

Carbon Offsetting for Communities

Loch Ness Field Trip Report

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1 Introduction

This report offers a summary of a fieldtrip to the Loch Ness area during October 2022, as part of the project titled [Carbon Offsetting and Communities: co-developing alternative place-based voluntary offsets in Scotland](#). The project is led by the University of Strathclyde and University of Aberdeen, and co-funded by the [Scottish Universities Insight Institute \(SUII\)](#) and the [University of Strathclyde's Centre for Sustainable Development](#) COP26 Legacy Fund. The field trip saw representatives from various Scottish universities and public bodies visit two nature-based carbon offsets sites in the Central Highlands of Scotland (Figure 1) – Trees for Life and Highlands Rewilding – as well as speak directly with other offset developers (e.g. RSPB) and local community representatives.

The purpose of the trip was to see first-hand the changes that are taking place in Scottish Highlands through voluntary nature-based carbon offset project and to learn first-hand about the full range of impacts they're having on communities. The trip was split into two days; the first involved a walk around the two sites with a guide (Section 2) and the second comprised of a series of talks from landowners, offset developers and community stakeholders (Section 3).

We'd like to thank the various individuals and organisations (especially Trees for Life and Highlands Rewilding), as well as our funders, for supporting this field trip and project. We wouldn't have been able to conduct this research scoping without your help.

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Figure 1: Field trip site visit locations (Source: Google maps)

2 Day 1: Site visits

2.1 Trees for Life, Dundreggan

The group visited [Trees for Life](#) (TfL) at Dundreggan, North West of Fort Augustus and Loch Ness. TfL was founded by Alan Watson Featherstone in 1993, with the central goal of restoring the Caledonian Forest. In 2008, the charity purchased Dundreggan from the Forestry Commission (now [Forestry and Land Scotland](#)) in 2008 and has been rewilded since. The site is 4,000 hectares large and divided into a series of different native plantations, some which were planted over a decade ago (Figure 2). The rewilding and afforestation at Dundreggan is part of a much wider initiative to rewild Glen Affric and the surrounding area (see Section 3.2).

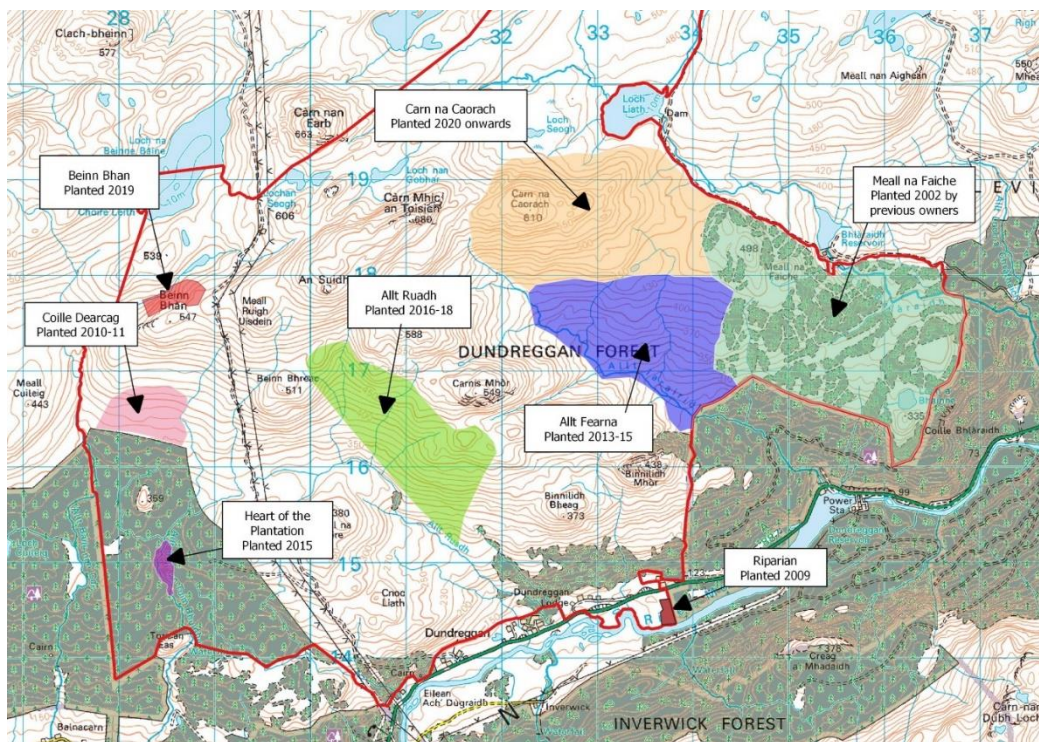


Figure 2: Map of Trees for Life's Dundreggan site (Source: [Trees for Life](#))

Over 4,000 species of plants and animals are found at Dundreggan, including many rare and protected species. Tfl’s accredited carbon offsetting site is located at Dundreggan, and has the capacity to offset over 50,000 tonnes of CO₂. Containing over 250,000 new native trees, the site’s offsetting potential has been validated and verified under the Woodland Carbon Code ([TfL 2023](#)).

