

HIGHL  NDS™
REWILDING

Engagement roadmap

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Summary

This document is intended as a basis for participatory development of Highlands Rewilding's community engagement processes. This will help to improve our existing approach to engagement and help to embed community perspectives, knowledge and aspirations in our work. We consulted on an initial draft with local people and other interested parties, and we are now collaboratively developing specific strategies within this general framework (for an example, see Box 1 below).

This roadmap builds on a review of standards and examples of good practice in Scotland and elsewhere (described in the Appendix), and independent research being done on our own work.

In this document, we adopt a definition of **engagement** as a process by which individuals, groups or organisations choose to take an active role in decisions which affect them. This engagement can take many forms, and our draft roadmap includes the following steps:

1. Identifying the subject and purpose of engagement, for example collaboration on a management plan or communication of findings;
2. Identifying interested and affected parties, for example local communities or government bodies;
3. Choosing the right methods of engagement, spanning communication, consultation, collaboration and empowerment;
4. Co-identifying desired benefits with local communities, for example jobs, access to nature, or locally-produced food;
5. Evaluating engagement processes, through ongoing feedback and monitoring;
6. Embedding engagement in our work, for example by increasing the resources and expertise available within Highlands Rewilding.

We give details of each of these steps in the document below, and welcome continued feedback on all of them. We are also now developing specific engagement plans with local communities around our estates at Bunloit, Beldorney and Tayvallich.

Introduction

Highlands Rewilding seeks to generate nature recovery and community prosperity through rewilding¹, based on a foundation of shared ownership², and supported by innovative finance³. In doing so, we must achieve an ethical level of profit to make our work feasible and demonstrate the scope for returns on environmentally beneficial land management. While pursuing these aims, we also act as an ‘open laboratory’ for research and practice, to test whether and how environmental, social and economic benefits are being produced, and so to ensure that they are genuine. Engagement with communities of place and communities of interest is essential to this work, and this roadmap is intended to continue the process of extending, improving and embedding our engagement processes.

The roadmap builds on a review we have conducted of standards and examples of good practice, with an emphasis on new guidance being developed for natural capital markets in Scotland (including standards suggested by the Scottish Government, Scottish Land Commission, Community Land Scotland and the Scottish Community Development Centre; see Appendix). It also builds on independent research on our strategies for nature recovery, engagement and human prosperity in the communities and landscapes where we work⁴.

What we mean by engagement

We rely on several key terms in this document that can be used and understood in various ways (see Appendix). The most important of these is **engagement** itself. In this document, we use engagement to mean a process by which individuals, groups or organisations choose to take an active role in decisions which affect them⁵. For us, this includes both focused engagement (conducted for a particular purpose, project, or decision, involving specific communities and affected parties) and wider engagement (for general information sharing, as in a public awareness campaign). Such engagement covers a spectrum from informing to empowering (Figure 1). We plan to engage across this spectrum, with core principles of the company (e.g. nature recovery, community prosperity and ethical profit generation) being fixed objectives more suited to informing and consulting, and specific interventions, aims or processes being more suited to involvement, collaboration or empowerment.

¹ <https://www.highlandsrewilding.co.uk/mission>

² Highlands Rewilding is owned by a mix of large private investors and hundreds of local community and other small-scale investors.

³ These sources of finance include markets for ‘natural capital’, such carbon and biodiversity credit markets, operating at the highest standards to ensure genuine, net-positive outcomes.

⁴ E.g. the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery at Oxford University is conducting research on our public engagement strategies. <https://www.naturerecovery.ox.ac.uk/projects/highlands-rewilding/>

⁵ Hafferty (2022) <https://nepubprod.appspot.com/publication/5365328451469312>; Hafferty (forthcoming); Reed (2008) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2008.07.014>

This definition of engagement deliberately goes beyond “regular communication between the people who take decisions about land and the communities affected by them”⁶ in encompassing a range of participatory processes that can be tailored to specific circumstances. This is because we recognise the need for more in-depth and varied engagement that is tailored to its context. In subsequent steps, we will further and collaboratively develop this roadmap for each of the estates where we work.

Why we engage

Highlands Rewilding exists to benefit people, locally and beyond, by tackling the climate and biodiversity crises and by generating direct environmental, social and economic benefits on the land we manage. Deciding how to do this, and what specific outcomes we should aim for, requires collaboration with a range of people and organisations. For example, people living on or near the land we manage (communities of place) should be engaged in decisions that affect them and in defining benefits they would like to receive. People with relevant knowledge (including scientific expertise and local knowledge about the ecology, culture, and socio-economic dynamics of the landscape) should be engaged in deciding how we achieve our aims. There are also many other benefits that can be achieved through engaging well, including promoting knowledge sharing and building relationships between people.

In co-developing our engagement strategy, we want to improve engagement for three reasons: to improve our work, to benefit those who engage with us, and to explore how meaningful engagement can be embedded in a profitable model of environmental management, supporting improvements for nature and for people.

