

Lough Neagh Partnership Study Tour to the Hebrides

A personal report by Alastair McIntosh, organiser

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Agnes Rennie (Chair of the Galson Trust) with Professor Frank Rennie, the four Lough Neagh delegates Michael Browne, Gerry Darby, Gary McErlain and Conor Jordan, and Professor Alastair McIntosh with Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin

Introduction and Background

In the warm summer of 2023, Lough Neagh experienced a catastrophic bloom of blue-green algae. Sand dredging caught much of the flack, but the main cause is thought to be climate change heating that compounded biological activity fed by agricultural and sewage runoff. And this, this in a bioregion where statutory regulatory control has historically been weak. The bloom was a shock to the tourist industry and it had multiple knock-on consequences through economic multipliers and linkages on other aspects of people's livelihood. However, a positive spin-off has been that it has deepened the commitment of local stakeholders to look at how they might strengthen their future capacity for responsibility. Some form of community ownership might be the way ahead, and this study tour was for four delegates, senior in the Lough Neagh Partnership, to explore such vision.

Covering 151 square miles, Lough Neagh is the biggest freshwater lake by surface area in the UK and Ireland. Its catchment covers between a third and a half of Northern Ireland's land area and it extends over the border with the Irish Republic into Co. Monaghan. Whilst the water is a public asset that accounts for some 40% of Northern Ireland's piped supply, the catchment area is owned by more than 13,000 interests - mostly farming, forestry and conservation. The bed of the lough is owned by the Earl of Shaftesbury, Nick Ashley-Cooper.¹

I first became loosely involved with this in June 2022. A friend, the chess grandmaster Jonathan Rowson of the *Perspectiva* theological think tank, had invited me to speak at the annual Realisation Festival that they jointly organise at St Giles House, the stately home of the Earl of Shaftesbury in Dorset. My keynote address, [What Brings Nature into Being](#), was attended by Nick and his wife Dinah. During a fleeting chat, I gave them a copy of *Soil and Soul*, my book on community land ownership and empowerment. That evening, over an empowering dram, one of the St Giles trustees, Ed Haddon, spoke with me about Nick's inheritance in Lough Neagh, and about the workings of community land trusts in Scotland.

The [Lough Neagh Partnership](#) (LNP) is an elected stakeholder body of some thirty local community, farming, conservation, sand extraction and heritage organisations. Nick has been [in discussions](#) with them about the possibility some form of public ownership for the lough's bed. This had formed the backdrop to an online public consultation [webinar](#) that was put on by the LNP in July 2024. The speakers included old acquaintances Dr Peter Doran of Queens University law school and Dr Liam Campbell of the Mellon Centre for Migration Studies. At their suggestion, I too was asked to speak, my invited topic being community land trusts in Scotland with a focus on the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust.

This, in turn, led to the LNP seeking approval from the Heritage Lottery Fund to ask me to organise a study tour. I was raised and educated in the island that is known as Lewis in the north and Harris in the south, the two divided not by the ocean but by a mountain range and old administrative boundaries. Some 75% of it is now community owned, and Scotland has some 500 community land trusts that cover very nearly 3% of its 19 million acres.

¹ In this report I have referred to him as "Nick", rather than as "Ashley-Cooper" or "the Earl". This reflects our acquaintance, but whilst avoiding a misleading impression of distance, it should not be taken as implying familiarity any closer than that described.

Why this personal report?

This is a personal report but with much appended material for context. It not a substitute for full reporting by the LNP. Rather, it is intended as a contribution to their reporting back to stakeholders and it doubles as my appreciative feedback to our community hosts in the islands. It also serves as a reflection on wider issues, loosely linked to the ongoing Northern Ireland peace process and a symbolic role that Lough Neagh might potentially contribute.

The island(s) of Lewis and Harris account for just over 20,000 people. As a core part of Scotland's *Gàidhealtachd*, they are indigenously Gaelic speaking. Like in both the North and South of Ireland, religion is culturally important. Northern Hebridean religion is predominantly Protestant, socially conservative, and with a doctrine and polity that follows the Westminster Confession of Faith.

As such, it would not be out of step with many of Northern Ireland's Protestant churches, albeit one that is not (these days) politicised to the extent that Irish religion can still be. The islands share with Irish religion, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, a strong [underlying spirituality](#). This has expression in communitarian values. These show in a frequent emphasis on doing things "for the community". So that the island might have periodical rest, even its nonbelievers are often atheist Sabbatarians!

In recent decades, local authority reorganisation and improved transport links have led to close relationships with the predominantly Roman Catholic islands of the southern Outer Hebrides, of which South Uist and Barra are the largest units. Such a religiously nuanced human geography constitutes an important cultural backdrop to the Lough Neagh study tour, albeit one that had not been anticipated in the visit's original framing (Appendix 1).

I emphasise that this is a *personal* report because, in addition to what the LNP had commissioned me to do, it ties in with my wider Quaker concerns for peace, reconciliation, community empowerment and a human ecology that gives life. My backdrop here includes having been a regular guest lecturer over the past quarter of a century on both the advanced officer training courses at the UK Defence Academy at Shrivenham, and the Irish Military College at Curragh where my remit was to speak to [nonviolence](#).

Such work and its possible relevance to Lough Neagh also ties in with a past involvement with the World Council of Churches (WCC), and this, especially through the Rev Alan Falconer of the Church of Scotland and his esteemed work across Ireland with *Reconciling Memories*. I gratefully acknowledge his informal and slight, but memorable mentoring.

In such connection, this report will touch on why the future ownership and management of the lough could be of symbolic significance in Ireland's continuing peace process. It is why, beyond my interests in land reform and community empowerment, I have engaged so thoroughly with this study tour.

Moreover, it might justify why, as Dr Peter Doran suggested during the run-up to our July 2024 consultation webinar, "Lough Neagh is a sign of the times ... a parable in making."

Preliminary Ground Laying and a Core Question

CVs of the four delegates from Northern Ireland are given in Appendix 1. Briefly, these were:

- Gerry Darby, Lough Neagh Partnership (LNP) General Manager
- Michael Browne, Lough Neagh Heritage Plan Coordinator
- Gary McErlain, LNP Chairman and an 8th generation fisherman on the lough
- Conor Jordan, LNP Director, former chair and sand trader

Originally, they had planned to come from the Monday to Friday with me arriving slightly earlier to do groundwork. Difficulties with flight connections from Belfast led to their schedule being advanced by a day. This allowed me to visit some of our hosts and to keep a finger on the community pulse through seeing old friends.

Out of respect for Nick Ashley-Cooper's privacy I had not been directly in touch with him about the delegation. Communication had been via Michael Browne and, more widely, through Jonathan Rowson. However, on the eve of the delegation's arrival I was pleased to receive an email from Nick saying: "I am very happy you have been providing guidance and support."

I mention this because, in the preceding months, I had twice been contacted by environmental activists, who, knowing my history in supporting such causes, invited me to help them to campaign on the lough's pollution and ownership. I respectfully declined, explaining that in my case it seemed better to knock at what might be an open door than to presume it to be closed. In this respect, my involvement with Lough Neagh has differed from some more adversarial land reform engagements, especially that of the Isle of Eigg in the 1990s. The people who had contacted me accepted the rationale of such an approach, and Nick's emailed message opportunely affirmed such a path. I mention this backdrop, not least because, as David Cameron's handout stresses (Appendix 4), "Openness and transparency are essential." Such work, it partly about building trust across different stakeholders, including where there may have been frustration and sometimes hurtful [divisions](#).

I had already met with David Cameron, a past chair of the North Harris Trust and Community Land Scotland after bumping into him at the Tarbert church on the Sunday. This led to a pre-meeting over afternoon tea to discuss the delegation's needs and interests. Always generous with his time, David formally welcomed Gerry, Conor, Gary and Michael on their first night and shared a handout that he had prepared to structure his reflection (Appendix 4).

As usual with David's visitor handouts, this began with emphasising *community desire*, and that so as to function "not as a community of interest but a community of place." He explained what a community trust is, how it can be set up, the democratic resident membership structure of operating, the process of using ballots to advise the board on contentious issues, and, importantly, that one size does not fit all. Like with natural ecology, human ecology is highly niche specific, and this may not sit comfortably for central government preferences for standardisation. A common legal structure is to establish the trust as a membership company limited by guarantee, with charitable status. The charitable company can then serve as the holding company for business activities are run through separate subsidiary limited companies. These pass their profits back to the parent charity. In addition to avoiding complications with charitable law, such a structure provides a firebreak in the event that a business activity might fail. Normally, the land remains secured.

