 24 shows the profile of whether or not respondents had concerns about community ownership of Orbst Forest, by townships in the DCT area.

Township	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Dunvegan	11	50.00	11	50.00
Orbst	6	75.00	2	25.00
Harlosh	10	45.45	12	54.55
Feorlig	4	66.67	2	33.33
Vatten	2	66.67	1	33.33
Roag	8	57.14	6	42.86
Herebost	0	0	0	0
Horneval	0	0	0	0
Greep	0	0	0	0
Claigan	0	0	1	100.00
Uiginish	0	0	2	100.00

Survey respondents were also invited to provide comments regarding any concerns that they had about community ownership of Orbost Forest. Their verbatim responses are detailed below.

- Over exploitation and development may alter its uniqueness, which would defeat the very purpose of its community ownership.
- The possible restrictions that could be placed by the RSPB due to the presence of the sea eagles. The wood contains 10% Larch trees this could present a very costly drain on resources if Larch disease strikes it has done in the past and appeared very recently in the castle woods. The road down to the beach would have to be upgraded even just for wheelchair access ,although encouragement should be given for cars to be left at the steading car park. I do not think that the extraction of the timber would return a profit. I do worry overall about the cost implications and why it is being put up for sale just now.
- I think it's an amazing opportunity for the community, although the size of the forest is daunting. When local people consider the possibility of owning the forest, is it clear to the community that there will be people employed (foresters/rangers - ideally local people) to manage the forest (& wont be up to the locals & volunteers to try & do it all)? I think this needs to be clear as Im sure the huge size of the forest is overwhelming to folk when considering ownership.
- The track to Bharcasaig will not support further vehicular access although I do support access for people with reduced mobility.
- Exploitation and/or the spoiling of nature for monetary gains
- Over development
- I am supportive of community ownership of the Orbost Forest, but would hope that those who live within the Orbost community would have a strong voice when it comes to making decisions, especially around access and development, as their daily lives will obviously be impacted.
- There has already been a lot of public money spent at orbost and that is the main reason i am totally against more money being spent.
- My concerns are not with the concept, but the capacity of the community to manage such a project of scale. Not all, but a significant number of newer members of the community are retirees, and we need a mix of young and old to achieve this. We also need people to engage in a positive way, even when they don't always agree. Constructive criticism is always needed to avoid 'group think' whereas negativity is just destructive. The vision and enthusiasm of young people combined with the pragmatism and experience of older members of the community, supported by the whole community would allay any concerns for me.
- Already publicly owned Cost removing timber The state off the woodland

- As a member of the only household that resides within the forest, I am particularly keen that any developments are sympathetic to the desires of the residents and preserve the peaceful nature of the area. I am also concerned that access to the largest part of the forest is via a mile-long single-track road with no passing places and which is unsurfaced. Any increase in traffic must be avoided at all costs.
- Needs to be paid staff & board of directors that will ensure public monies are spent properly and to the purpose they were intended
- I have real concerns that this will become a huge burden on the Community in the future. Highlands and Islands enterprise will be delighted to offload the Orbost Forest to the Community and release them from the responsibility of the management of the woodlands. HIE have owned the woodlands for many years and have failed spectacularly to achieve any benefit for the surrounding community or more importantly for the PUBLIC PURSE so should be held to account for waste of public finance. Sale or transfer to the community will only move the financial burden to the community. It is abundantly clear that if commercial interests are not interested in the woodlands then why should the public, community, be saddled with this WHITE ELEPHANT.
- Viability and liability.
- I do worry that the money spent at Orbost will not serve the community effectively. I think the community has repeatedly said that affordable housing was a priority on the list of needs. I also think the opportunity to bring Orbost into community ownership is a great one- if the 2 were combined the community support would be much greater.
- As always, waste management and vandalism. Requires proper waste disposal facilities at all entrances/ car parks. 'Long drop' or composting toilets. Having due regard to tourism visitors, an overnighting spot for campers (as described above) - there have been problems with irresponsible waste disposal by a few, but rather than ban all tourist campers, they can be managed by offering dedicated basic overnight pitches, waste disposal facilities (and possibly fresh water). Highland Council is promoting such facilities.
- Access.
- There are far better ways of spending community money than a forest. Wood would have to be taken out by sea like last time, as the roads are not suitable for artic lorries. The costs involved to get power and amenities to the site would be extortionate. I feel like it would be a massive waste of money and would become a drain on the community money, that could be spent elsewhere to far better affect.
- I fear it will be a huge ongoing expense to the community. Even if its just maintaining footpaths, its a huge expense. The forest could also be an expense depending on obligations any revenue raised through felling may be cut as extraction costs may be quite high due to access issues
- Wastage of public money, HIE have already wasted millions , let it go back to being one big firm .