Who we engage with

We recognise that it is impossible to be prescriptive about involvement in engagement at a general level; defining engagement partners is itself part of the roadmap below. However, we will seek to engage across the range of people and organisations usually referred to as **stakeholders**⁷, **communities of interest**, and **communities of place**. These terms refer to groups and individuals who are interested in, can affect, or could be affected by, a decision⁸ and can include local people, members of the public and other groups such as community initiatives, local authorities, charities, businesses, and non-governmental organisations. For brevity, we use **relevant parties** below as a general term to cover all of these categories, and tentatively highlight ways of identifying who these different groups and individuals are in the sections below.

⁶ Scottish Land Commission (2023) [Community Engagement in Decisions Relating to Land](#)

⁷ The term stakeholder has been critiqued for its colonial associations and so other terms are sometimes preferred.

⁸ Freeman (1984) <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139192675>

How we engage

Our engagement to date has included a website and forum designed specifically for community engagement (during covid lockdowns), email exchanges, an ongoing programme of public meetings, ‘walk and talk’ events, site visits, one-on-one meetings and informal discussions, and communication via digital and printed media, including our annual natural capital reports that describe work we have conducted and planned. These forms of engagement have primarily involved local people, but have also included experts from government bodies and NGOs, academic researchers, charities, investors, private companies and other relevant parties.

This programme of engagement has provided opportunities to inform, consult and involve, but we recognise important opportunities for its expansion and improvement. In the future, we plan to engage for a variety of specific purposes and using a variety of methods. We recognise that there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach here, and engagement processes need to be co-developed with their participants. To support this, we have identified a spectrum of engagement types that we will seek to work across (Figure 1) and 10 key principles that we will try to satisfy.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Meaning	<i>Communicate & educate;</i> undertake to keep people informed.	<i>Obtain feedback on decisions;</i> undertake listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how input influenced the decision.	<i>Directly include;</i> undertake to work together to ensure that concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how input influenced the decision.	<i>Work in partnership;</i> undertake to work together to formulate solutions and incorporate advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	<i>Full control;</i> undertake to implement the decision.
Examples	Newsletters, social media, websites, videos	‘Walk & Talk’ events, public meetings, open days, drop-ins	Citizen science, participatory platforms and maps, idea generation	Advisory boards, iterative deliberation, participatory decision-making	Delegated decisions, community ownership, community wealth-building

Figure 1: A spectrum of engagement and examples of how we plan to engage across it. The spectrum and meaning of terms within it originate with the International Association for Public Participation’s IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation⁹, with text adapted from this source. Further guidance exists for different elements within this spectrum, for instance the Gunning Principles for legitimate engagement¹⁰, which we will use to further develop our practice.

⁹ <https://www.iap2.org/page/pillars>

¹⁰ Local Government Association:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/The%20Gunning%20Principles.pdf>

10 key principles for embedding engagement:

1. Clear objectives for engagement need to be agreed at the outset.
2. Engagement is an ongoing process, not a one-off or add-on activity.
3. Understanding the local context for engagement is crucial.
4. Engagement should begin as early as possible, and continue through decision-making processes in an open and transparent way.
5. Integrating local and scientific knowledge produces more robust environmental decision-making.
6. Power dynamics need to be recognised and managed effectively.
7. Engagement should be adapted to the time and spatial scale of the project.
8. Different methods should be used for engagement, including in-person and digital approaches.
9. Information needs to be shared in accessible and relevant ways to maximise engagement.
10. Developing an effective and meaningful approach to engagement is crucial for embedding social and equity issues at the heart of nature recovery.

We acknowledge the challenge of achieving these principles: they require substantial effort, goodwill and capacity on all sides. The quality and outcomes of engagement are likely to vary with its context, and our own skills and resources may be limiting factors. To address these issues, we will continue to collaborate with independent researchers and use external facilitators and other experts where we can, to continually review and improve our progress.

Elements of engagement

We envisage Highlands Rewilding's engagement spanning a range of general steps as set out below. Each of these will involve co-development and specification to particular contexts as part of the overall engagement process. Box 1, below, gives an example of how we are starting to implement these steps in practice.

1. Identifying the purpose

Identifying the purpose or subject of engagement will be our first step, allowing us to determine appropriate partners and methods of engagement. This will involve a clear statement of the purpose of a specific instance of engagement. For example, engagement on high-level organisational objectives is likely to involve informing or consulting relevant parties, while engagement on specific interventions may involve full empowerment (Figure 1). To help define subjects of engagement, Highlands Rewilding intends to develop statements describing the purpose, scope and planned outcomes of engagement, which themselves may be adapted or co-designed through collaborative engagement.

2. Identifying relevant parties

We will collaborate with different groups and individuals to identify relevant parties who might affect or be affected by the subject of engagement, and those who might have a strong interest. These are likely to include:

- The local community or 'community of place': people living or working nearby (e.g. residents, landowners, land users, farmers, local authorities, community groups and businesses).
- Non-governmental organisations
- Charities and not-for-profits
- Scientific community
- Government bodies
- Investors
- Other organisations and interest groups as appropriate

The Scottish Government suggest that early engagement with the community council, formal community groups, and other public bodies is beneficial for understanding local knowledge, needs and priorities, while also identifying the right people to engage with (see Appendix). Other useful sources of information may be Community Planning Partnerships, local chambers of commerce and Business Improvement Districts, local farming associations, residents' associations, tenants' associations and housing associations, as well as public bodies such as Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), or National Park bodies, if present. Recent research has also identified a

comprehensive range of relevant parties for UK ecosystem markets¹¹, and we will seek to engage across this range. We will also seek to use formal stakeholder mapping methods, professionally supported where possible.