Tfl’s Dundreggan site also includes a number of buildings to support its rewilding and offsetting operations including a new visitor centre, ancillary buildings, accommodation and native woodland nursery:

- The **new visitor centre** (Figure 3) opens in 2023. It will provide a base for public education and youth engagement in relation to rewilding. The site also offers free parking, refreshments and a network of paths for the public to enjoy.
- Tfl is expanding its **accommodation** block to house a larger number of volunteers throughout the year, who are provided with board and lodging in return for their support with tree planting.
- The **tree nursery** (Figure 4) is located, where Tfl propagate various native, highland species, in particular aspen, with seeds mostly collected from site. To support these trees to take root, Tfl is engaged in reducing grazing pressures, not least deer management.



Figure 3: Trees for Life’s new rewilding visitor centre (Source: Hannon)

Figure 4: Trees for Life’s tree nursery (Source: Hannon)



Figure 5: Project team walking through an ancient stand of silver birch at Dundreggan (Source: Hannon)

Having visited these various facilities, the project team walked up through a stand of ancient woodland that had been regenerated by Tfl, with an emphasis on natural regeneration rather than planting. They walked up towards Binnlidh Bhearg, to get a view onto Allt Ruadh (Figure 2), which was planted over a three year period from 2016.

The Allt Ruadh plantation has already yielded revenue through the sale of [Pending Issuance Units \(PIUs\)](#). These are “effectively a ‘promise to deliver’ a Woodland Carbon Unit in future, based on predicted sequestration. It is not ‘guaranteed’, and cannot be used to report against UK-based emissions until verified. However, it allows companies to plan to compensate for future UK-based emissions, or make credible CSR statements in support of woodland creation” ([Woodland Carbon Code 2023](#)).

In 2022, TfL sold its first PIUs, with the price as of April 2022 as high as £40 a unit. We can estimate from TfL’s press release that approximately £69,000 was generated from this sale ([TfL 2022](#)). TfL were keen to emphasise that they ‘screen’ potential buyers of their carbon credits and PIUs on the basis that they didn’t want to support ‘greenwashing’ and were keen to only sell units to organisations that were making a concerted effort to reduce their operational carbon footprint ([TfL 2022](#)). A third (£23,000) of with the income generated from the carbon units is being shared with the two community groups (including [Glenmoriston Improvement Group](#) and the [West Glenmoriston Community Company](#)), equating to just over £13 per PIU sold and £23,000 in total, with the rest of the funds will go towards Trees for Life’s rewilding work ([TfL 2022](#)). Over time, TfL expects that further sales of carbon units from the Allt Ruadh woodland will generate up to another £52,000 for the community groups ([TfL 2022](#)).



Figure 6: Project team hearing from Trees for Life’s Alan McDonnell at Dundreggan (Source: Hannon)

2.2 Highlands Rewilding, Bunloit

Following their visit to Trees for Life, the team travelled to [Highlands Rewilding’s \(HR\)](#) Bunloit estate, on the north shore of Loch Ness and neighbouring the small town of Drumnadrochit. We met HR’s Head of Operations, Kirsty Mackay, who gave us a guide tour around 513 hectare Bunloit estate.

The area of Bunloit has been inhabited for centuries and originally part of the larger Balmacaan estate: “by 1875, there were twenty-three roofed buildings recorded on Bunloit Farm, in the first edition of the Inverness-shire OS map” ([HR 2023](#)). Traditionally, the land was “comprised of moorland for game, forestry, common grazing and cultivated areas for livestock and crops” but following World War II, the resident population decline and the land was sold or let out for grazing.

The estate is comprised of woodland, peatland and grassland (Figure 8). The site’s woodland is broadly split, with native temperate forest in the south (comprised mainly of oak, and a mix of birch and juniper woodland) and scots pine and larch in the north. There are also a number of stands of non-native conifers. The site also comprises much peatland, with three areas of peatland with peat up to 4 metres deep, sitting on the site’s upland plateau. There are also significant swathes of grassland, used for grazing over the years. Across the habitats, Bunloit is home to rare and important flora and fauna, including several rare and threatened fungi species, and home to dragonflies, lichens and hazel rainforest of significant conservation importance ([HR 2023](#)).



