

CASESTUDY: COMMUNITY ACTION IN THE GLENKENS



KEY INSIGHTS

- ✓ Rural & island communities often have a wealth of assets, e.g. physical, social, community, organisational
- ✓ Accessing financial returns from these many assets can allow rural & island communities to be ambitious and sustainable
- ✓ Rural & island communities often have clear strategies and development plans, and well developed organisational structures to deliver on these.
- ✓ Community organisations in rural & island areas deliver diverse activities and services, responding to the particular needs of their communities.
- ✓ The strategies and actions of rural & island communities align closely with national and regional priorities. Communities should be viewed as key strategic partners in delivering so many national and regional priorities efficiently and effectively – but need to be valued and resourced as such.

We are a forested area, a farming area, an energy generation area. We are a watery area, given life by our rivers and lochs. Our natural environment is so special that we are part of the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere. Our landscapes attract visitors from all over the world. We are a peaty area and our soil stores some of Scotland's best carbon. It is our home, where we work, live and play.

Opening of "A Vision for Land Use in the Glenkens"



Glenkens
Community
& Arts Trust

Glenkens context

- A collection of remote-rural villages in Dumfries & Galloway.
- Challenges of social isolation, rural poverty and inequity of provision.
- The oldest demographic in Scotland. Very low 18-35 numbers.
- BUT - a track record of community empowerment stretching back decades.
- There is a growing pipeline of Community Benefit funding from windfarms coming into the area.
- The 'Glenkens and District Community Action Plan' was published in September 2020.
- We are increasingly organised and ambitious, aligned across the area around the Community Action Plan.

"The Glenkens is well-defined culturally and geographically. Each village has between 100 and 500 households, and the centre of the area is 13 miles from the nearest town of 3,000 people. There are around 3,500 people living in the Glenkens and district."

CASESTUDY

The Vision for Land Use in the Glenkens demonstrates the wealth of physical assets located in the Glenkens. Community action in the Glenkens, rooted in decades of practice, has become increasingly organised and ambitious with a thriving and well-embedded culture of volunteering and self-sufficiency, from Good Neighbours clubs to an oil-buying co-operative to local food networks, plus many community-owned assets, from Community Shops to Community Woodlands to Village and Town Halls, all supported by committed volunteer Boards and committees.

This wealth of community energy is evident from the Community Action Plan for the Glenkens and district. Published in September 2020 after significant community consultation, the Plan engages with four key themes:

1. A Connected Community
2. An Asset Rich Community
3. An Economically Flourishing Community
4. A Carbon Neutral Community.

The Vision for Land Use is a 2023 addendum to the Plan.

Community action is well organised with three closely connected but distinct voluntary entities that ensure delivery and accountability of the Plan:

1. **The Glenkens & District Trust** builds the available funding pot through effective liaison with wind farm (and other) developers and administers the funds effectively and transparently. Membership is drawn from Community Councils.
2. The **Community Action Plan Steering Group**, a non-incorporated body, owns the Community Action Plan, keeps it relevant and prioritises delivery. Membership is drawn from across the area.
3. The **Glenkens Community and Arts Trust**, the local anchor organisation, has the mandate to lead on delivery of the Plan, which it does through a strategy of direct delivery, supporting other local organisations, such as the Galloway Food Hub, and creating regional and national partnerships.

3. The Model

- **Effective delivery of a Community Action Plan in a remote-rural community through:**
 - Evidence gathering to support need and solutions.
 - Transparency and accountability.
 - Responsiveness to changing context.
 - Adherence to Community Wealth Building Principles
 - Alignment with regional and national priorities.
 - Increased community confidence and autonomy.
 - Clear organisational roles and responsibilities.

The Glenkens is fortunate to have access to resources from windfarm developments in the area, currently about £280,000 a year across 8 Community Councils. With further windfarm developments coming on stream in the 2030s, this could increase, demonstrating the potential for local sustainable development resourced through income from local assets. Well-engaged locally-driven strategic development is key for meeting the needs of the community. As is enabling communities to gain more of the returns on local assets, such as renewable energy (see [here](#)).

The Glenkens and District Community Action Plan clearly maps on to regional and national priorities. The Glenkens have created a model of effective delivery of regional and national priorities within remote-rural communities that we feel could be shared across the country. Our delivery model is a case study in how to plug the gap between national policy and action on the ground. However, a lack of core revenue support and constraints on possible regional partners is hampering our efforts to make this happen. Communities should be viewed as key strategic partners in delivering ScotGov priorities efficiently and effectively – but need to be valued and resourced as such.