David concluded that a community landowner set up as a land trust can become the shop front or “go to” organisation of an area of land, water or bioregion. Usually, this will be as the first brick in the wall but not the last. In such a way the trust serves in a gatekeeping role. It holds a steady and community-accountable platform on which other many other activities can play out. His bottom line was therefore: “Community landownership is about OPPORTUNITIES based on local decision making.” Strikingly, as far as we are aware, not one of Scotland’s 500-plus community land trusts has gone bust since their formation. That compares most favourably with small businesses. But as David emphasised, it is essential to have supportive government policies in place. These need to join up policies and support from the Scottish government, government agencies, and through to the local authority and even more local levels such as community councils where they operate.

David, however, raised a central challenging core question. It ran through most other meetings during the week, and it focussed the delegation’s minds along deepening paths of thought. If the right intentions and structures can be moved into pace in government(s), and if community desire is to be kindled sufficiently to fire up people’s motivation sufficiently to give of their voluntary time and competent skills, then ... *What would community ownership be for?*

Outcomes of Meetings with Community Land Trusts

Our full programme is Appendix 2. With various side visit stops along the way, we met with:

1. [The West Harris Trust](#), *An Urras Taobh Siar na Hearadh*, including their major community and visitor centre [Talla na Mara](#). Thanks to Linda Armstrong (Commercial Manager), Rhoda Macdonald (director), Neil Campbell (former Secretary), Rhoda Campbell (community volunteer) and Rachel Campbell (Neil’s and Rhoda’s daughter, who has just been awarded a 1st class honours for her thesis on community land ownership at the University of Glasgow).
2. [The Bays of Harris Community Estate](#), which is a trust in waiting, attempting to negotiate purchase with their current landlord. Thanks to John Maher (Vice-chair and former Chair).
3. [The North Harris Trust](#), *Urras Ceann a Tuath na Hearadh*. Thanks to Calum Mackay (founding and ex-chair) and Diana MacLennan (Office & Land Administrator).
4. [The Galson Estate Trust](#), *Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn* and while there, the [Ness Historical Society](#) museum, *Comunn Eachdraidh Nis*. Thanks to Agnes Rennie (*Cathraiche* / Chairperson), Professor Frank Rennie (former director) and Jemma MacVicar (Executive Manager).
5. [Carloway Estate Trust](#), *Urras Oighreachd Chàrlabhaigh*. Thanks to Ben Inglis-Grant (Project Officer, Peatland Action).
6. [The Stornoway Trust](#), *Urras Steòrnabhaigh*. Thanks to Iain Maciver (the Factor, i.e. CEO).

Our meetings ranged from discussions over tea and home baking in people’s homes, to the board rooms in trust offices, to restaurant meals, to drive-arounds to see what was on the land. It would be repetitive to describe what emerged from each visit as there was much overlapping experience. The photographs (Appendix 7) mainly reflect the people we met with, not the projects, as our emphasis was on learning about ways of operating.

The essence of what emerged in discussion with these 6 groups can be distilled as follows:

- The community must have had a need for change that kindles the desire to get organised and to put in and sustain the necessary mainly voluntary effort.
- Usually, that change is linked to perceptions of decline of the assets of a place, population loss, or lack of opportunity for the younger generation. The core driver for many trusts is freeing up land for social/affordable housing. This is usually developed in partnership with housing associations. Priority is given to keeping children in the local school and providing the community with needed skill sets.
- It is *ownership*, and not just *management*, that matters to motivate collective responsibility. The realisation that it is now “our land” is a community wake-up call.
- It is helpful to have an existing sense of community cohesion and boundaries. One of the problems that we heard faces the proposed Bays of Harris buyout, is that the estate’s history scatters its coherence across several non-contiguous settlements.
- There must be (and in rural communities of place that are not highly socially stratified like in cities, there usually are) people with needed skills that can be brought to the table, both blue and white collar playing equally important roles.
- In community land trusts, women often play equal or leading roles. Childcare and other carer support enables participation and service for men and women alike who might have such responsibilities.
- A land trust must normally have clearly identifiable and quantifiable economic drivers that can keep it sustainable – wayleaves, rentals, energy sources (hydro, wind, solar and biomass), ecological regeneration and business activities (including the provision of rented small units) that can attract grant income and give work.
- Activities should seek to optimise economic linkages and multipliers within the local economy, this to build a sustainable rather than an extractive economic base and to cultivate such qualities as self-reliance and self-determination.
- In addition to providing a significant measure of democratically accountable self-determination and opening up the potential of the potential of the land, community trusts cultivate both confidence and competences in grassroots people. They engender a sense of togetherness and “can do”. Ironically, what can be perceived as “socialism” strongly squares the circle with entrepreneurship, transcending both for individual good held in the basket of the common good.
- A land trust keeps a finger on the pulse of emergent opportunities and threats. For example, we heard how the cruise ship facility at Stornoway has yet to show whether it will be a net benefit to the island, or have unintended consequences. We saw how the Carloway Trust was benefitting from peatlands restoration, both ecologically and with revenues drawn in. But in contrast, the landlord who owns the Bays of Harris required a revaluation of his estate for the purposes of a community buyout to take account of the potential value of carbon offset credits in the peat bogs. Like with wind turbines, this has potentially created new value to less-favoured-area agricultural grazings that previously had little value.
- We heard from several trusts of the importance of championing good integration and communications with government and statutory mechanisms and

representatives - MPs and MSPs, local government councillors, planning authorities, utility providers, CalMac (the ferry company), etc.. In this, land trusts can function like community councils (and perhaps, with them), but with the added benefit of having the teeth that comes from controlling the bedrock asset of place.

- Culture is enriched by community ownership, leading to closer integration of local heritage, environmental responsibilities, respect for faith, development of the Gaelic language, cultivation of the arts, provision of sports facilities, grants to youth activities from energy revenues ... and all of these in ways that dovetail in with employment creation. Examples that we witnessed included community museums and archaeological attractions that have a gallery or café attached and used by both tourists and locals. On the Galson estate at Cross in Ness, we arrived for lunch to find the café nearly filled with a local elderly folks' gathering, some of whom took interest and delight to find that we had come to learn from their achievements.
- Community ownership often arises most urgently from localities that have had to struggle in the past to be able properly to function as integrated communities owing to past neglectful, disruptive or exploitative private ownership and its denial of community agency. Agency is the capacity to be responsible, to make one's own choices about the future, and to get things done. That, however, is a learning process, with networks such as [Community Land Outer Hebrides](#), [Community Land Scotland](#), the [Development Trusts Association Scotland](#) supporting peer-to-peer learning between fledgling and experienced land trusts.
- As part of such learning, communities come to recognise that conflict is normal in functioning human groups, but the name of the game is to develop the skills both to recognise it, and process it healthily. As Colin Macleod (whose family is from Gravir in Lewis), the late founder of [GalGael Trust](#) in the hard-pressed area of Govan Glasgow used to put it: "Shit happens. What matters is how you shovel it."
- As such, a certain community discipline is needed in a way that keeps a sharp eye towards building and sustaining patterns of right relationships amongst people. "What if that fails?" asked one of our delegates of Calum Mackay in North Harris. "Then the backstop," he said, "are the governance provisions laid down in company law" (paraphrased from memory).
- Land trusts depend upon having a love of people and of place, both in indigenous populations and in incomers who have settled there. The word "love" comes up often in community trust contexts – love of place, love of nature, and more cautiously expressed so as to not sound naff, love of people, or "... for the community". This motivates and rewards what it takes to drive the growth in confidence and competences that are necessary for communities to release their song.
- Consequently, most trusts find, in words emphasised by Frank Rennie at Galson and reinforced by Agnes and Jemma, that, "We came to understand that the land is about far more than the land alone." Community land ownership is about how people can function more fully again after generations of limited agency.
- Even more, it is about how "poetry becomes people" (Hamish Henderson). About the potential for human beings to have not just any old life, but as somebody said, to have life "more abundantly".

That Core Question: What would community ownership be for?

Here we grapple with why the study tour took place. The delegates were particularly stuck by the emphasis that our land trust hosts placed on having *drivers* to establish and sustain community ownership. But what would those be with Lough Neagh?

What *difference* would some form of community ownership make, especially given that we are not talking about land. We are not even talking about the water. We are talking about the bed of the lough and the soil that holds it. What economic value is that? What would be the point? This raises questions both pragmatic and symbolic.

In his Substack piece of midsummer 2024, [Thoughts on Lough Neagh](#), Nick Ashley-Cooper addresses the ecological problems facing the lough and its future health. He names the main issue as excessive levels of phosphorous running into the lake. A report published by the [Northern Ireland Assembly](#) also mentions excessive nitrates. These come from fertiliser runoff, and also, from both agricultural and human sewage that has been poorly handled. What has been a longstanding but growing problem is now exacerbated by the heating effects of climate change, as this boosts the speed of biological activity.