Figure 7: View onto Loch Ness from Bunloit, with cattle grazing in the background (Source: Author)

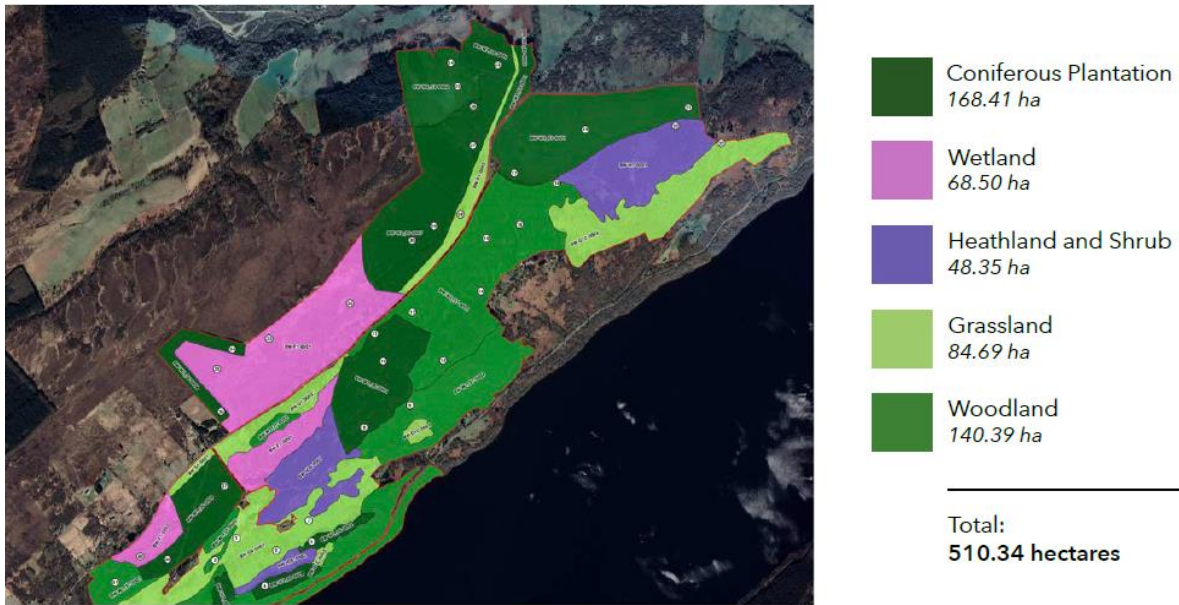


Figure 8: Bunloit's various habitats (Source: [Credit Nature](#))

The vast majority of Bunloit's carbon is stored in its peatland; roughly ten times as much versus its woodland ([HR 2021](#)). Despite its richness of natural capital, HR's baseline carbon and natural capital assessment in 2021 found the site was a net-emitter of carbon; with an estimated average net loss of 240 tCO₂e / year ([HR 2021](#)).



Figure 9: Brush left following the removal of monoculture plantation for re-wetting

The first part of the site visit explored the recently removed plantations, which began to be felled in 2022 ([HR 2023](#)). "Stump flipping" will be carried out to infill the furrows and "cross-tracking", using excavator tracks to level out the surface (Figure 9). The latter will help to bring water table higher and "re-wet" the land, to support restoration of the former plantation land into its original peatland. We observed various piles of timber, ready to be transported to market; an important initial revenue stream for HR at Bunloit.

Where re-wetting for peatland is not considered appropriate, the plan is to plant "broadleaves elsewhere on the estate to compensate for the carbon stock loss in the plantations" ([HR 2021](#)). Through this two-pronged approach, HR aim to sequester 60,747 tCO₂e over 100 years.

The tour also comprised the site's various self-catering accommodation, including cottages and a larger lodge. The emphasis is on generating revenue from a combination of holiday lets (with an emphasis on eco-tourism) but also a focus on corporate team-building retreats. HR's share offer ([HR 2022](#)) also outlines other planned business activities such as eco-building for local residents and regenerative agriculture, with the latter taking advantage of the existing agricultural footprint on site.



Figure 10: Team visiting the site

During the tour, we also learned about some of Highlands Rewilding's community engagement. This was made challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the timing of engagement activities with various lockdowns, however a combination of online and in-person consultations were conducted to inform business decisions. This consultation period lasted approximately a year, targeting conservation groups, scientists, expert ecologists, government and the local community. As per the share offer ([HR 2022](#)), the team also attended community council meetings and updated local contacts about what they are working on. They also held "walk and talk" events on the estate, offering the opportunity to update community members and to gather feedback & ideas.

A more in-depth discussion of the Highlands Rewilding's business strategy is covered in the following section, so here we focus mainly on observations and discussions during the tour.

3 Day 2: Workshop at Bunloit

3.1 Jeremy Leggett – CEO and Founder of Highlands Rewilding

Jeremy began set the scene for the day by giving us an overview of the Highlands Rewilding project at the Bunloit estate, as well as perspectives on the carbon offsetting market.