3. Choosing the right methods

Methods of engagement will be selected and tailored to the decision-making context, considering the objectives, type of participant, and appropriate level of engagement¹². Specific methods will be finalised only when objectives have been clearly articulated, an appropriate level of engagement has been identified to achieve those objectives, and relevant parties have been identified and involved.

We will work across a wide range of methods from those designed for communication (e.g. social media, videos and podcasts, newsletters and leaflets), consultation (e.g. feedback forms, forums and opinion polls), collaboration (e.g. participatory mapping and deliberation), and empowerment (e.g. self-governance models such as community ownership and wealth building).

A key consideration here, and one that will itself require engagement, is the tailoring of methods to the local context. In particular, this needs to maximise opportunities for participation and ensure early, meaningful, and regular engagement. There will be some situations where professional facilitation may be required, some where engagement can be conducted more informally, and some where communities might want to lead the process themselves. Examples of engagement methods and activities could include:

- **Ongoing informal outreach and engagement:** continuous personal engagement to build relationships and trust.
- **Providing information and data:** publishing information proactively and providing information when it is requested. Information might be shared through public talks, updates in local papers, Facebook groups, local notice boards, mail drops, social media and websites. The most appropriate channels for sharing information will itself be a subject of engagement.
- **Open meetings:** including regular formal engagement events such as public meetings, 'walk and talk' events, community drop-ins and open days. These could include communities and other relevant parties (e.g., local authorities and community councils) to provide information and discuss topics of interest.
- **Community consultation:** enabling people to provide feedback (e.g., comments, perceptions, information, advice, experiences, and ideas). For example, people's opinions could be sought about a specific question or decision related to an environmental intervention.

¹¹ Reed et al. (2023) <https://doi.org/10.31223/X5ZH3D>

¹² Hafferty (2022) <https://nepubprod.appspot.com/publication/5365328451469312>, forthcoming; Reed (2008) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2008.07.014>

- This could include ongoing outreach to people who are particularly affected by management activities, and openness for ongoing contact through defined channels (e.g., email, letter, telephone, face-to-face meetings). One key element of this could be having a single point of contact for enquiries and complaints, with a defined timescale for responses.
 - Targeted consultation could be conducted with specific groups (e.g., schools, land managers, neighbours, and biodiversity groups), which could create additional opportunities for more active engagement.
- **Specific engagement with key issues:** for example, to feed-in to understandings about desired environmental and socio-economic benefits and how potential trade-offs, conflicts, and tensions could be resolved. Community ownership and wealth building could be important topics here.
 - **Citizen science:** involving citizens or ‘community scientists’ in one or many stages of investigation, including the identification of research questions, collection of data and evidence, conducting observations, analysing data, and using the resulting knowledge.
 - **Participatory mapping**¹³: an interactive approach that draws on local people’s knowledge, enabling participants to create visual and non-visual data to explore socio-economic and environmental problems, opportunities, and questions. This can lead to rich insights into community perspectives of rewilding and nature recovery and could be entirely led by a community (and/or professional facilitation).
 - **Representative deliberative processes:** involving a targeted and systematically selected group of people who are broadly representative of a community, such as a local management board. Ideally, this group would collaborate with professional facilitation to form collective recommendations for decisions. This would be particularly beneficial for tackling complex environmental issues while accounting for a diversity of views, including both scientific and local knowledge¹⁴.

Where used, these methods must also be adapted to the decision-making context, especially to maximise access and inclusion, account for power relations, and maintain trust and transparency. We will develop methods for achieving these alongside the engagement processes themselves, and ensure that feedback from communities shapes the use of these approaches as engagement proceeds.

¹³ The Involve Foundation: https://involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Using-participatory-mapping-to-explore-participation-in-three-communities_June-2010.pdf

¹⁴ Raymond et al. (2010). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2010.03.023>

4. Co-identifying community benefits

The term 'community benefits' means different things to different people. According to a report by the Scottish Land Commission¹⁵:

Community benefits are packages of intentional benefits, arising from investment in natural capital enhancement, creation, and restoration projects, provided on a negotiated basis for the long-term benefit of the geographically local community'.

Community benefits are for the community or communities of place that are local to, and therefore most affected by, particular projects. These are distinct from wider public benefits and can range from direct economic benefits to the act of engagement itself, having knowledge and perspectives respected and strengthening community cohesion.

We will define 'community baselines' in consultation through the above mechanisms, to include key social, cultural and economic metrics, complementing a natural capital baseline (while recognizing that not all community benefits can be measured in this way). From this baseline, a set of targeted community benefits will be co-defined, including a figure for direct investment and approach to land and home ownership. Baseline and benefits will be reported on annually and, in detail, every five years. Community baselines and metrics for monitoring and evaluation will be co-designed with local communities to ensure that they reflect local needs and priorities.