Speaking as a director of the Shaftesbury Estate of Lough Neagh Ltd, Nick says: “As owners of the bed, the company has no control over the water in the lough nor any ability to control the nutrients that flow into it.” He emphasises, “This cannot be solved by one person or entity alone. It needs collective action and a coordinated approach with community, government and private sector coming together.” As such, he concludes, “The crisis touches on many complex structural and emotive issues which require brave and innovative new ideas and approaches.”

His essay cites a 2023 report of the [Environmental Justice Network Ireland](#) by Dr Bróna McNeill and Dr Ciara Brennan. This majors on a “rights of nature” approach, by which “decision-making focusses on what is of most benefit to the lough, rather than using metrics that prioritise economic development.” They sum up:

Current management of Lough Neagh is unsustainable, and has led to significant damage to this culturally, socially, environmentally and economically significant resource. The question of ownership should be at the forefront of discussions about the lough’s future because ownership ultimately dictates governance and management arrangements. A rights of nature approach may be used to inform the design of governance frameworks that are capable of producing better outcomes for the environment and communities.

Such an approach would require a) a willingness from the Shaftesbury side to cede ownership, b) a suitable structure to receive and manage the lough, and c) drivers to make it all happen. It might be assumed that ownership is lucrative, but although the Shaftesbury estate has owned the rights to the bed of the lough since colonial times in the 17th century, these are highly remunerative. Figures drawn from estate accounts cited in the essay state that in the ten years to 2022, net revenues averaged just £24,591 a year. These came mainly from sand extraction royalties.

There is therefore hardly a significant pecuniary advantage in “owning Lough Neagh”. Whether for that reason, or for others that are more altruistic, Nick’s essay concludes: “I have not wanted to

stand in the way of discussions over ownership and positive progress.” Moreover, he states that he is “open, willing and ready to engage on the future ownership structure of Lough Neagh.”

In this respect, let it not escape notice that the 7th in the Shaftesbury lineage was known as “the poor man’s earl” for his social reforming work, and that the family motto is *Love, Serve*. But even with a willingness on the owner’s behalf, the issue forced by David Cameron’s core question stands stubbornly persistent, namely:

If the door is open from the Shaftesbury side, would a community body, whether the LNP or some other structure, really want to take on the ownership of Lough Neagh?

Precisely what would be the *desire*? Where is it rooted amongst the closest stakeholders? And could it be carried forward in ways that would be sufficiently consensual to achieve a sustainable level of goals convergence across multiple stakeholder interests? Weighing up such questions, and one senses that it is with something of a heavy heart, Nick’s essay cites [a 2014 report](#) that could determine “no compelling grounds” for public acquisition. He observes that “the government, whose job is to represent the interests of the public, currently does not seem to want it.”

This leaves him feeling rather as if he “has been used as a scapegoat” for a more complex constellation of problems over the years. It is a position that he finds “deeply upsetting”, indeed, even as a land reformer I can feel a certain sympathy with a landowner who might be trapped by trappings that were not of his own choosing. And this, especially given a sequence of tragic family circumstances that unexpectedly led to Nick Ashley-Cooper becoming the heir to an estate that he had expected to be carried forward by his late brother.

To base the future of the lough on a “rights of nature” approach is sound natural ecology, but a realistic future must also add up to sound human ecology as part of that natural ecology (“ecology” being the study of plant and animal *communities*). How could community in this sense operate? Especially so, with an expanse of water where most of the problems derive from a complex network of ownership in the catchment? Furthermore, where one of the many layers that overlay that network is the historically tense pattern of religious affiliations around the shores, these being predominantly Protestant to the north and west, and Catholic to the south and east (Appendix 3)?

On the study tour, we heard of some striking and unexpected examples of landowners who had been instrumental in raising a people’s agency for connection as communities of place to a higher level. The 64,000 acre Stornoway Trust was gifted to the people in 1923 by [Lord Leverhulme](#). The 1,600 acre densely populated Isle of Scalpay was gifted to the people in 2012 (via the North Harris Trust) by its English landowner, [Fred Taylor](#). And without expectation of what any future settlement might look like, we noted, and were uplifted, by the conclusion to Nick Ashley-Cooper’s essay:

I would like to transfer the ownership of the Shaftesbury Estate of Lough Neagh Ltd into a charity or community trust model, with rights of nature included, as I think that this could be the best way to support the long-term future of Lough Neagh. Reaching this may take time, and until another structure is created, I will continue to take my responsibility seriously and work hard with others to help bring about positive change. This includes, using company profits to invest in the future well-being of the lough and to work with others to seek solutions to the current problems.

Reconciliation, Nature and a Vision for Humanity

But, but, but ... we must round on that unresolved core question of the drivers. On the one hand, the bed of the lough is never going to be an economic powerhouse in its own right. On the other hand, given the realities of runoff and of climate change, *something* has got to happen that can galvanise vision and generate community desire to sustain a future worth having.

It was in this respect that the study tour shed light upon an opening of the way; a deeper way of looking at the drivers.

Consider this. The bed of the lough and the soil out of which it was scooped by nature rests as the central focal point of Northern Ireland. Its catchment touches lightly over the border. *What other natural feature can claim such symbolic, psychological, and even, spiritual significance?* The bed of Lough Neagh is the cauldron, the heart. If that can be cared for by its surrounding communities, like an indicator species, a jewel in the crown, then given the past history, what better testament to reconciliation?

Let me now introduce, as alluded to earlier, two supporting elements to that way of thinking. One, touches on the cross-Protestant-Catholic work that culminated in the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement. My chosen angle on this comes from the book [Reconciling Memories](#) (available on the Internet Archive), an edited collection drawn together by Joseph Liechty the Rev Alan Falconer of the Church of Scotland, when Alan directed the Irish School of Ecumenics in Dublin and later, while director of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. The other element comes from an informed ex-military perspective offered by my brother-in-law, Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin, who lives in Lewis and who joined us for one of the days of the study tour.

Drawing from both the book and a *Theology in Scotland* essay, also called [Reconciling Memories](#), Alan addresses “cultural recovery” after bloody conflict. He suggests that communities can start to “break through the captivity of the memories of the different traditions” to “participate in a liberating event”. In so doing, they can begin to lay down the siege and coercion mentalities by which “history holds a community captive.”

How so? Because, as his essay puts it, “For the authors of the Bible, *to remember* is to be liberated,” and this, often, culminating in “staging a symbolic event heralding a new relationship between the communities.” In the preface to the second edition of their book, he and Joseph Liechty make the following point about practical and ongoing peace work in rebuilding fractured communities:

The most significant reconciling contribution ... was the recovery of a theology of forgiveness, which must be grounded in the acceptance by all parties that each has shared responsibility for creating a situation in which religious, social, and political identities have been formed and sustained as communities-in-opposition.... This resonance suggests that now is a *kairos* for forgiveness – the decisive moment to engage in such risky undertakings as forgiveness requires. (*Reconciling Memories*, 2nd edn., 1998, pp. 7 – 8).

In other words, and for our purposes, let the potential contribution of Lough Neagh’s future to ongoing reconciliation not be overlooked. It may have a deeper import, and that, as a driver.

Now to an ex-military perspective. At the Irish Military College in Curragh, officers are trained mainly for UN peacekeeping work. Both there and at the UK Defence Academy, I have often been struck by the insistence of experienced soldiers on listening to and bringing together both sides of a conflict. Ironically, the realities of conflict can result in deepening of understanding as to the conditions that build peace. It is why people like me, or irenic scholars at such universities as Maynooth, Trinity (Dublin), Queens (Belfast) and Ulster (London/Derry), can be invited as guest speakers and researchers.

When he was a young brigadier, my brother-in-law Nick Caplin was for a time the commander of the army helicopter unit out of Aldergrove, Co. Antrim. In this respect, I vividly remember an occasion in 2001 when taking a group of human ecology students on a study tour to Northern Ireland. One of our ports of call was to the Lodge in Portadown, where we listened to Dennis Watson, the Grand Master of the Grand Orange Order, offer a Protestant point of view on Northern Ireland's future.

Another port of call was to the Sinn Féinn offices at Camlough near Bessbrook. Here we in front of four men whose vision for the future was forming from the difficult transition from paramilitary operations to political process. There was a terrible clattering of helicopters overhead.

"I'm terribly sorry," I said, as if with a wink, for we could hardly hear our hosts. "My brother-in-law used to command those things until last year. I must have a word with him."

"You shouldn't be telling us a thing like that!" growled one of the IRA men. And then the irony caught up with the room, and the tension relaxed.