Helen Keron, GCAT Executive Manager

DELIVERING ON SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

The Community Action Plan aligns very clearly with regional and national strategies such as the South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy, the Dumfries and Galloway Local Outcomes Improvement Plan and Scottish Government priorities of tackling poverty, ensuring a just transition and building a wellbeing economy.

The Community Action Plan is rooted in local understanding of the challenges that the Glenkens communities face, and in local decision-making on how to address these. Doing so clearly matches regional and national policy as well. The key challenges are:

- The Glenkens is in the bottom decile for ‘Access to Geographic Services’ in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. No trains, no taxis. Public buses don’t run after 5:30pm or at all on Sundays.
- There are significant issues of social isolation, especially post-Covid. Pockets of rural poverty are growing due to the cost-of-living crisis. With no mains gas and poorly insulated homes, fuel poverty is worsening as heating oil costs rise.
- Glenkens has an older population: 28% are aged over 65 (compared to 19% for Scotland). Just 14% of the population are aged 0-15. The population in Dumfries and Galloway is forecast to decline by 3% by 2028. Mothballing of local schools only exacerbates the population challenges the area faces.
- Glenkens is at the centre of rapid land-use change, especially due to renewable energy and forestry. This brings challenges but also opportunities (e.g.) community benefit funds from wind farm developers.

A large threat to the sustainability and prosperity of the Glenkens is rapid land use change being driven by well meaning but misguided policy interventions in response to the climate emergency. A two-hour drive around the area brought these realities into stark focus. Huge areas are being planted over by trees, driven by the latest iteration of subsidies, in this case carbon offsetting and timber production. The densely packed trees we saw are of questionable benefit to the climate and biodiversity and take out of action so much good land that could be used for sustainable and regenerative farming; the Glenkens has for generations supported livestock farming. We felt the grief within the community for farmers who had farmed their land for generations feeling that they have no option but to sell up and bury their land under trees which will so damage the productivity of the land.

CoDeL blogpost 1 March 2024

Community action in Glenkens can contribute directly to many Scottish Government policies, such as:

The National Performance Standards, for example on poverty (“we tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally”) and communities that “are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe”: “We live in friendly, vibrant and cohesive communities which value diversity and support those in need. We are encouraged to volunteer, take responsibility for our community and engage with decisions about it.”.

Community Asset Transfers under **the Community Empowerment Act (2015)**. The Galloway Food Hub is run out of a community building that used to be an old primary school. New Galloway Town Hall has recently been fully modernised after an asset transfer from Dumfries and Galloway Council.

The Good Food Nation Act (2022), e.g. “to encourage and empower people to grow their own food”, “to increase the consumption, production, and provision of local food” by bringing more local food into shops, food outlets and schools. “High-quality, nutritious food which is locally and sustainably produced is key to our wellbeing – in economic, environmental, social and health terms.” (See also the casestudy on the Galloway Food Hub.)

Agricultural and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill (2023), e.g. “ensuring agricultural activity continues appropriately, contributing to the economic or social wellbeing of an area and to environmental benefit”.

The **Addressing Depopulation Action Plan (2024)** “emphasises and endorses the importance of local leadership and seeks to exemplify the maxim ‘local by default, national by agreement’. We know that a place-based approach to applying national, regional, and local policies will be essential to sustainably and effectively address depopulation.”

The Community Action Plan seeks to deliver towards **Scotland’s climate change legislation**, by setting out ambitions for a Just Transition to Net Zero, starting with decarbonising local transport.

Community Wealth Building (CWB) “seeks to transform our local and regional economic systems to enable more local communities and people to own, have a stake in, access and benefit from the wealth our economy generates.” Community action in Glenkens contributes directly to all five strands of CWB, e.g. finance, inclusive ownership and land & property.

LINKS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The Glenkens Hub at <https://glenkens.scot/>, including <https://glenkens.scot/community-groups>

The Glenkens Community and Arts Trust at <https://gcat.scot/about-gcat/>

The Glenkens & District Trust at <https://www.glenkenstrust.org.uk/>

The Glenkens & District Community Action Plan at <https://glenkens.scot/community-groups/community-action-plan-steering-group>

A Vision for Land Use at <https://glenkens.scot/land-use>

The Galloway Food Hub at <https://gallowayfoodhub.org.uk/>

The Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere at <https://www.gsabiosphere.org.uk/>