5. Feedback and evaluation

Continued evaluation of engagement processes is crucial, and we will develop a strategy for feedback and evaluation. This will involve 'organisational learning', improving engagement and the (co-)delivery of social benefit through identifying successful and unsuccessful approaches.

6. Embedding engagement

The evidence suggests that to be successful in the long term, community engagement and social benefit need to be institutionalised¹⁶. We will work towards this by increasing resources dedicated to engagement, including time, finance, and human resources. Highlands Rewilding will work to improve the skills and expertise of our staff, as well as using external expertise where useful and feasible. In doing so, we seek to institutionalise engagement as part of a long-term

¹⁵Scottish Land Commission:

https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/63eb8fd87d297_Community%20Benefit%20Discussion%20Paper.pdf

¹⁶ Baker and Chapin (2018) <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-09868-230120>; Bussu et al. (2022) <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2022.2053179>; Reed (2008) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2008.07.014>; Scottish Government (2022) <https://www.gov.scot/publications/report-institutionalising-participatory-deliberative-democracy-working-group/>; Wesslink et al (2011) <https://doi.org/10.1068/a44161>; Hafferty (2022; 2024; forthcoming)

and evolving process. A first step will be the development of a clear understanding of existing approaches for engagement and social benefit while highlighting any gaps, training needs, and other requirements.

Box 1: Engagement in action, Tayvallich estate

Highlands Rewilding purchased Tayvallich estate in May 2023, and we have been working with the local community to develop a collaborative approach to estate management. To date, engagement has occurred through:

- A series of public meetings, with and without representatives of Highlands Rewilding, to discuss management aims and engagement opportunities;
- Individual, face-to-face and online, and small group meetings with residents and community members for open-ended conversations;
- A facilitated event to identify desired community benefits from the estate;
- Negotiation with the Tayvallich Initiative, a community body set up to consider options for community land purchase, to agree on shared objectives and a framework for collaboration;
- Agreeing a Memorandum of Understanding for land management to benefit local community and nature, including provision for local jobs, increased security of tenancies, sale of land to the community, and application of rural housing burdens to ensure that plots and properties remain available to the community in the long term;
- Establishment of a Local Management Board, collaboratively designed to be representative, to advise on estate management objectives and methods in monthly meetings.

These steps provide a basic framework that will be adapted for our other estates and developed further as we continue to work on our engagement processes.

Appendix: Review of engagement principles and standards

In order to develop our engagement roadmap we have been reviewing general literature on engagement and specific standards developed for Scotland and elsewhere. This Appendix describes our findings to date and relates them to the work of Highlands Rewilding. These reviews will continue alongside development of our engagement processes.

Benefits and challenges of engagement

Engagement is a complicated and very broad process that spans numerous different practices. We believe it is important to acknowledge the associated benefits and challenges if our own engagement is to improve. This section sets out our current understanding of these general issues.

Engagement is fundamental to the work of Highlands Rewilding and we regard it as a crucial outcome in its own right. Beyond this, engagement can help to enhance the quality of evidence and decisions, build relationships (e.g., between an organisation, its staff and the local community), and increase the credibility of outcomes¹⁷. Other benefits include representation of a diverse range of voices, and the early, accurate identification of local needs and priorities¹⁸. When done well, engagement is particularly valuable for negotiating contested or conflicting interests, trade-offs or otherwise contentious decisions¹⁹. Environmental decision-making processes, including rewilding and other nature recovery initiatives, often involve many of these characteristics.

However, there are a number of potential risks for engagement which can cause unintended negative consequences, particularly if engagement is poorly designed or delivered. These risks include the inadvertent exclusion of some people, an increase in distrust and scepticism, reinforcement of unequal power structures, and creation of disillusionment and conflict²⁰. These, in turn, can affect support for a project among relevant parties and the wider public. It is therefore important to think through possible risk factors and their mitigation early in the process, particularly with respect to the use of local and scientific knowledge, fairness and

¹⁷ Fiorino (1990) <https://doi.org/10.1177/016224399001500204> ; Fischer (2000) *Citizens, experts, and the environment: The politics of local knowledge*. Duke University Press; Stirling (2008) <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243907311265>.

¹⁸ Ferreira *et al.* (2020) <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12020640>; Hafferty (2022) <https://nepubprod.appspot.com/publication/5365328451469312>; Reed (2008) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2008.07.014>.

¹⁹ Waterton and Tsouvalis (2016) <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775815594305>; Whatmore and Landstrom (2011) <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2011.602540>

²⁰ Cooke and Kothari, eds. (2001) *Participation: The new tyranny?* Zed books; Few *et al.* (2007) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14693062.2007.9685637>; Reed *et al.* (2018) <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec.12541>

trust, power relations and accounting for different perspectives in environmental decision-making processes²¹.