One of Nick's last assignments as a Major General had been to review the Irish peace keeping forces' UN operations in Lebanon. He came back enormously impressed, and after giving a lecture at Curragh, it was my honour to present the Commandant with a framed copy of an email from him in testimony to this. With that background, he wondered if he might connect with the study tour. So it was that he joined us on the Thursday for our visits to the Galson and the Carloway trusts. I was a little apprehensive, but quickly what began as formal conversation in the back of the minibus relaxed to laughter and to sharings of experience. Heading back to the hotel in the late afternoon, we went round by the 5,000-year-old Calanais (or Callanish) Stones.

As we walked up the path, I asked Connor Jordan how he'd felt about having Nick with us. To paraphrase from memory, "It's good, it's what has to happen," he said. "We've learned that we have to have these kinds of conversation to get to know and understand each other if we're not to slip back."

I put the same question to Nick. "Well ... what do you make of what they're about?"

"It's important," he said. "If they can pull together the communities around the lough, they'll help to pull together their future."

As we were about to leave the Stones, I asked Nick if he'd share his thoughts with the group. It was powerful coming from his background. The delegates wished they'd recorded it, but if they had, it

might not have been the same. Afterwards, I asked him for some notes. He wrote: “My observation was along the lines”:

- How important this initiative was, for many reasons including environment and building/strengthening the Loch Neagh community;
- That the timing was excellent: building and strengthening post the Troubles and post Brexit;
- The opportunity that this brings to cross borders and boundaries in building community with a common interest and desire centred around Loch Neagh;
- That the partnership had the opportunity through this initiative to provide exciting leadership across communities;
- That this will help communities to move beyond sectarianism to partnership with common purpose;
- There is potential through this community initiative to have broader impact for the benefit of the Island [of Ireland] at an exciting juncture in its history.

Lord MacLeod of Fuinary, the Presbyterian clergyman who founded the Iona Community in Scotland, said, “*Only a demanding common task builds community.*” Dr Peter Doran spoke of the lough being “a parable in making”. And the Rev Alan Falconer, of the value of a “symbolic event heralding a new relationship between the communities.” Could it be that in its symbolism we see the driver that, with the willingness of Nick Ashley-Cooper, could take this forward both for nature and the common good? After all, it is one thing for landowners and regulatory bodies perhaps to be a little lax about their effluent, when the lough is held in title harking back to colonial times. But it might be quite another thing, if the responsibility evolves to local tenure and a growing root of regeneration and pride. And that, not as a top-down initiative of one or both governments, but bottom up from local stakeholders ... for the rights of nature and the prospering of humankind.

In Scotland, community landownership is enabled by the government but not controlled by it. Could the same come to pass with an enabling Northern Irish Executive and, perhaps, the Irish Government - both facilitating an opening of the way by which the litmus test would be the lough’s restoring health? We have seen that, unlike with Scotland’s community trusts, there is not the same advantage of prosperity in the land. With Lough Neagh, the drivers are less tangible. But perhaps they come from hidden depths?

The name, Lough Neagh, comes from the Gaelic, *Loch n-Echach*, the Loch of the Horseman. In Irish mythology, it was created by a magical horse sent by Aonghus, the god of poetry, youth and love. The lough requires and serves those qualities. And we might glimpse, too, the motif of the great *each-uisge* (Scottish), the water horse, whose sighting signify upheaval and a transformation in the clan. The algal bloom was upheaval, right enough. But whither transformation?

On the eve of Saint Columba’s passing in 597 AD, it was his dear white horse that wept and taught his followers humility. According to Adomnán, the saint’s last words were, “Love one another unfeignedly. Peace.” Nature teaches. I rest it there.



St Columba bidding farewell to the White Horse, John Duncan RSA (1925), Carnegie

Rationale & CVs for the Visit to Lewis and Harris

Exploring Community Ownership for Lough Neagh

by Michael Browne, Lough Neagh Partnership

As part of a Heritage Lottery-funded programme, members from The Lough Neagh Partnership will undertake a study visit to the Isle of Lewis and Harris from 22nd to 26th October 2024. The primary goal of the visit is to explore the potential for community land ownership as a model for the future stewardship of Lough Neagh, one of Northern Ireland's most iconic natural resources.

The Isle of Lewis and Harris presents an inspiring case study for this exploration, having successfully transitioned to community ownership, which has driven significant positive outcomes for both land management and local communities. The community buyout of the island's land has led to numerous benefits, including: -

Local Empowerment: The community now has direct control over the land, making decisions that align with local needs and aspirations.

Economic Revitalisation: Community ownership has spurred the revitalisation of local businesses, helping to sustain the economy and creating jobs, particularly in the tourism sector.

Sustainable Development: Land use has become more sustainable, focusing on environmental preservation while fostering economic opportunities.

Social and Cultural Benefits: The preservation of local culture and heritage has been a core priority, contributing to the community's sense of identity and well-being.

The Lough Neagh Partnership seeks to learn from this model to assess its applicability to their own unique context. Lough Neagh, the largest freshwater lake in the UK and Ireland, faces a range of environmental, social, and economic challenges, including pollution, habitat degradation, and economic underperformance in the surrounding areas.

During the visit, the group will:

Engage with Local Leaders and Community Trusts: By meeting key figures from local community land trusts, the group will learn about the practicalities of

community ownership, including governance structures, fundraising efforts, and stakeholder engagement.

Study Best Practices: The group will explore the best practices employed on Lewis and Harris in areas such as sustainable tourism, land management, and the promotion of local culture and heritage.

Examine Economic and Social Impacts: Case studies of businesses and initiatives that have thrived under community ownership will provide insights into the economic and social benefits of such models.

Explore Adaptability: Importantly, the group will consider how the lessons from Lewis and Harris can be adapted to the Lough Neagh context, particularly in addressing issues such as environmental management, local governance, and economic regeneration.

The Lough Neagh Partnership group is also interested in examining the due diligence process that was conducted in facilitating community ownership on the Isle of Harris and Lewis.

The findings and experiences gathered during this visit will inform future discussions about community ownership for Lough Neagh, helping to shape a strategy that balances environmental sustainability with economic and social development.

The Delegates: Lough Neagh Partnership Party

Gerry Darby – Lough Neagh Partnership General Manager

Gerry is the general manager for LNP and has overall responsibility for all the functions delivered by LNP. Gerry has extensive experience in the development and management of major European funded programmes covering areas of Rural Development, Community Development, Landscape Management, Tourism Promotion and Development, and EU Grant Assessment. Gerry has a particular strong knowledge of Inland Waterway issues gained from his extensive experience working on the development of Lough Neagh and the Ulster Canal.

Michael Browne – Lough Neagh Heritage Plan Coordinator

Michael has been contracted by the Lough Neagh Partnership to develop and deliver The Lough Neagh Heritage Resilience Plan (Dec 2024 – Dec 2026), which has been funded by the Heritage Lottery. Michael previously worked for Mid Ulster

District Council as Head of Tourism and Corporate Events and has extensive experience in the delivery of major projects and programmes. During his previous role had overall responsibility for development and delivery of 5 strategic tourism projects funded by EU Grants valued at £8.5m.

Gary McErlain – Lough Neagh Partnership Chairman & Lough Neagh Fisherman

Gary McErlain is an eighth-generation fisherman on Lough Neagh and, together with his wife Anne Marie, operates Lough Neagh Tours, which focuses on the cultural and natural heritage of the area. As an active Chairman of the Lough Neagh Partnership, Gary has demonstrated exceptional leadership and guidance, particularly during the ecological crisis in 2023 and 2024 caused by elevated levels of blue-green algae.

Conor Jordan – Director, Lough Neagh Partnership & Lough Neagh Sand Trader

Conor Jordan has been a board member of the Lough Neagh Partnership since its inception 20 years ago. He has served as Chairman on several occasions, consistently demonstrating a deep understanding of the needs and challenges facing Lough Neagh.

In his professional role with Emerson Sand Traders, based on the southern shores of the lake, Conor has played a key role ensuring the industry is regulated in accordance with planning and environmental requirements, to help to ensure that sand extraction on Lough Neagh is conducted in a manner sensitive to the protective environmental designations of the Lough.

Alastair McIntosh – Human ecologist, honorary professor in the School of Education, College of Social Sciences, University of Glasgow

Alastair McIntosh was raised in the Isle of Lewis from the age of four when his father (whose uncle had been the island's first surgeon in the 1920s, and whose great grandfather from Strathconon had been a precentor at the start of the Free Church of Scotland), became the doctor in the parish of North Lochs in 1960. He went to school in the village of Leurbost, to the Nicolson Institute for secondary in Stornoway, and then to Aberdeen University. As one of the pioneers of modern Scottish Land Reform with the Isle of Eigg Trust, his books include *Poacher's Pilgrimage* about the island's human ecology and spirituality and *Soil and Soul* about the community land buyout in the Isle of Eigg and the battle that surrounded the once-proposed Isle of Harris "superquarry".