- I do have concerns over any development that may detrimentally affect the quality of life for those who already live in Orbost and nearby. Any development needs to be taken on a gradual basis as there is no evidence the resources will be available to manage it - using Trust funds, would, in my opinion be money badly spent, and too much public money goes into feasibility studies and legal fees.
- They can't afford it. The forest will drain the community funds quickly. It's not practical to commercialise Orboast forest due to access.
- Lack of communication, community spirit and trust
- Any project would require huge investment & continued funding to manage, with little profit coming back to the community.
- I don't believe public money should be spent on ground that was already bought by public money. I fear they will end up throwing up money into a bottomless pit and no benefits will be seen.
- I worry it would be a huge investment of community funds with little likely return.
- It would cost a fortune to get the wood out and would have to come out by boat as it did in the past. It is not a viable option to buy as it would cost far too much money to clear and develop into most of the options mentioned above. Just looking at the suggestions it seems like it would be a huge effort and expense. However, it might be easier for the reader to envisage, if a little more detail was given eg the purpose in putting in paths, what a woodland croft would look like and what sort of renewable energy would be harvested in a woodland. In the 90s and early 2000s there was some community scheme in Orbost if I'm not mistaken but that seems to have fallen by the way side. Perhaps this could be re established in the first instance? Or perhaps the money would be better spent on obvious needs in the community such as affordable housing, a bigger car park, doing up the toilets, supporting groups such as Lets Make Dunvegan Beautiful Again, creating a welcoming space eg in the hall for local youth to (one day!) hang out in, maintenance of the play park, establishing local businesses and groups in the lochside buildings, etc. On another note, does the Dunvegan Community not already own the forest?
- The management of parking and amenities and also the upkeep and regular maintenance of the trails and footpaths.
- Destruction of habitat.
- We are all worried about the condition of the road down to the beach, personally I support a fold down central bollard as a way of restricting high traffic volumes, at least in the summer months, with codes for the disabled and for residents and with provision of proper parking round the steading, to avoid the chaos of the Coral Beach. Moreover we are worried about litter and massive numbers of visitors; at the moment there are clearly safety concerns in the forest. In the bigger picture, we have concerns about the sustainability of the project financially if it is grant dependent and the future of the land if interest and enthusiasm wanes. We are concerned that the environment be protected and development avoided. We are also concerned for the future outcome of the rest of the land on the Orbost Estate and how that may dovetail with or separate from the Orbost Forest scheme.

- The forest was planted and thereafter ignored. No maintenance ie thinnings, brushing etc was carried out The wood is only good for pulp Extraction was attempted a few years ago by sea. This was a total disaster Extraction by road was deemed uneconomical Larch was found to be diseased and some was felled and left to rot. Disease could still be present The Trust can't afford it and would impact on other community projects the Trust should support
- What is this going to cost to purchase ?? How much is this going to cost for the up keep ?? How will money go back into the community !!
- Whilst affordable housing is a huge requirement for the area I think it would be a shame for an area of such natural beauty to be turned into affordable housing if there is a way an income can be gleaned from the site in order to develop affordable housing nearer the village I think that would be more beneficial for the area
- The costs that may occur to manage the wood land. The last company who tried to take wood out of there found it very challenging and it made a loss.
- My main concern is that affordable housing has been mentioned, I personally think there must be far more suitable place to build affordable houses in the dunvegan area. The costs off putting in infrastructure such as roads, power, telecom and broadband would make any such housing far from affordable. Also the cost of removing timber from Orbst would make any timber operations unviable. Also any land within the Forrest is far from suitable for crofting on without huge expenditure.
- Waste of money.
- Previous community ownership didn't really benefit the community
- I am concerned that with the difficulties that residents have faced over the past year and more due to the pandemic they may be other things to spend funds on right now to provide support. For instance pre school children and parent support and local businesses.
- A complete waste of time, money and resources. Been there before. How much money does the community want to throw away this time round.
- Becoming overwhelmed by tourists.
- I have concerns because of what is potentially happening at 'The Plock' in Kyle of Lochalsh since it went into community ownership. The Plock is a beautiful small area of woodland and creeks that is an absolute delight to walk around. There is a fairly flat open space in the middle which is also delightful to sit and enjoy. They want to put in a campsite, hub and other things I can't remember but these could be put on any flat scrappy piece of land. Why spoil such a beautiful place that many walkers enjoy and make it busy and noisy. I would be against anything that spoiled the wild and natural land. I thought Orbst should have been in community ownership the last time it changed hands. All these schemes they had about folk getting a house and a workshop didn't work, the businesses didn't last hardly any time at all. All the crofts that were going to be available for the young islanders never happened. Only Keith Jackson has made anything of a good business there under those original proposals so I would not be in favour of anything like that again.