Benefits and risks vary with the type of engagement, and a range of approaches can be selected with these in mind²². Methods also need to be adapted to the decision-making context, including socio-cultural and environmental factors. The following points are particularly important when choosing the best methods to suit a particular decision-making context:

Access and inclusion: Issues related to accessibility, inclusivity, equity, and empowerment are fundamental. It is important to consider who might be included and/or excluded by a particular approach, and how this impacts the representativeness of decision-making²³.

Power relations: Power imbalances exist in most engagement contexts and their management is a substantial challenge. Balanced power relations between actors can, for example, give communities and other stakeholders an equal opportunity to contribute²⁴. Different methods can be used to achieve this balance within and between parties depending on the context.

Trust and transparency: If decision-making processes and their underlying information are transparent and fair, trust, credibility, and accountability of both the decision and decision-making organisation can be increased²⁵.

The choice of in-person and digital engagement methods can strongly influence the above factors²⁶. In many situations, in-person engagement is necessary to build trusting relationships and understand issues in more depth. At the same time, digital tools and platforms (e.g., surveys, online forums, digital mapping, or virtual reality) can be effective ways to gain broad insights about a local area, and can be followed up with in-person methods²⁷. Hybrid engagement approaches, that use a mix of in-person and digital tools, can be more effective and inclusive compared to using either in-person or digital methods in isolation²⁸. Ultimately, the evidence suggests that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to engagement and the methods need to be carefully adapted to the context and purpose in which they are employed.

²¹ Avelino and Wittmayer (2016) <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2015.1112259>;

Chambers (2006) <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1681-4835.2006.tb00163.x>;

Krupa et al. (2020) <https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920.2019.1665763>;

Morrison et al. (2019) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.101934>;

Smith and McDonough (2001) <https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920120140>

²² Dryzek (1990) *Discursive Democracy: Politics, Policy, and Political Science*. Cambridge University Press; Hafferty (2022, forthcoming); Scottish Government (2018) <https://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-engaging-communities-decisions-relating-land/>;

²³ Rowe and Frewer (2000) <https://doi.org/10.1177/016224390002500101>

²⁴ Webler et al. (2001) <https://doi.org/10.1007/s002670010160>

²⁵ Richards et al. (2004) <https://edepot.wur.nl/34897>

²⁶ Hafferty (forthcoming)

²⁷ Falco and Kleinans (2018) <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJEPR.2018070105>

²⁸ Sattler et al. (2022) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2021.12.006>

Continual evaluation of engagement is essential to overcoming challenges and realising benefits, but is itself a difficult process. The evidence suggests that monitoring and evaluation processes for engagement are often ad-hoc or not conducted at all, and often rely on very informal and anecdotal evidence²⁹. Furthermore, their findings are rarely shared and rarely lead to demonstrable improvements in practice³⁰. There are significant issues related to the capacity and capability of environmental organisations to conduct robust, systematic, and institutionally embedded processes to monitor social benefits, including constrained budgets, lack of staff, limited knowledge and expertise³¹. These limiting factors need to be carefully considered and strategies need to be put in place to overcome them. Highlands Rewilding’s collaborations with independent social science researchers is one way in which we hope to address these issues.

The evidence suggests that to be successful in the long term, community engagement and social benefit need to be institutionalised³², including by embedding social science as a central part of the knowledge base for nature recovery. Nevertheless, goals and criteria for effective engagement can conflict with governance structures and organisational objectives³³, and any inconsistencies here should be addressed early on. This is particularly important in the context of emerging natural capital markets, which need to encourage rather than override engagement³⁴.

This institutional embedding of engagement can be supported by consideration of resources and expectations³⁵. The availability of resources including time, finance, and human resources necessary for capacity and capability to engage should be highlighted, with missing resources and expertise sourced from other organisations where possible. For example, the Scottish Government³⁶ identified a lack of specific participation skills within public bodies that included support, expertise, and guidance to staff, which meant that engagement was often ‘ad-hoc, inconsistent, and in addition to existing job roles’, making it ‘inefficient and far from cost effective’ (page 15). Hiring staff with existing social science expertise can

²⁹ Burchell (2015) <https://wellcome.org/sites/default/files/wtp060036.pdf>

³⁰ Dyer et al. (2014) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2013.11.057>;

Falanga and Ferrão (2021) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2020.101895>;

Glicken (2000) [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1462-9011\(00\)00105-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1462-9011(00)00105-2);

Karcher et al. (2021) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2021.08.012>

³¹ Reed et al. (2018) <https://doi.org/10.18546/RFA.02.1.13>

³² Baker and Chapin (2018) <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-09868-230120>;

Bussu et al. (2022) <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2022.2053179>;

Reed (2008) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2008.07.014>;

Scottish Government (2022) <https://www.gov.scot/publications/report-institutionalising-participatory-deliberative-democracy-working-group/>;

Wesselink et al (2011) <https://doi.org/10.1068/a44161>; Hafferty (2022; 2024; forthcoming)

³³ Bickerstaff & Walker (2005) <https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980500332098>; Hoppe (2011) *The Governance of Problems: Puzzling, Powering and Participation*. Policy Press ; Hafferty (forthcoming) ; Hafferty (2022)

³⁴ Scottish Land Commission: [Community benefits from investment in natural capital](https://www.gov.scot/publications/report-institutionalising-participatory-deliberative-democracy-working-group/)

³⁵ Hafferty (forthcoming)

³⁶ Scottish Government (2022) <https://www.gov.scot/publications/report-institutionalising-participatory-deliberative-democracy-working-group/>

be valuable to overcome this problem³⁷. Despite the fact that social science is widely recognised as playing a vital role in supporting nature recovery and meeting the UK's net zero goals³⁸, there is often limited capacity for carrying out social science work within environmental organisations³⁹. The long-term success of engagement also depends on defining minimum requirements and monitoring their achievement.