[Appendix 2](#)

Exploring Community Ownership for Lough Neagh

Study Tour Programme of Land Trust Visits

Tuesday 22nd to Saturday 26th October

Notice how professionally and caringly presented are most of the linked community websites. In addition to descriptions of communities of place and their projects, these often include minutes of meetings, details of elections or voting, governance charter documents, annual accounts, tributes to funders, community plans, and profiles with photographs of staff and directors. Such transparency builds confidence both towards and within communities.

Notice also how a high proportion of board members are from long-established local families, and in many trusts women as well as men play prominent leadership roles.

Day 1: Tuesday 22nd

1. **1540 Arrivals:** Alastair (who arrives in advance on Saturday) meets the delegation off the Glasgow flight at Stornoway Airport and they check out the people carrier.
2. **1600 – 1700 Travel:** Drive down the spinal route through Lewis to the [Harris Hotel](#), Tarbert, on the way learning about crofting settlements and viewing (from the road) the North Harris Trust's wind turbines on Clisham, its hydro at Bun Abhainn Eadarra ("the foot of the narrow river") and the relatively new village on land made available by the Trust, Ceann an Ora ("the Head of Gold"), said to be so-called for how the setting sun catches the mountain side.
3. **Evening Welcome:** Dinner at Harris Hotel, followed by a welcome and introduction to the rationale behind land trusts shared informally by [David Cameron CBE](#), the local garage proprietor and former chair of both the North Harris Trust as well as of the key networking representative group of some 100 of Scotland's land trusts, [Community Land Scotland](#).

Day 2: Wednesday 23rd

1. **0900 – 1000 Talla na Mara:** Prompt start to drive down to Scarista, South Harris, stopping for 20 mins to view the Talla na Mara (Centre by the Sea) of the West Harris Trust. This is a community complex for the arts, social functions, visitor dining and meeting. It is surrounded by new affordable housing built on Trust land by the [Hebridean Housing Partnership](#) to help keep people resident (rather than just holidaying) in the area. Linda Armstrong the Commercial Manager may be in the West Harris Trust's offices based there and might be able to have a quick word with us. The campsite lower down is run by the Trust, as are the two revenue-generating wind turbines at

Horgabost and Scarista. Other achievements are visitor facilities and housing plots down the Luskenytre road, but too far off our route to visit.

2. **1000 – 1130 [The West Harris Trust](#), *An Urras Taobh Siar na Hearadh***: Morning coffee at the home of Rhoda Campbell and her husband Neil in Scarista, 3 miles south of Talla na Mara. Both have been heavily involved in setting up the trust and serving on its board. We will discuss why community ownership was needed, how it happened, what the benefits have been, and any downsides. It is possible that current trust directors might also join us.
3. **1145 – 1300 [The Bays of Harris Community Estate](#)**. This is a land trust in waiting covering parts of the east coast of South Harris, Toe Head and the Isle of Berneray off North Uist. In all, the home of some 700 people. The landowner Mr Hitchcock has expressed agreement in principle to selling to the community, but two years ago came back requesting a revaluation to take account of a potential rise in market capitalisation given the advent of Peatland Carbon Units sold for offsetting (see pp. 61 – 65 [of my report](#) for Community Land Scotland). We will meet the photographer [John Maher](#) at his workshop on the Leverburgh pier, and have a bread-and-soup lunch in The Anchorage across the road to learn from their journey. John was Chair of the group until last year, but has now stood down and become Vice-chair to allow [Euan Galloway](#) to step into the position. The focus here will be on challenges more than achievements, and how a community perseveres and works gently to loosen long set-in-place structures.
4. **1300 – 1430 [Roineabhal](#), [St Clement's](#) and [The Golden Road](#)**. We will make our way back up north to Tarbert on a single-track road, part of which is called the Golden. En route, we will stop at the historic St Clement's Church, the ornately embellished burial place of the Macleods of Harris and Dunvegan with grave slabs of the West Highlands school of carving, and of their pipers, the MacCrimmons, said to be the greatest Scotland has ever known, whose descendants play on to this day and are actively involved in community land reform. At the church, we will survey Roineabhal, the mountain that was the focus for of an epic debate from 1991 – 2004 as I tell it in *Soil and Soul* and as Scottish Environment Link have documented in their review, [The Battle for Roineabhal](#). The church as social heritage and the mountain as both natural environment and once sought-after natural resource illustrate conflicts in community vision, and how these can be reduced (but never completely resolved) as communities seeks a modicum of goals convergence in shaping their futures.

As we travel up the Golden Road, compare the landscape and settlement patterns with those of the north of County Mayo or the more rugged parts of Connemara. The history of indigenous populations being “cleared” or evicted onto infertile land has close parallels too.

5. **1430 – 1600 [The North Harris Trust](#), *Urras Ceann a Tuath na Hearadh***. Covering 25,900 hectares (63,000 acres), this community land trust is one of the largest of the 500 of such that now own very nearly 3% of Scotland's area. It incorporates the nearby Isle of Scalpay, famous for its fishing, the 300-strong population of which voted in 2012 to join with North Harris rather than to set up a separate trust after their island was donated by its landowner, an English businessman [Fred Taylor](#), whose name will always be of blessed memory.

Like all the other land trusts we are visiting, North Harris manages crofting smallholder tenure and additionally, extensive migratory freshwater fisheries, pier facilities, deer parks, and native woodland restoration drawing on rootstock of mostly local seed provenance that is raised in four island tree nurseries – this being just one tiny glimpse of the extensive economic linkages and multipliers in local economies that community ownership realises.

The NHT also, as we will have seen on our journey down on Tuesday, manages renewable energy, affordable housing sites and new business ventures including a business park to generate local employment. Some of these enterprises were enabled by [Harris Development Ltd](#), a venture set up in 1994 partly to explore employment alternatives to having a superquarry. We will be hosted at the Trust offices in Tarbert by Calum MacKay. He led the steering group that set up the Trust and chaired the board for 23 years, until last year when as part of succession planning (note that awareness) he stood down and became Vice-chair. We may also be joined by Diana MacLennan,

the Office and Land Administrator since 2007, and by the Trust's manager, Michael Hunter, if he has recovered from jet lag after getting back from Mexico the day before. Apparently, Michael hails from just outside Belfast, and will no doubt be aware of discussions about the future of Lough Neagh.

6. **1600 – 1730: [The Isle of Harris Social Distillery](#) and [Harris Tweed](#):** The Isle of Harris Distillery was founded by the landowner of Scarp, an island uninhabited since 1971 off the west of Harris. A musicologist and businessman, [Anderson Bakewell](#) and his family wanted to give back to the community. It is often described as “the world’s first social distillery”, though the uninhabited Isle of Pabbay off Harris, once famous for its illicit produce, also has a good claim! The shop is open until 1700, and if any of you would like to book the [official tour](#), let me know a.s.a.p. so that I can make arrangements and pay up. The adjacent Harris Tweed shop, linked to the famous Campbell family of plant-based natural-dye weavers, is open until 1730, and includes much information about this central and famed island industry.

Day 3: Thursday 24th

1. **0900 – 1030:** An Irish priest once told me that Protestant whisky is better than Catholic whisky. “Why is that, father?” I asked. Because, he announced, “it is heated on the fires of hell.” As such, there will be no mercy after Wednesday’s demanding schedule, and let us make a prompt start, please, to drive 90 mins to Galson in the far north of the Isle of Lewis.
2. **1030 – 1200: [The Galson Estate Trust](#), [Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn](#).** This is a large trust, 56,000 acres with a population of some 2,000 people, that covers the far north of the Isle of Lewis. It has an extensive range of activities similar to those of other trusts, and a strong revenue base from its 1.8 megawatt three-turbine [community wind farm](#) on their common grazings land, which allows them make grants from their [Community Investment Fund](#) to a range of local causes. This highlights how much conventional wind farms extract from local economies, which then have to go running for charity and subsidies. We will be welcomed at the estate offices by the Trust’s Executive Manager Jemma MacVicar and then by Agnes Rennie (who will be a little delayed) and her husband Professor Frank Rennie.

Agnes is a leading figure in Gaelic language renewal and publishing, and will be just back from judging at [the Mòd](#), the annual festival of Gaelic music and related art forms. Belonging on her grandfather’s side to Galson, she is the [Chairperson](#) of the Trust’s board, and her many contributions to community life in Scotland have included serving for ten years as a Crofters Commissioner, having been elected to the island’s council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, and serving on the board of Community Land Scotland, based in Govan, Glasgow.