- Orbost estate is not well known to tourists and we can visit in the height of the season in peace. I would be concerned if there was a lot of development which might spoil the area.
- Look at the past, mistakes were made. management structure needs to be right from the start.
- Main concern would be that if a company known for forest harvesting could not make it profitable to fell then how can the trust think they can. It is total pie in sky thinking and a complete waste of the funds that the trust have available at their disposal to invest in community projects for the Benicia of the whole community. Invest in the community by offering help to senior citizens, building a play park or atleast upgrading the existing. Buy a green area/ space in the village and develop it, build housing.....no housing has been invested in over 25 years!! There are in my opinion more important issues to invest in the village (outlined above) as opposed to a forest which has not been harvested due to poor road infrastructure and demanding sea routes which both would require major investment in prior to any sort of harvesting!
- I think the money would be better spent developing the centre of Dunvegan village.

Additional Comments

The final part of the survey invited respondents to provide any other comments they wished to make. Their verbatim responses are detailed below.

- The environmental protection of this unique site ought to be sought. The walled garden could return to its former horticultural use
- If this area does become more developed and attracts more visitors can the roads that lead there at least be kept repaired but preferably improved. If only one road (I.e the Glendale/Orbost road) is repaired, can signs be placed on the other (Roag/Orbost) road that there is no access. Parts of both roads are narrow and there are few passing places.
- Best wishes to everyone if they are able to get ownership for the community and are able to make it an asset for the community in the future.
- I think it is extremely important that we do all we can to preserve the forest, continue to grow trees to sequester carbon, & consider the role of the forest within the changing climate, warming planet.
- Any future planting should take account of climate change and what species might be flourishing in 50 to 100 years
- Happy to help with rewilding and conservation work when I'm at Orbost!
- I would love to see this area on the map as an area rich in biodiversity and natural beauty. I would hope that the community can learn from the experiences of other parts of Skye and develop a strong strategy on safe and manageable access and protection of the landscape for future generations. It is inevitable that issues such as public toilets, footpaths, parking, public bins will all have to be thought through if numbers to the area are expected to

increase as a result of community ownership. I'm grateful for the efforts being made to hear from members of the community and investigate all options.

- I agree that just because it was handled badly it does not mean that we should think this will be the case again.
- This is an opportunity like no other. Just because it was badly handled by HIE 20 years ago, doesn't mean it is a bad idea. It just means we have a chance to fix it. It could create employment, meaning that young people could have jobs as foresters, development officers, trail guides, conservationists. I do believe that HIE has a responsibility to the community that it, with good enough intentions, used as a social experiment. Perhaps it is time to draw a line under the large sums of public money spent to date on the project and look to gifting Orbost estate, not just the forest, to the local community. Instead of our community raising funds to apply for match funding from the public purse, it could instead focus on raising money to develop a sustainable model of land reform through community enablement that has been demonstrated by many other fantastic community projects across Scotland.
- Money could be spent in better ways
- I'd like more information about woodland crofts and the business models employed. I'd also like more information about the small scale renewable energy projects envisaged and how they would connect to the grid.
- While I have no concerns about community ownership of the forest per se, I do have concerns about development of the area in general. Orbost remains a relatively quiet corner of Skye and this means a lot to the local community, both of Orbost and the surrounding areas. Many 'beauty spots' on Skye are becoming severely congested and consequently spoiled by increasing visitor numbers. I am concerned that wider publicity of development of facilities may open Orbost to greater numbers of visitors, thus causing greater pressure on the delicate infrastructure of the area. Car parking is already an issue and inappropriate parking is already a problem in gateways, passing places and driveways and any further increase in vehicle numbers would need to be carefully managed. The access track to the beach and Bharcasaig/Brandersaig parts of the forest is not suited as a public thoroughfare and is not suitable for most types of traffic: it is vulnerable to extreme erosion and has weak bridges and fairly tight corners along its length. It should be clarified where responsibility would lie for its upkeep were woodland crofters etc. to require to use it to access/develop their businesses and activities.
- it is a logistical and financial liability.
- Community should not touch this with a barge pole.
- Without seeing the viability study it is difficult to see how this would be an asset to the community, other than to stop someone else buying it.
- Given that half of the forest is 'out-of-bounds' due to wildlife constraints, and with access issues, it seems infeasible to consider harvesting the mature trees for commercial gain, and any 'deal' with HIE should be on the understanding that the forest is being handed to the community gratis. If HIE insists the mature trees have a harvest value, then let HIE undertake to fell the trees (and replant?). This would effectively take the felled forest out of action while the ground recovers (5 years?) unless there was a will to lease bare plots for hutting.