Review of engagement standards

We have carried out a rapid review of standards from the nature-based solutions industry and Scottish community and land use bodies or policies. Our aim is to develop a structure for community engagement by Highlands Rewilding that meets the highest possible standards, specifically tailored to the Scottish context. We have collaborated on a larger review and synthesis with researchers at Oxford University and the Countryside and Community Research Institute at the University of Gloucestershire, and hope to develop a transferrable set of standards as a final outcome. Interim results are presented below.

Standards reviewed

- Scottish Government
 - [Land Rights & Responsibilities Statement](#)
 - [Engaging communities in decisions relating to land: guidance](#)
 - [Interim Principles for Responsible Investment in Natural Capital](#)
 - [Consultation on Community Wealth Building, proposed legislation](#)
- Scottish Land Commission
 - [Responsible Natural Capital and Carbon Management Protocol](#) (based on Scottish Government's Land Rights & Responsibilities Statement)
 - [Community Engagement in Decisions Relating to Land Protocol](#)
 - [Transparency of Ownership and Land Use Decision-Making good practice](#)
 - [Community benefits from investment in natural capital: A discussion paper](#)
- [Scottish Community Development Centre, National Standards for Community Engagement](#)
- [Community Land Scotland Position Paper on Rewilding](#)

³⁷ Canfield et al (2022) <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42532-022-00119-5>

³⁸ University of Exeter <https://greenfutures.exeter.ac.uk/article/social-sciences-to-play-vital-role-in-meeting-uks-net-zero-goals/>;

Sandbrook et al. (2023) <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-023-02048-2>;

Ortega (2023) <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44221-022-00013-0>;

Loos et al. (2022) <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4286771>

³⁹ Hafferty (2022) ; Hafferty (forthcoming thesis)

- Guidelines for environmental restoration interventions in the Affric-Kintail area (Fisher et al., in prep.)
- [Accountability Framework Operational Guidance on Free, Prior and Informed Consent](#)
- [Forest Stewardship Council - Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship \(abbreviated to FSC\)](#)
- [Plan Vivo Project Requirements](#)
- [VERRA Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards](#) (abbreviated to Verra)
- [Biodiversa Community Engagement Handbook](#) (for research)
- [OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes](#)
- Natural England Commissioned Report (Hafferty 2022): [Embedding an evidence-led, best-practice culture of engagement: learning from the evidence](#)

Interpretation

An important high-level issue relates to interpretation of standards, especially those expressed in broad terms, and the potential for different perspectives on compliance with such standards. For example, the Scottish Government's Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement suggests that "Land ownership, management and use should deliver a wide range of social, environmental, economic and cultural benefits" and that, "acting as the stewards of Scotland's land resource for future generations [holders of land rights] should contribute to wider public benefit, sustainable growth and a modern, successful country". These statements are clearly not intended to provide objective tests of compliance, and inevitably rely on subjective terms that cover distinct and potentially confounding objectives. Engagement is particularly important around the specific meanings and combinations of these objectives in each context.

Synthesis of standards

The table below gathers the main principles/standards from the documents we have reviewed. These are used as a basis for further development of our engagement roadmap. We use 'or' to separate principles on the same topic that differ in some significant way, highlighting variation among the sources without interpreting these as strict alternatives.

Topic	Standard (rephrased/combined)	Sources
Overall purpose	Production of environmental, social and economic objectives, specifically targeting climate change & biodiversity loss, and protecting natural capital.	Scottish Land Commission, Scottish Government
	Maintain & enhance social and economic wellbeing of community	FSC, Scottish Government
	Rewilding should complement the policy objective of repeopling areas of rural Scotland. Tackle vacant and derelict land and buildings.	Community Land Scotland, Scottish Government
	In employment, prioritising local hires & skillbuilding without discrimination, comply with employment laws and adopt best practice in worker relations and safety	Plan Vivo, Verra
	Financial/economic gains should remain in communities rather than be extracted. Or Work with the local community to identify opportunities to share the benefits with them and to support local priorities and aspirations. Consider opportunities to contribute to community wealth through procurement, fair work, and inclusive ownership. Establish a community benefit fund to provide direct financial returns to local communities Or Investment in and use of Scotland's natural capital should create benefits that are shared between public, private and community interests, contributing to a just transition. Current investment and future increases in land and ecosystem services value should benefit local communities. Investment and management decisions should support Community Wealth Building by reinvesting value in local economies to their long-term benefit.	Community Land Scotland Or Scottish Land Commission Or Scottish Government Interim Principles for Responsible Investment in Natural Capital
	Community voices should be at the fore of rewilding initiatives	Community Land Scotland
	Carbon offsetting discouraged; Investment in offsetting should not be a replacement for emissions reductions, and should always be made in addition to having plans and demonstrable actions in place to reduce emissions as close to zero as possible, and as part of targets and transition plans aligned with the Paris Agreement. Investment in natural capital for carbon management should be both measurable and verifiable, such as through the government-backed Woodland Carbon Code and the Peatland Code. Use UK Carbon Registry	Scottish Land Commission, Scottish Government