Figure 11: Jeremy Leggett speaking at Bunloit estate

With an estimated investment gap of around £20 billion needed to achieve Scotland's nature restoration goals ([GFI 2021](#)), Jeremy positioned the Highlands Rewilding model as a first of a kind project to get private finance behind the climate change and biodiversity challenge. The project aims to be a tipping point for encouraging further investment from financial institutions, whilst balancing the local and regional requirements of the area.

Jeremy noted how this project is not the only model or necessarily the best, depending on the context. For instance, he highlighted alternatives such as the Langholm community buy-out being a particularly compelling alternative model, although the scaling and duplication of these kinds of models may be challenging. However, for the amount of investment needed, the big

financial players need to be ‘on side’ and it is the story of growth within the carbon offsetting market that will ultimately bring them in. Even so, the ‘Green Laird’ rhetoric can be off-putting to investors and detract from the overall investment picture. Investors are increasingly aware of the need for strategic investment that offers them a “social licence” to operate certain activities, in certain locations. This model aims to demonstrate way of linking key actors: big landowners, communities and investors together.

Jeremy explained some of the approaches that Highlands Rewilding is taking to community engagement as part of its business operations and strategy. Local employment and education was considered central to the project, with a significant number of staff² and board members being Highlanders. They have also offered paid summer internships to university studentships from the local area, including training to carry out ecological surveys, as well as apprenticeships for local high school students ([HR 2022](#)). Local schools were also brought to the site to learn about the organisation’s work in situ. They have “attended classes in rural skills and conservation and environmental science on the estate, run jointly by their teachers and Bunloit rangers” ([HR 2022](#)). Furthermore, the share investment rounds that are designed to be sufficiently affordable to community members in order to provide a ‘social license to operate’, in the eyes of the investors.

The business model requires consideration of the time-scales associated with carbon offsetting and nature restoration and the constantly evolving policy and market landscapes. For the first five years, the project will draw an income from a range of eco-tourism related activities, whilst the land assets provide security, though the rising price of land is not a focus. By ‘holding tight’ for five years until regulatory bodies are in place - and drawing upon non-natural capital revenue streams - the project will be well placed to go to market and provide ‘best of class’ in offsetting and nature restoration. This charismatic element is of real importance to the projects character, and ultimately potential customers must and will be serious about net-zero and making real progress in their emission reductions.

Another element of the model is around the consultancy and data led services, which was considered to be a commercial unique selling point. The project aims to create novel and unique methods for biodiversity data which is scalable, leaving in scope for innovation and partnerships with other landowners to create bespoke data offerings. Amongst other benefits, this could offer investors is the opportunity to evidence real-term benefits and not just limited to carbon. This data is considered crucial to unlocking the carbon credit. This would work by using baseline studies with in-house expertise analysing to increase efficiency and provide guaranteed biodiversity gains. Furthermore, the view taken on biodiversity credits was of a system of a retail price index with a basket of metrics, which would then be scored and taken as a baseline, then returned to every five years and progressed. This work would underpin any generation of biodiversity credit and the subsequent share offer that was released by Highlands Rewilding makes clear that “biodiversity uplift credits provide our strongest natural-capital credit (NCC) revenue stream in our business plan. Carbon credits play an important support role” ([HR 2022](#)). This puts the two revenue streams into perspective

Jeremy was clear that the nature of the project will mean that unwanted investors and potential ‘greenwashers’ are likely to be put off, as there are inherent risks in the time-scales of carbon capture and the 5% return on investment offered will not be enough for those not serious about carbon. The project will be looking at different sources of finance in equity markets, financial institutions such as

² He explained that 16 of the 22 staff are from the Highlands.

asset investment houses, university endowment funds, and finally banks. The latter would ideally include both the Scottish National Investment Bank and private banks.

A different part of the vision was on promoting energy cost savings by utilising indigenous sources. Electricity, heating and fuel will have the possibility of being connected to local housing developments. Jeremy was keen to stress the joint venture opportunities, such as 50/50 investment with communities where private sector can bring investment to community partnerships.

3.2 Marian Bruce – Enterprise Manager at Trees for Life / Affric Highlands

Marian introduced the landmark [Affric Highlands project](#); a partnership between Trees for Life and [Rewilding Europe](#). Taking a 30 year view, the project aims to connect-up areas of rewilding land, and by extension different landowners. Its geographical focus is “from Loch Ness across the central Highlands to Kintail in the west, including Glens Cannich, Affric, Moriston and Shiel” ([TfL 2023](#)) (Figure 12).