Frank recently retired as professor of sustainable rural development at the Stornoway campus of the University of the Highlands and Islands. When the Centre for Human Ecology (of which I am a fellow and former director) was located in the University of Strathclyde, he was also our external examiner. His many publications and books expound the interfaces of natural ecology and human ecology, from Bhutan of which he has much expertise, to the Outer Hebrides. His most recent book is *Among the Layers of the Land: Stories of People, Perspectives and Place* (Acair, £14), and I have asked him to bring a few copies with him.

3. **1200 – 1400: Walkabout, and lunch at the [Ness Historical Society](#) museum, [Comunn Eachdraidh Nis](#):** A look around the estate, and a simple lunch in the historical society’s café. Such societies across the island have a key role in cultural conscientisation (Paulo Freire’s term for the raising of consciousness of circumstances). They also provide a focal point for education, cultural tourism and employment, with their cafes and shops. The museum’s collection includes St Ronan’s Cross, brought into safekeeping from the Isle of North Rona some forty miles north of Ness, normally

accessible only on the back of the great and angel-directed leader of a pod of whales, the *cionaran-crò*.

4. **1400 – 1500: The West Side:** Parts of West Side of Lewis has been described as one of the most densely populated agricultural (crofting) settlements in Europe. We will be making for Carloway, and if time permits, go via the restored blackhouse village of [Gearrannan](#).
5. **1500 – 1600: [Carloway Estate Trust](#), *Urras Oighreachd Chàrlabhaigh*:** Here we will be narrowing our focus somewhat. We will have heard, with the Bays of Harris, how peatland carbon sold for offsetting can curb community aspirations. But on this study tour, we want to gather differing perspectives, and Carloway has distinguished itself as a leading community in Scotland for the restoration of peatland areas degraded by bygone heavy cutting. We will be hosted in the newly refurbished estate offices by [Ben Inglis-Grant](#), the Peatland Action Project Officer, and it is possible that we might be joined also by the Development Manager, Donald MacKinnon. Carloway have also distinguish themselves with community energy efficiency, and they manage an extensive freshwater fishery, mainly brown trout with a few migratory.
6. **1600 – 1800: [Dùn Chàrlabhaigh Broch](#) and the [Calanais Standing Stones](#):** As we wind our way back to the Harris Hotel (a 75 min drive), we will go via the Carloway broch (an Iron Age mansion with a small visitor centre run by the Carloway Trust) and the Calanais (or Callanish) Stones, on land surrounded by the estate trust with a community-run visitor centre (which closes at 1700). How early or late we get back is your call, and we may want to pick up a carry-out meal in Stornoway, or at the Achmore pizza hut en route if it is open.

Day 4: Friday 25th

1. **0900 – 1000:** Drive back up to Stornoway; and when we set up the fledgling Isle of Eigg Trust in 1991, our critics said that the very idea of a modern Scottish land trust was pie in the sky. Our [manifesto](#), therefore, emphasised the precedent set by the 64,000 acre Stornoway Trust which had been gifted to the people by Lord Leverhulme in 1924. Indeed, it had become so much part of the woodwork that many folks “from away” were not aware of its impressive distinctiveness. At the Trust’s offices in Stornoway’s town square, we will meet with my old school contemporary and neighbour from the next village, Iain Maciver, who is the Trust’s factor (or managing director), answerable to its community-elected board.
2. **1000 – 1300: [The Stornoway Trust](#), *Urras Steòrnabhaigh*.** The remit of the Trust is vast. It includes (with various management, lease and partner agreements) the Lewis Castle grounds, major port facilities including a new cruise ship terminal capable of taking the world’s biggest ships, both light and heavy industrial sites, and plans for a wind farm in the town’s hinterland common grazings, with turbines up to 180 metres to tip height, amongst the biggest in the world.

As factor, Iain has strong and to some, controversial views as to what can generate revenue for the island’s future and, thereby, keep local people anchored in the land. Or rather, as he put it to me, his views are, “not controversial, but realistic!” That is why I want the Lough Neagh delegation to meet him. He is one of the most knowledgeable people I know about crofting. His late father, Finlay Maciver, was the factor of the Soval Estate where I grew up at the doctor’s surgery in the village of Leurbost. Iain will affirm and amplify some of the narratives that you will have heard about community ownership from me and our other hosts, but he will challenge others. As with our other hosts, I am very grateful for his time. It will add to a sense of how a health community can be, and should be, what my academic colleague, the theologian and human ecologist Professor Richard Roberts, has called “a community of contested discourses.”

3. **1300 – 1415: Lunch at the Cabarfeidh Hotel, and further discussion with Iain:** After talking, as we drive around Stornoway and its surrounds with Iain, we will end up with lunch and continued discussion hopefully in a quiet corner of the hotel.

4. **1430 – 1600: [Museum nan Eilean Stornoway](#) and [The Stornoway Gazette](#):** My friend the journalist, blogger and educator [Katie Laing](#), who has recently rejoined The Stornoway Gazette, the island's longstanding newspaper of record, will be topping our visit with a report as we arrive, and tailing it after meeting you in the island's museum in Lews (Lewis) Castle.

The museum expresses the island's history, and also displays six of the 93 [Lewis chess pieces](#) from the Norse era (which I know that Michael wants to see). It closes at 1600, but I will need to leave at 1530 to get to Inverness for a family gathering over the weekend.

Day 5: Saturday 26th

1. **0730 – 0845 [Stornoway Airport](#):** And that's it, folks. Your flight to Inverness leaves Stornoway at 0940, and from there on to Belfast arriving 1330, You must check in at least 45 minutes before. I'd suggest that 0730 is the latest by which you should be driving away from the hotel. And be careful! Stornoway airport is famous for having the strictest security checks this side of Tel Aviv (I kid you not). Go well, 'till we meet again ... "if we're spared" ... as some of the island's venerable old Presbyterians can still be heard to say. But can meant ... almost as blessing for the road.

Alastair McIntosh
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07444 580380

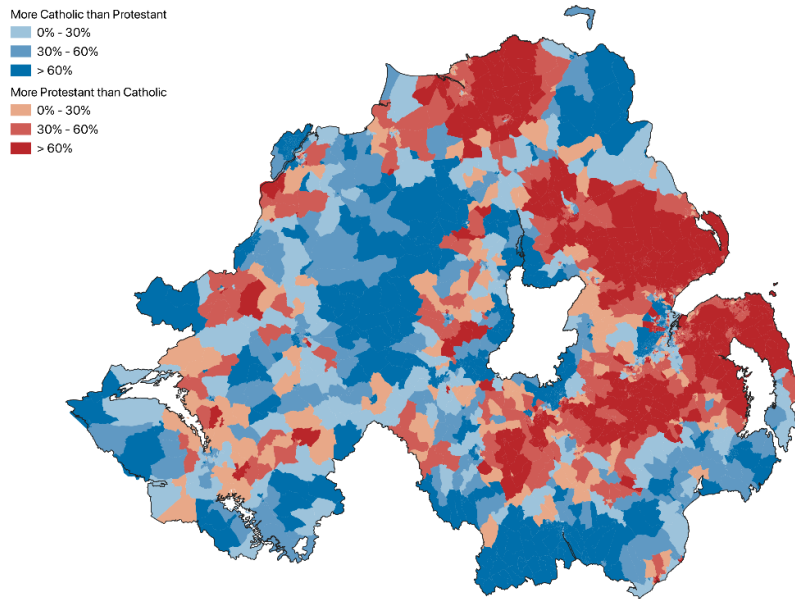
It happens that this week is Community Land Week in Scotland