	Seek to collaborate with neighbouring landowners and public bodies to contribute to a coherent approach to delivering benefits	Scottish Land Commission, Scottish Government
	There should be a more diverse pattern of land ownership and tenure, with more opportunities for citizens to own, lease and have access to land. More local communities should have the opportunity to own, lease or use buildings and land which can contribute to their community's wellbeing and future development.	Scottish Government
	Investors should meet the six UN principles for Responsible Investment (https://www.unpri.org/about-us/what-are-the-principles-for-responsible-investment) Investment should comply with the values of Scottish Government as set out by our policies on Just Transition, Fair Work , Land Rights & Responsibilities and Global Capital Investment	Scottish Government
Identifying the community / pre-engagement	The people, communities and organisations affected (or 'relevant stakeholders') should be systematically identified, in collaboration with community and public bodies. Sometimes specified as 'significantly affected' (see glossary)	Scottish Community Development Centre, Plan Vivo, Biodiversa, Scottish Government
	Identify and overcome any barriers to participation, including technology and times of day at which engagement occurs	Scottish Community Development Centre, Plan Vivo, Verra, Natural England Report
	Conduct a 'Livelihood / Community Baseline' using simple, cost-effective indicators related to wellbeing, community cohesion, climate resilience etc. Produce annual report on Livelihood Indicator Progress and obtain feedback from stakeholders to include in annual report (along with accidents affecting people or environment)	Plan Vivo, Verra
	Identify areas providing/protecting critical ecosystem services/ livelihoods/ cultural identities for local communities and set a plan of action to manage/enhance them. Monitor appropriately and demonstrate no net harm. Existing natural capital should be protected and enhanced alongside the development of carbon management or other activities. It is recommended that surveys are conducted to establish baselines and monitoring systems are put in place to establish environmental and biodiversity gains	Verra, Scottish Land Commission
	Identify the benefits/motivations for engagement for stakeholders who engage with you, as well as being clear on what can and cannot change	Biodiversa
	Establish a 'culture of engagement' with regular, diverse opportunities for engagement, partly through varied methods including digital tools	OECD Guidelines, Natural England report

	Up-to-date information about who owns land or buildings and the extent of the landholding should always be made publicly available. The information should be in line with the information that will be detailed in the Land Register and RCI. Landowners should make use of the Registers of Scotland's processes for voluntary registration of land holdings, where appropriate. Land management plans should also be available.	Scottish Land Commission
Engaging the community	Develop a stakeholder engagement plan with the local community, engage early (3 months ahead of large changes) and regularly, allowing time for influence on plans. This should set out agreed expectations on what, how and when the community will be engaged in decisions that could affect them.	Plan Vivo, Scottish Land Commission, Scottish Government
	Use methods that are fit for purpose, achieving clear and regular communication in accessible language/formats, and assessing its impact to improve future engagement	Scottish Community Development Centre, Plan Vivo, Biodiversa, Scottish Government
	Healthy participation, involvement in decision-making and implementation. Communities able to shape project design	Verra
	Establish a transparent and accessible enquiry and grievance mechanism. To include a process for receiving, hearing, responding to and attempting to resolve grievances within a reasonable time period. Contact information available. Where a relevant party asks for information or a meeting to discuss ideas or issues, and where the request is appropriate and proportionate, this should be accommodated. It is recommended that this is within six weeks of a request.	Plan Vivo, Scottish Land Commission
	Engagement - should ideally be funded and managed by those with an understanding and training in stakeholder engagement. If lacking expertise, bring in 'knowledge brokers' and stakeholder engagement experts	Biodiversa
	Develop and implement a community impact monitoring plan that identifies what variables will be monitored, types of measurements, sampling methods and the frequency of monitoring and reporting. Demonstrate no net harm and share online or otherwise communicate summaries	Verra
	Where rights in carbon or natural capital are transferred to a third party this should be openly and transparently recorded. Use of the UK Land Carbon Registry is recommended if appropriate	Scottish Land Commission
	The people involved in a consultation event or engagement meeting should agree before it takes place how notes, actions and decisions will be recorded and shared, including how use of engagement responses are handled and decided on. It is recommended that this information is shared	Scottish Land Commission