HIE needs to be shown up for the lack of active management counter to what its PR puff says. HIE has sat on the Orbost Estate for too long and now expects to be able to exit in glory.

- Invest the money in something that will actually benefit the community rather than making a few people a lot of money.
- Although the Community Forest will, if it occurs, mark out a beautiful and vital area of the estate, obviously those who know it well or live there are concerned for the environmental integrity of the whole. Particularly the bay area which is simply one of the most beautiful places in the world and also very rare for Skye in the sandiness and gentle gradient of the beach. Pressure on other areas of great coastal beauty locally warn us what could happen if Orbost is not handled carefully. The HIE sale is a time of significant change; the future division of the whole estate is in a sense negotiable and I would love as many voices as possible to shout out for protecting the land as well as extending its relation to its surrounding community and to visitors. I believe a thoughtfully managed biodiverse community forest could be a central part of this. I have also wondered whether it is worth seeking some kind of designation or classification for the area, at a national or even international level; perhaps because of its lichens or its geology if not its birds. There's a natural slight feeling of dissolving vision about the area as a whole as the DCT works out what if anything is feasible in terms of forestry, and we are keen that the HIE does not feel a community woodland sale is a solution that in anyway solves the future of the integral area of which the forest is part. The models of community ownership are inspiring and also address profound historical wrong, I would love them to extend over as much of the estate as feels genuinely possible, but I do feel the gap between the Orbost community, where some of the people who love it cannot live there all the time, and the Dunvegan community who are always local and immediate, and have sometimes wondered if we need to think creatively and communally about the estate area surrounding the forest to protect the whole for everyone, as well and for as long as we can.
- I still have paperwork generated during the original buyout if anybody is interested in what the proposals were at that time
- I think this area has a great amount of potential if in the hands of the right people. The community buyout would secure not only the land itself, but the assurance that it will always be in the community hands to therefore stop possible future large commercial developments out of our control.
- If hie had plans to harvest forestry but didn't do it - why didn't they ??? Was it because it was too expensive to do it by sea. Whats the point in buying a forest to harvest most off it ??? What species of animals are you thinking of reintroducing ?? There's enough local hot spots that the trust could put money into to improve, with out starting another half baked idea!! Orbost is a nice area that not many tourists know about, why spend mega bucks on it when you could spend some pennies on coral beach !!!! That a lot of tourists and locals use !!!
- I think that Community Ownership is the way forward for our Island and indeed all the West Highlands as well, we should pressure the government to make funding more available.
- I think community ownership is a great idea.

- I support the initiative completely, and think this is an excellent opportunity for Dunvegan as a community to take steps which other areas of Skye already have. I know locals feel strongly about housing, but I think the community ownership of the wood would be a great first step for any group to become established and understand the nuances of community ownership before such an undertaking as housing was approached, especially as acquiring land can be so difficult.
- Think it's a great idea, forest needs to have clean bill of health re disease. needs to be accessible for all.
- Invest the money that is coming to the trust in the community- housing/ improving Dunvegan.... Buy or at least look into the old camp site and see if it can be developed into a market square or housing or back to a small/ big scale camp site where the profits could be made to support local staff and reinvested into the community. IMO there are more important areas to invest into rather than the white elephant of Orbst forestry, which I cannot see ever make a profit without spending tens of thousands improving the current infrastructure.