Celebrations are being held across rural and urban localities

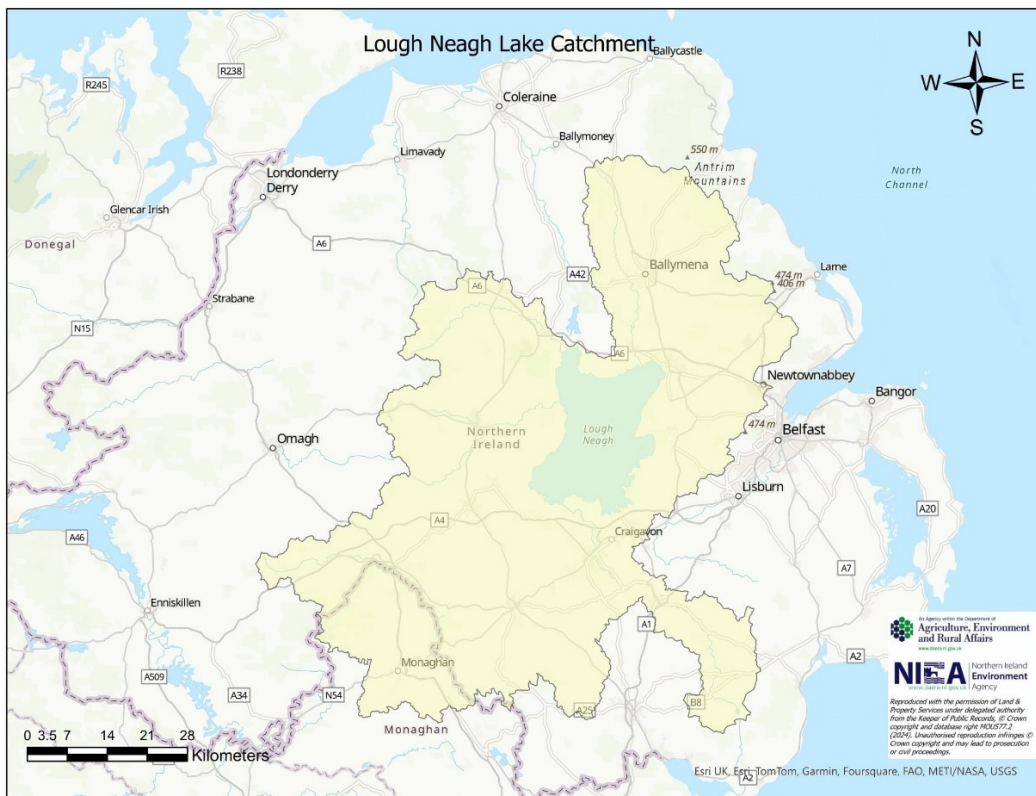
A message from Ailsa Raeburn, the Chair of Community Land Scotland (who is also the Chair of the Isle of Eigg Trust, a board member of the Crown Estate Scotland and on the board of Highlands and Islands Enterprise) ... that *Community Land Scotland welcomes the Lough Neagh delegation*

Appendix 3

Maps of Lough Neagh and the Outer Hebrides



Lough Neagh, Northern Ireland, Religious Distribution (2021)



Lough Neagh Catchment Area, extending to the South into Co Monaghan

Isles of Harris and Lewis

- 1 Isle of Harris & Lewis Seatek
- 4 Calanais Stones & Visitor Centre
- 5 Uig Sands Restaurant
- 6 Doune Braes Hotel
- 7 Blue Pig Creative Space
- 8 The Beach House Gallery
- 9 Gearranan Blackhouse Village
- 24 St. Columba's Uì Church
- 26 The Blackhouse, Arnol
- 27 Dancing Flower Craft Shop
- 28 Garenin Gallery
- 29 Carloway Community Centre & Shop
- 31 Sea in Design
- 32 Commune Eachdraidh Nis (Ness Historical Centre)
- 33 Harbour View Gallery
- 34 The Breakwater
- 35 Spornis
- 37 Kinloch Historical Society
- 38 The Weaving Shed
- 39 Uig Lodge
- 40 Islewear
- 41 Alpacan
- 42 Coll Pottery Craft Centre
- 43 Ardhasaig glass and arts (The Hebridean Design Company)

4 CARLOWAY BROCH
EXCEPTIONALLY WELL PRESERVED BROCH

40 ISLEWEAR
HEBRIDEAN DESIGNER JEWELLERY

73 CRUST
CRUSTLINEHAT.CO.UK

94 HARSGEIR VIEW
2 BEDROOM HOLIDAY COTTAGE
01851 703612
CALUM.MARTIN@INTERNET.COM

74 CLIFF STUDIO

75 MANGURSTADH GALLERY

72 HEBRIDEAN BAKEHOUSE
CAKE, COOKIES, ICE CREAM, DRINKS.

26 BLACKHOUSE ARNOL
TRADITIONAL FULLY FURNISHED BLACKHOUSE

8 THE BEACH HOUSE GALLERY
PAINTINGS, PRINTS & PRETTY THINGS

25 LEATHAD ARD GARDENS
OPEN FOR CHARITY



Tarbert Street Map

Police, Surgery, Blamire at Harris, Community Centre, Essence of Harris, Loomshed Deli, School Sports Centre & Soft Play Area, War Memorial, Hotel Hebrides, Church, CalMac, Post Office, P, i

76 THE CRAFTY WEAVER
HARRIS TWEED & KNITTED MAKES HAND-DYED YARNS

77 ISLAND ARTS
GALLERY & COFFEE SHOP

78 RAVENSPPOINT
HOSTEL, SHOP, TEAROOM & FUEL

79 THE WEE CROFT SHOP
HARRIS TWEED & HOME BAKING

80 LOOMSHED BREWERY
HEBRIDEAN CRAFT LAGER AND ALES

81 ISLAND DAINTIES
SWEET AND SAVORY HOME BAKING

Isle of Lewis & Harris

THE ISLE OF HARRIS has a wide range of landscapes. On the west coast lie some of the most spectacular beaches in Great Britain surrounded by stunning open machair. To the east known as Na Baigh (The Bays) the terrain is rugged and mountainous where single track roads wind through large boulders resembling a lunar landscape. To the south lies St Clement's Church (Tur Chliamainn) built in the early 1500's. To the north a winding single track road takes you past Amhuinnsuidhe Castle and Highland cattle to Huisnis at the end of the road.

ISLE OF SCALPAY located to the east of Tarbert is accessed by a bridge built in 1997 linking Scalpay to Harris. A 30 minute walk takes you to Eilean Glas, the oldest lighthouse in The Outer Hebrides. Pick up some treats from **Island Dainties (81)** to enjoy on your walk.

● Places to Visit ● Shops and Services ● Sport and Recreation ● Eating Out

South Harris

90 LOMSHED DELI
COFFEE, SANDWICHES, SNACKS

89 THE CAKE SHED
HOME BAKING FROM OUR FAMILY CROFT

88 LUSKENTYRE BEACH HUT
GIFTS, DRINKS, ICES, SNACKS

87 JOCELINE HILDREY ILLUSTRATION
WORKS OF ART AND GIFTS

86 MUSTHEB
ARTISAN MUSTARD

85 THE BOTHY
PIZZA, FOOD, RELAX
WWW.THEBOTHYHARRIS.COM

84 CAFÉ 34
HOME BAKING, SOUP & HOT DRINKS
OPEN THURSDAYS

83 FINSBAY GALLERY

82 SKOON ART GALLERY

48 BORRISDALE TWEED offers exclusive homewares & accessories made from our independently woven **HARRIS TWEED®**. All products are made by us or in collaboration with small scale manufacturing partners within the UK. Centrally located in Leverburgh.
Usually Open Monday-Friday from 12 noon - 6pm
Please call or email if travelling far. 01859 520788
info@borrisdale.co.uk

49 HARRIS TWEED AND KNITWEAR
Situating 5 miles from Tarbert on The Golden Rd this purpose built 'Clo Mor' exhibition is a self guided tour showing you Harris Tweed through the ages with hands on sections for all to enjoy and video footage of the weaving process. It has a unique display of old and new pictures, artifacts and present day designer products. Coach parties welcome.
Toilet facilities. Tel: 01859 511189 info@harristweedandknitwear.co.uk
Open: April - October, Mon - Sat 9am-5.30pm
www.harristweedandknitwear.co.uk

91 SCARISTA HOUSE RESTAURANT *Isle of Harris:*
Good Hotel Guide César Award winner. Featured in The Good Food Guide, The Michelin Guide, Scotland the Best and Alastair Sawdays's Eat Slow Britain. Elegant, licensed, candlelit restaurant open for dinner to non-residents every evening serving fresh Island fish, shellfish, lamb, beef and game. Scottish cheeses. Interesting and varied wine list. Booking essential.
Tel: 01859 550238. Email: bookings@scaristahouse.com
www.scaristahouse.com

50 HOLMASAIG STUDIO GALLERY: Quidinish S.E. Harris. Fine Art by resident artist Margarita Williams DA awarded the CRMacintosh/Assoc/ France residency in Collioure 2014. Watercolour paintings, cards Japanese woodblock prints, mixed media work reflecting the unique landscape, birds and wild flowers. St Kilda also inspires her varied work 200+ originals. **Open:** 11am - 5pm Mon - Sat. Tel: 01859 530401. www.holmasaiggallery.com

51 SEA HARRIS: Specialise in fast, comfortable day trips from Leverburgh to St. Kilda on our purpose built vessel Enchanted Isle. These dramatic volcanic islands around the coast of Harris on our Rib Pabbay, with our Shiants trip from Tarbert being a firm favourite with bird and nature lovers and often referred to as a 'mini St. Kilda'.
Book online at www.seaharris.com
Tel: 01859 502007
Mob: 07760 216555

Isle of Benbecula - see map on Page 8

THE STEPPING STONE RESTAURANT:

Serving snacks and hot meals throughout the day, using fresh local produce where possible. Open all year round, showcasing the best in local produce since 1997. Reservations are recommended.
Opening Hours: Monday to Saturday 11am-8pm & Sunday 12-6pm
Tel: 01870 603377



MACLEANS BAKERY & BUTCHERS:

Run by the MacLean brothers since 1987, we are a small independent bakery based in Uachdar, Benbecula, just off the main A865. Our delicious breads, rolls, pastries, savouries, oatcakes & biscuits are freshly made every day using traditional methods.
Shop open: Mon 9.30am-1pm, Tues-Fri 9.30am-5.30pm & Sat 9.30am-1pm. Tel: 01870 602659.
Email: enquiries@macleansbakery.co.uk



MUSEUM NAN EILEAN (LIONACLEIT):

Discover the history and culture of the Outer Hebrides. Always something new to see! Enjoy engaging temporary displays including island heritage and national touring exhibitions. Located within the Sgoil Lionacleit Community School.
Museum Open: Tuesday, Thursday & Friday 10am - 1pm, 2pm - 5pm Wednesday 10am - 1pm Saturday 10 am - 3.30 pm
Closed: Sunday & Monday
Email: museumU&B@cne-siar.gov.uk



Appendix 4

Lough Neagh

A few personal observations from David Cameron

(former Chair, North Harris Trust & Community Land Scotland)

The points below are always adaptable according to an area's community desire

Community landownership is community empowerment through land ownership by the whole community that live (and work?) on that land. It is not a community of interest but a community of place.

Before purchase, the community manage a consultancy process to establish if the purchase price can be afforded, management skills are available, the ownership will produce more income and expenditure to re-invest in the future of the community, and finally via a ballot, that the community have the desire to purchase.

100% ownership is seen as the gold standard. Buying the land automatically includes several important rights e.g. solum of rivers and lochs, minerals, deer and game (rough shooting).

All community landowners differ in their approach, which can cause problems for such stakeholders as legislators. One size does NOT fit all. Cf. *Mull and Iona Community Trust*.

Within a community owned area, the owning charitable Trust (usually formed from elected local Board members but co-options are common) does not compete with existing local industry and activities but will support and encourage established businesses. It also attracts inward investment for gaps in the area when there is local support for such ventures.

Issues which are deemed contentious e.g. renewables are examined, and the results presented to the community and balloted on if felt necessary.

Openness and transparency are essential.

The owning Trust needs to be aware of different sectors within their area and build relationships by good communication with each sector. A community landowner becomes the "go to" organization, in the area and can be the first brick in the wall and not the last.

**Community Landownership is about OPPORTUNITIES
based on local decision making**

Stornoway Gazette report by Katie Laing, 24 October 2024

Thursday, October 24, 2024 www.stornowaygazette.co.uk

STORNOWAY GAZETTE

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NEWS

Island trusts to inspire Loch Neagh guardians

Katie Laing
www.stornowaygazette.co.uk

A delegation from Northern Ireland will be visiting community trusts and development organisations in Lewis and Harris to learn lessons which they hope will help clean up Loch Neagh, which has been polluted by a damaging toxic algal bloom.

The largest surface of water in the UK and Ireland, Loch Neagh is an iconic wildlife site and home to a world famous, if declining, eel fishery.

However, the blue-green algae is a serious environmental problem and its causes are believed to include agricultural runoff which contributes to high nutrient levels which create the ideal conditions for the algae to bloom.

The loch bed is owned by the Earl of Shaftesbury and some believe that a move to public ownership would make for better management.

The Loch Neagh Partnership, a stakeholder organisation which manages and protects it, is said to be "in close conversation about

future possible frameworks for wise ownership and governance".

This week will see four representatives from that Partnership undertake a study visit to explore the potential for community land ownership as a possible way forward.

The visit is part of a Heritage Lottery programme arranged by Professor Alastair McIntosh, a human ecologist who was raised and educated in Lewis.

The party will meet with representatives from the community trusts in West Harris, North Harris, Carloway, Tolson and Stornoway, as well as Community Land Scotland and Harris Development Limited.

Michael Browne, Loch Neagh Heritage Plan coordinator, said: "Loch Neagh is a critical asset, providing significant environmental, recreational, and economic value. Recently, the lake has faced one of its most serious environmental challenges with the outbreak of blue-green algae blooms."

"By transitioning ownership and adopting innovative management models, there is an opportunity to strengthen

the stewardship of this vital resource, ensuring its natural beauty and ecological value are preserved for sustainable generations.

"The Loch Neagh Partnership is eager to explore and learn from successful management practices in the Isle of Harris and Lewis.

"We are particularly pleased to have Professor Alastair McIntosh coordinate this important study visit, offering valuable insights that could help shape the future of Loch Neagh."

Alastair McIntosh said he had been "contacted out of the blue" by the Loch Neagh Partnership to take part in a consultation webinar about the loch's future, which led to a request to arrange a study tour to Lewis and Harris.

Alastair said the trusts have "enthusiastically thrown their doors open."

"In my experience, these kinds of sharing of experience are important not just for the guests, but also for the hosts," he said. "As the great Uig-born Gaelic scholar Dr. John MacInnes said of a slightly different context, 'it helps them to organise their experience.'"



Michael Browne is "eager" to explore and learn from successful management practices in Harris and Lewis.

Highland dancers head to Ireland

Stornoway Gazette report by Katie Laing, 31 October 2024



Other coverage includes [Northern Ireland World](#) (with Mid-Ulster Mail) and [Derry Now](#)

Appendix 7

Group Photographs



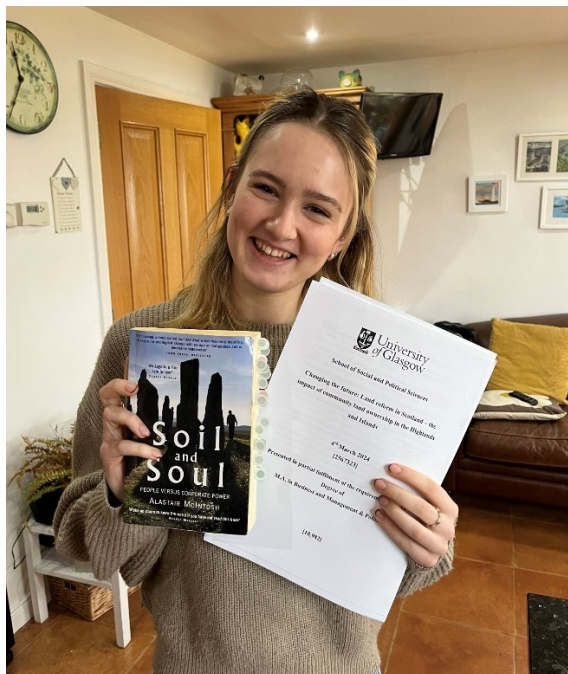
David Cameron of North Harris in discussion with Gary McErlain, Chairman of Lough Neagh Partnership (LNP)



Bays of Harris Community Estate: John Maher (Vice-chair, right at the back) of the in his Leverburgh Pier workshop, with the LNP delegates Gary McErlain (Chairman and fisherman), Michael Browne (Heritage Plan Coordinator), Gerry Darby (General Manager) and Conor Jordan (ex-Chairman and sand trader)



West Harris Trust: Rhoda Campbell (community volunteer), Rachel Campbell (graduate), Neil Campbell (former Secretary/Director), Alastair, Conor, Michael, Gary Rhoda Macdonald (Director) and Gerry



Rachel Campbell, with one of her many textbooks having just graduated with First Class Honours from the University of Glasgow for her thesis on community land trusts



Affordable social housing made possible by the West Harris Trust working with the Hebridean Housing Partnership housing association



North Harris Trust: Calum Mackay (Member, founding figure and ex-Chairman) with Gary, Diana MacLennan (Office and Land Administrator), Conor, Gerry, Alastair and Michael



Carloway Estate Trust: Alastair, Nick, Ben Inglis-Grant (Project Officer, Peatland Action), Gary, Conor & Gerry



Galson Estate Trust: Jemma MacVicar (Executive Manager) and Agnes Rennie (the Cathraiche)



Galson Estate Trust map: with Frank Rennie (the Cathraiche's assistant)



Butt of Lewis lighthouse on the Galson Estate: As this report was being written, a letter came in from a stranger saying, "The day we drove to the Butt of Lewis the rain was biblical and I just cannot fathom how anyone could walk in those conditions!"



The Stornoway Trust: Conor, Iain MacIver (the Factor), Gerry and Garry



The Address at the Stones: Gerry Darby, Alastair McIntosh, Michael Browne and Gary McErlain with Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin at the back, after he had spoken at Calanais/Callanish



A huge thank-you to all our local hosts and the LNP's funders

Leis gach beannachd