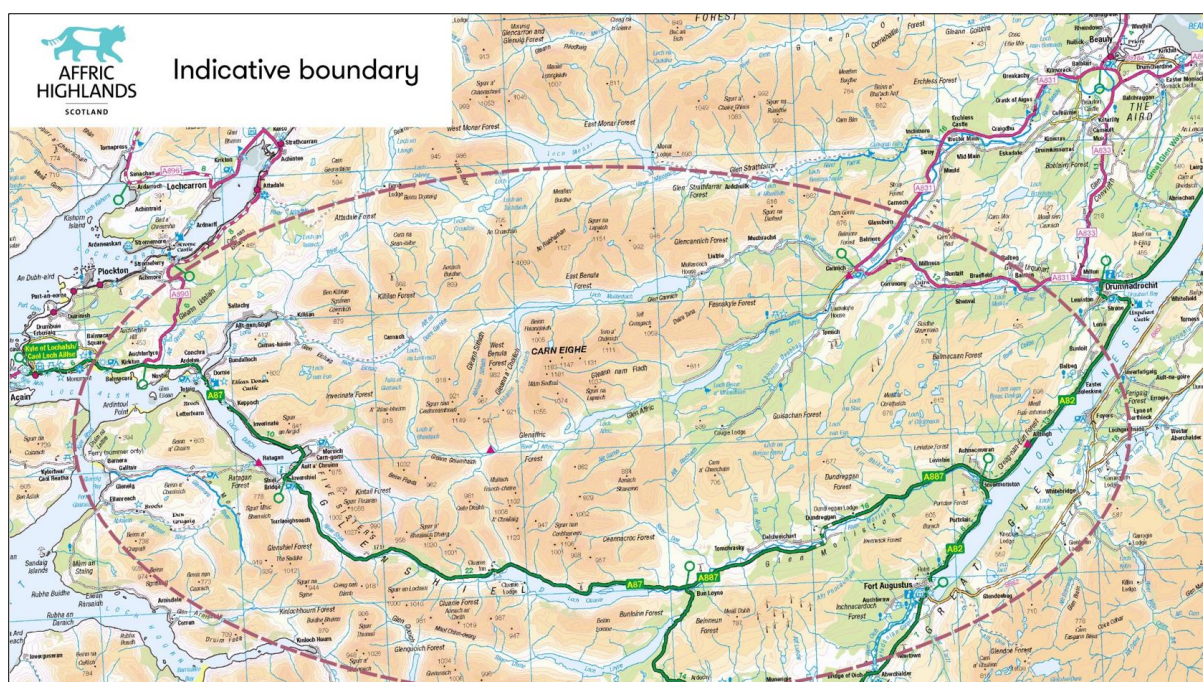


Figure 12: Indicative boundary of the Affric Highlands project area (Source: Bruce)

Affric Highlands aims to scale up nature restoration in a way that works for people and the land. The project has transitions from a tree planting focus to wider approach based around three principles:

- 1) Everyone cares for the wellbeing land;
- 2) Nature communities and business need each other; and

3) A diverse coalition of people is necessary to make it happen.



Figure 13: Marian Bruce presenting on Affric Highlands (Source: Author)

Using the [SDG 'Wedding cake'](#), Marian demonstrated the thinking behind trees of life, where society and economy are built upon a nature systems, and so by repairing that biosphere people can prosper. The Affric Highlands project is ultimately about nature restoration, placing ecological aspects at the core, as well as scientific integrity and allowing nature to rebound itself and utilising natural regrowth where possible throughout native woodlands, peatland and protection of rivers. This means supporting a nature-based economy, nature-positive businesses, agroforestry and timber, agro-ecology and ecosystem services.

The carbon offsetting element has been developed as a product of the biodiversity and social impact approach and is now bundled together. The functionality of an ecosystem is important, rather than just identifying which species are present. As such, water and air quality - amongst other aspects - are part of this higher biodiversity measure, which has to be context specific. Third-party accreditation and verification is essential and investors will not invest unless this verification is on the table. Various Global South accreditation schemes have been developed over decades and emergent European and Global North schemes are building on this foundation.

The Affric Highlands and Trees for life approach places greater focus on the social aspects of the projects and advancing the kind of impact measures in this space. Sustainable livelihoods, green jobs and reconnecting with nature are all part of community wealth building approach³, where income is ultimately shared with communities. Marian viewed this as a kind of moral imperative as biodiversity belongs to everyone. Payments are made to place-based, development trusts where they provide money with no strict directive. Of a recent sale of carbon credits, one third of the revenue - around £23,000 - was paid as lump sums to two different organisations, with no stipulation on how funds should be spent.

Capacity building is an important part of the community wealth building agenda, and carbon offsetting revenue can be used to support this objective. Community engagement strategies should be community-led but without funding for capacity building, there often is not sufficient resources to allow the community to fully participate and/or lead. Affric Highlands will look to develop relationships with such communities to understand such capacity for community-led work can be generated.