	within six weeks of the meeting date or the end of the consultation period, unless otherwise agreed.	
	Engagement is not a disproportionate burden on either the land owner, land manager or community.	Scottish Government. Engaging communities in decisions relating to land: guidance
Role & benefits for community	Ensure a clear purpose for engagement, which is based on a shared understanding of community needs and ambitions	Scottish Community Development Centre
	Obtain Free, prior and informed consent where appropriate (“ensure that, prior to any activity that may affect indigenous peoples’ and local communities’ rights, land, resources, territories, livelihoods, and food security, their free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) is secured. This is done in a culturally appropriate manner, in accordance with the traditions, norms, and values of these peoples and communities, and through the representatives and institutions they choose.” (Accountability Framework Operational Guidance on Free, Prior and Informed Consent)	Verra, FSC
	Clear governance structure to enable stakeholder involvement in decision-making (e.g. could be represented on an advisory board or steering committee). Consider opportunities for collaboration or partnerships with landowners, tenants and local communities, that can deliver wider social, environmental and economic outcomes. Should involve legal contract for sharing risks, responsibilities, costs and incomes.	Plan Vivo, Scottish Land Commission
	Community engagement is a shared activity, with both those carrying out the engagement and those participating in it having a joint responsibility for its success. All parties are responsible for creating and maintaining a productive working relationship. Written agreements are recommended and seeking professional advice may be helpful.	Scottish Government. Engaging communities in decisions relating to land: guidance; Scottish Land Commission
	Community benefits should accrue to the geographically local community, should be considered prior to project initiation and should be proportionate to scale/impact of the project. Benefits should be rooted in engagement with the community and in an understanding of local needs and priorities (via established and constituted community groups, aligning with local strategic and development plans), and should be additional to broader public benefits. They should be clear and identifiable, understood by all parties, monitored and evaluated, with regular public reporting on progress.	Scottish Land Commission

Glossary

Several terms are key to the standards used here. Definitions provided by those standards are included below.

Term	Existing definitions	Source
Community	individuals who live in a particular place. This can be an urban or rural area. It can be defined as whole towns, single streets, whole islands or peninsulas, other large geographic areas or small villages or neighbourhoods.	Scottish Land Commission
	Where those who take decisions about land live within and are a part of the local community, they may know who could be affected by their decisions. If this is not known, then Scotland's local authorities and community councils may be sources of information on local needs and in identifying the right people to engage with. Other useful sources of information may be Community Planning Partnerships, local chambers of commerce and Business Improvement Districts, local farming associations, residents' associations, tenants' associations and housing associations. Public bodies such as Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), or National Park bodies, if present in the area, may also be able to help.	Scottish Government
	Communities of any size that are in or adjacent to the Management Unit, and also those that are close enough to have a significant impact on the economy or the environmental values of the Management Unit or to have their economies, rights or environments significantly affected by the management activities or the biophysical aspects of the Management Unit.	FSC
Community benefits	Community benefits are packages of intentional benefits, arising from investment in natural capital enhancement, creation, and restoration projects, provided on a negotiated basis for the long-term benefit of the geographically local community	Scottish Land Commission
Engagement	Regular communication between the people who take decisions about land and the communities affected by them. Regular engagement builds trust and good relationships and ensures information is shared effectively.	Scottish Land Commission
	Engagement does not give local communities any legal right over land nor any power to direct the actions and decisions of land owners or their delegates. However, engagement will enable communities' views to be heard and help to shape decisions about land. Engagement will also help to foster trust between communities and those who are making decisions about land, which in turn will often lead to better decisions.	Scottish Government. Engaging communities in decisions relating to land: guidance
	Can include: . publishing a written consultation or survey	Scottish Government

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . holding local meeting(s) . holding site visit(s) . carrying out workshop(s), perhaps with a facilitator . collaborating with the community to co-design a project 	
Significant impact	<p>There is no fixed definition of significant impact, but, as set out in the Scottish Government Guidance, it can be taken to mean a decision that might affect the environmental, social, economic or cultural development of a community. It could also involve a change or restriction of access to local services, a good quality environment, or community viability.</p>	Scottish Land Commission
	<p>As a broad guideline, a significant impact is one which is felt at the level of the local population, rather than just at the level of an individual person or household. It will usually include things that impact on opportunities for local sustainable development, wellbeing, the fulfilment of human rights, and sustaining a viable community. Examples are housing availability and quality, essential services, prospects for economic development and job creation. It also includes social and environmental issues, such as land on which to build a village hall, protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment, creating a local community nature reserve and looking after green space within towns and cities [note that guidance goes on to point out that significant impact can arise from a series of small decisions, or decisions about different land related activities. In these cases, the cumulative impact should be the subject of engagement].</p>	Scottish Government
Consultation	<p>Where a decision could have a significant impact on a community more formal engagement or consultation will be expected. This may take place over a longer period, should be more structured, and should give people a chance to have a say on what you are going to do.</p>	Scottish Land Commission
Governance	<p>By governance we mean the structure around the decision-making processes relating to those who manage and implement decisions and policies in relation to land. In this case, when we mention governance it relates to people who take decisions about land, how they make those decisions, and how they involve other people in decision making. Good governance is a key contributor to the effectiveness, productivity and reputation of a landowning organisation or individual.</p>	Scottish Land Commission