The scope for change in land management is affected by the differing values and priorities held by different stakeholders, as seen for instance in deer management. This is a challenge for developing projects looking to bring about sustainable and positive change through collaborations between people with these different standpoints. TfL takes a pragmatic approach to this, seeking to co-create ways in which the things that matter to people about the present can be built into a shared vision of the future. This is therefore a major undertaking, and it will take time to build the trusting partnerships required, but the need for change, combined with the fact that stakeholders are united by a deep-seated care for the land and nature means that there are new possibilities in how people can work together.

³ See recent report commissioned by Community Land Scotland for a background on community wealth building, in the context of natural capital and nature-based carbon offsets ([MacFarlane and Brett 2022](#)).

To expand on this community wealth building approach, the governance of the Affric Highlands project will transition to include communities, landowners, partner organisations etc., with a focus on “looking for people who are invested, not just investing”. There are complex motivations amongst landowners to engage with projects but the Affric Highlands model is fundamentally about situating the carbon, nature and people together. There is no ‘middle ground’ for potential customers and the hope is this approach may create a premium price for its carbon and biodiversity credits in future.

3.3 George Campbell – Operations Director for North Scotland at RSPB

George provided an overview of the journey that [RSPB](#) has been on as a large landowner regarding the management of its varied types of landscape. Beginning with the case of its [regeneration of the Flow Country](#), George demonstrated the pace of change that is possible, when conditions and directive allow for it. He pointed to the example of the forestry expansion across the Highlands during the 1980s, which transformed the peatland landscape and ultimately damaged over 150,000 ha of flow country peatland (see Figures below). This speaks to a broader issue of where 20% of Scotland is peatland and 80% of this is in poor condition. From a carbon sequestration perspective, 1.6 billion tonnes of carbon is stored in Scotland’s peatland, yet its degradation means 16 million tonnes of CO₂ emitted annually from peatland across the UK.

1980s afforestation of the Flows

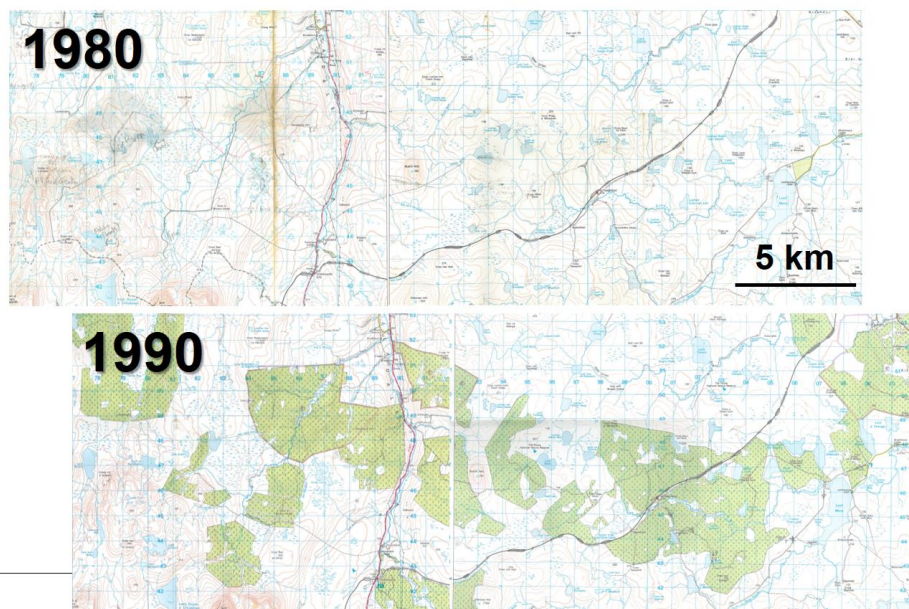


Figure 14: Afforestation of the Flow Country between the 1980s and 1990s (Source: Campbell)



Figure 15: Ridge and furrow for tree planting (Source: Campbell)

Figure 16: Aerial view of plantations in the Flow Country (Source: Campbell)



Figure 17: George Campbell (RSPB) presenting (Source: author)

Decades of learning has culminated in the [Flows to the Future project](#) running from 2014-2019, as the restoration of the bogs became the central land management action in the area. The forest to bog transition involved removing plantations, where there were plantation trees in the wrong place and full canopy cover that was adversely impacting bog health. To date, RSPB have removed 2,600 hectares of plantation and blocked 300 km of drains across 2,000 hectares of land.

George spoke of the scale of investment required to restore these landscape, comparing it to setting up the original Forestry Commission. Working with the [Peatland Action scheme](#) through NatureScot, which will invest over £250m

across a 10-year period from 2020. RSPB have 54 schemes completed or in delivery and 3,304 hectares peatland restoration delivered. They are developing a five-year pipeline of projects across the Islands, estimating 4,424 ha of restoration achievable in five years, and a total of 10,326 ha potentially restorable. This includes two trial sites for Lumbister in Shetland & Forsinard. In terms of financing the work, 50% has come from Peatland Action and the rest from organisational investment.

The Peatland Code and Peatland Action scheme requirements are similar but not the same, and so some duplicate work is required to qualify for both; the latter being critical to the sale of carbon credits. RSPB has already committed to selling carbon credits to commercial outlets before registering with code. Some partners are buying into pure carbon, others into the overall package of nature, biodiversity and employment. Sales are reviewed by an ethical standard board made up from external partners.

Marketing and maintenance are the potentially the most critical factors in project success, providing clarity of plans, monitoring requirements, and demonstrating consistency. Whilst there is a potential alignment between public policy and private investment, which may create a unique opportunity unique for carbon markets, RSPB are cautious about the overall profit projections from this, once maintenance and insurance over the lifespan of projects (e.g. 60 years) is accounted for.

Understanding these costs is crucial, with the 'forest-to-bog' model only working currently where 'public funding covers capital costs.

RSPB provides local benefit through community grants, which are governed by fundraising charity board. They must have alignment with organisational objectives, as well funding nature focussed education and research. With the Highlands and Islands focus, housing is an increasing area of concern and RSPB will aim to make impact in this sector.

3.4 Lynne West – Secretary of the Glenmoriston Improvement Group

The second part of the day provided insights from the local community. It began with Lynne West of the [Glenmoriston Improvement Group \(GIG\)](#). GIG are not incorporated, but a small voluntary group in the Glenmoriston area, with 210 listed residents, although not all are homes are permanently inhabited. They primarily organise via a Facebook page, which hosts overall aims to improve area.

As referenced in Section 3.2, GIG received two donations of £11,680 and £7,260 from TfL, with no restrictions on how the funding is spent. GIG's committee made the choice to use funds on projects aligned with nature. Lynne emphasised that as a small organisation - with a constitution and bank account - the TfL approach of gifting without instruction is particularly useful for the scale of their projects.

Some of their recent projects included installing an annual Christmas lights display, a street party for jubilee weekend, a memorial seat, and village wildlife trail. They also facilitated research into the local bardic traditions of Glenmoriston. Other projects include investing in bespoke local signs for animal crossings to slow down traffic in the area. They are planning to develop and enhance the local play-park using sustainable recycled material. Plans also include general environmental improvements to the village such as bee friendly plants, use of recycled plastics for benches.

3.5 Ian Leaver – Chief Officer at Fort Augustus & Glenmoriston Community Company
Founded in 2007 by the local Community Council, the [Fort Augustus & Glenmoriston Community Company \(FAGCC\)](#) was set up with the aim of receiving and distributing windfarm community benefit funds. The Company are engaged in several projects based around local development, fulfilling community services which may in the past have been the remit of the local authority. These include:

- A student grant scheme, to support local residents who are going to university;
- An apprenticeship scheme works to support and find employment for you people under 25 years old, in small companies for up to three years (up to £25,000);
- Individual for community benefit grants of up to £1,000 that promote wider community benefit.
- More recent grants include ones focused on cost of living and family support (up to £500/household); and
- Constituted groups can receive larger grants with any over £25,000 being referred to the renewables developer for ratification.

The windfarm developer, [SSE](#), who provide FAGCC with its funds have temporarily relaxed rules on the funding scope. It now allows cost of living payments to individuals, with geographical constraints. In a normal year, they receive around £600k income per annum coming in from both wind and hydro. For particular cases, FAGCC are able to withdraw funds up to five years in advance for housing, a recent example of this was the 12 new homes at Caledonian Court in Fort Augustus. FAGCC rebuilt the

Medical centre for £1.2m on land purchased by the group and leases the building to NHS Highland. Finally, the group have also been able to provide support and Electric vehicles to Sunflower Home Care and have installed a chemical waste disposal site for campervans. For more information on FAGCC's projects funded via the renewable energy community benefit funds, see this [episode of the Local Zero pod](#).

Importantly, the legislated 'Community Right to Buy' was invoked in order to buy land for housing, with 12 new houses built and rented out to locals. FAGCC are in the process of utilising community asset transfer legislation to acquire vacant properties from Scottish canals and the Highland Council

FAGCC's community action plan was developed through consultation with the community, with a sports and leisure centre receiving the highest priority. FAGCC view carbon offsetting as an opportunity to provide local jobs, apprenticeships and as a way of keeping the area attractive to young people. It sees space and opportunity for affordable homes as one the major challenges, particularly through land access difficulties, and so estates would be well placed to engage and support local housing.

3.6 Jane Frere – Local artist

Jane Frere, a local research-led artist with long-term ties to the area, offered her perspective on potential changes to the landscape associated with carbon offsetting projects. This followed extensive discussions with other local residents.

She began by giving examples of her own experiences, having lived in the glen over a long period of time. She described how landscape changes, such as new buildings, roads, wind turbines, deer fences etc. have significantly impacted her freedom to roam. Her concern was whether rewilding projects paradoxically might further hinder people's access in uninhabited areas, instead of encouraging them.

However, she concluded that if designed correctly, offset projects could have the potential to enhance public access to land, as well as create interest in and an awareness of a depleted environment. They could also provide outdoor classrooms for education and cultural spaces for community events and workshops.

Another aspect of the emerging rewilding and carbon markets she found particularly concerning, was the style of language being used and in particular the prevalence of corporate jargon. This served to alienate people within communities, furthering division from those not closely involved with the sector. By talking about nature in these terms - i.e. the commoditisation of nature - there was a real risk of polarising responses and contributing to a suspicion of greenwashing.

Some felt the concept of voluntary carbon offset markets could only be fully understood by those involved. Equally, some local people neither understood, nor even knew about, the developments in the carbon offsetting market.

In terms of Highlands Rewilding's community engagement, in-person community meetings were restricted due to COVID-19 restrictions. Consequently, Highlands Rewilding first introduced their vision for Bunloit via the media and the online forum "Bunloit Ideas". This offered interesting insights into to the attitudes of local residents living in proximity to the proposed rewilding scheme. There was a combination of positive voices, with others who were not in favour of any changes in the area.

The most significant objections related to the potential for increased traffic on the Bunloit road, which passes through the Bunloit estate and links it to the nearby village Drumnadrochit. Concerns related

to it being a single track, high gradient road, which was already considered by some residents to be dangerous.

Members of the Highlands Rewilding team were encouraged to bring their expertise and experience to bear through regular community presentations, which would serve to further develop engagement and dialogue with the local community. Jane felt more explanation would be helpful to make clear where the true value of carbon offsetting lay for communities.

More generally, people were concerned about carbon offset projects' impact on the rising price of land and property, particularly how acquisitions linked to the emerging carbon offsetting market are adversely impacting local residents and communities the most. Local people were likely to be more supportive of projects if they included opportunities for as many young people as possible and maximised community benefit.

There were also concerns too around the urgent need for legislation and regulation of offset schemes; ironing out potential loopholes of unverified green claims. This is important in countering early distrust towards not only carbon offsetting projects but urgently needed biodiversity restoration. She sensed a degree of scepticism about these projects; a result of the inequality of land ownership and a long history of poor land management, especially the legacy of the Highland Clearances, private hunting estates and more recently, commercial forestry plantations that emerged in response to government subsidies in the 1970's and 1980's.

Finally, with so many specialists employed within these restoration projects, Jane felt one way of bringing communities on side, was by helping to raise awareness of the biodiversity and climate crises, as well as how local communities can play a part towards their mitigation.

3.7 Roundtable discussion



Our roundtable discussion placed the community and local members at the centre, whilst fielding questions from all participants.

There was a combination of concerns and positive reflections about the increasing role of community groups in picking up and filling public service gaps from work that would previously be under the remit of the council. Whilst this places greater strain on communities' capacity and resources, it does allow action to be taken quicker, with fewer hurdles to overcome. It also allows services to be more tailored, shaped and responsive to community views. Ultimately, there was a shared concern about how community self-funding was becoming increasingly common as a means of funding critical services (e.g. health,

education, housing etc.), and it shouldn't really be their role to be provide the infrastructure and staff to provide these.

Even so, these kinds of community projects were seen as an important means of bringing communities together, particularly in smaller rural contexts. They instil a sense of pragmatism and encourage reflection on the community's welfare, for example long-standing issues relating to empty properties. However, with the growing need to provide essential services, community groups are being drawn

further away from the space they want to operate in, such as supporting the projects that make life more enjoyable, such as the arts, culture, sport etc.

As with the precedent set by windfarm benefit funds, TfL are looking to replicate this model in the nature restoration market. However, skills and capacity development is a real concern to support effective management and distribution of these growing funds. Yet there is a critical need for these rural communities to take advantage of these new income streams to support community welfare, such as via employment opportunities, skills development etc. There appears to be an obvious opportunity to ensure that a portion of these revenue streams are targeted at long-term community capacity building, rather than just capital investment in physical projects. Finally, there was a consensus about building a more holistic vision of rewilding and tying it more strongly to the idea of community wealth building, in its broadest sense.