Morvern & Strontian Learning Exchange Report

6 – 7 March 2024



Funded by UK Government

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Image: Tour of Morvern, day one.





1. Introduction

tsiMORAY provided nine participants from Moray-based social enterprises with a learning exchange visit to Morvern Community Development Company (morvern.org) and Sunart Community Company (sunartcommunitycompany.co.uk), based in Strontian, on 6-7 March 2024.

The demand for a learning exchange was driven by the Development Officer Network (DON), run by **tsi**MORAY. This network consists of development officers in Moray who represent various development trusts in the area. These development trusts are social enterprises focused on improving the economic, social and environmental aspects of the areas they cover. This learning exchange was developed with DON members in mind and was open to applications from any social enterprise in Moray.

The learning exchange was funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

2. Aims

The aims of the learning exchange trip were to:

a) Inspire participants to develop new socially enterprising projects in their local area.

b) Support participants to gain new ideas to tackle challenges around existing socially enterprising projects they are working on.

c) Enable participants to network with other local (Moray) organisations and build connections with leaders in Morvern and Strontian.



Image: Lochaline Community Hub, Morvern.

3. Preparation & Planning

3.1 Selection of Participants

Through an application process, a group of nine representatives from eight social enterprises were selected based on their role and interest in the identified learning exchange site visits. There was a good geographical spread of participants selected from across Moray. The table below identifies the eight organisations represented in addition to their location.



3.2 Itinerary and Logistics

The itinerary was created in partnership with the host organisations and shaped by what applicants had said they were particularly interested in from their application form.

A full risk assessment was completed and implemented with support from the host organisations. Relevant insurance was checked in relation to cover provided by the minibus insurance policy, and public liability cover for the trip more generally.

The minibus was hired from Moray School Bank to financially support a local (Moray-based) third-sector organisation and reinforce Community Wealth Building principles.

3.3 Participating Organisations

Organisation	Location	Website
InKeith & Strathisla	Keith, Strathisla	www.inkeith.com
Moray Firth Credit Union / Forres Area Community Trust	Forres	www.forresarea.org www.morayfirthcreditunion.co.uk
Naturally Useful CIC	Rafford, near Forres	www.naturallyuseful.co.uk
Portogordon Community Trust	Portgordon	www.portgordoncommunity.co.uk
Dufftown and District Community Association	Dufftown	www.dufftowncommunity.co.uk
R-evolution for Good	Craigellachie	www.revolutionforgood.org.uk
Tomintoul & Glenlivit Development Trust	Tomintoul	www.tgdt.org.uk
Lossiemouth Development Trust	Lossiemouth	www.lossietrust.org

4. Exchange Activities

4.1 Day One – 6 March 2024 – Morvern Community Development Company

After travelling early from Elgin and arriving at Morvern, day one was hosted by Lilia Dobrokhodova, Project Officer for MCDC.

- Arrival and introduction to the work of MCDC.
- Tour of the Morvern Community Business Hub. This recently completed building offers office space and a café for local residents and visitors.
- Tour of the Morvern Community Harbour project, including a viewing of the pontoons, and meeting with the Harbour Master. Participants learnt how this project generates income, and increases footfall into the village by providing sailors with a place to safely moor.
- Tour of the Morvern Community Allotments project. Participants learnt the importance of this project for providing a space for the community to come together.
- Travel to Strontian and arrival at accommodation.
- Evening networking meal, including a chance for participants to reflect on the day and meet some directors from Strontian Community Company.

4.2 Day Two – 7 March 2024 – Sunart Community Company

Day two was hosted by James Hilder and colleagues from the Sunart Community Company. The following schedule represents the activities undertaken:

- Met at Strontian Hotel and walked along the community-maintained path to the Village Hall.
- Introductory talk about the history and development of the Sunart Community Company. This included a questions and answers session.
- Oakwood Tourism & Crafts Centre visit and introduction from Oakwood Tourism and Crafts Manager. This Centre offers a venue in the middle of the village for local craft people to sell their products.
- Strontian Church visit and meeting with representatives of Dualchas to hear about their work and the Sunart Archive. A presentation was given about the proposed community buyout and feasibility study of the church, including proposed upgrades.
- Lunch at the Ariundle Centre with representatives from the Sunart Community Company. This provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on what they had learnt, and discuss this with Sunart CC directors.
- Presentation on Longrigg Woodland project and its aspirations for providing educational activities.
- Presentation on Sunart Community Renewables including the now established community hydro scheme and a proposed wind turbine.
- Visit to Sunart Community Hydro turbine shed including a presentation about the hydro scheme from the Chair of Sunart Community Renewables.

5. Feedback & Outcomes

Aim one: *Inspire participants to develop new socially enterprising projects in their local area.*

78% of participants 'strongly agree' that aim one was achieved, with 22% reporting that they 'agree'.

Summary of outcomes to date:

- Three participants reported they are now actively exploring the possibility of creating renewable energy schemes in their area as a result of the site visit to Strontian.
- One participant is looking into buying a local church as a heritage project as inspired by the church buy-out plan in Strontian
- One participant is looking into creating a community pizza oven as seen at Morvern allotments to bring the community together.
- One participant has been inspired to continue their plans to buy and develop their community harbour as a result of the Morvern site visit.

Aim two: *Support participants to gain new ideas to tackle challenges around existing socially enterprising projects they are working on.*

56% of participants 'strongly agree' that aim two was achieved, with 44% reporting that they 'agree'.

Summary of outcomes to date:

- Consider use of subcommittees to enable community involvement.
- One participant was inspired by the effective use of volunteers to deliver outcomes.
- Two participants were inspired by the level of community engagement they observed being undertaken at Morvern/Strontian.

Aim three: Enable participants to network with other local (Moray) organisations and build connections with leaders in Morvern and Strontian.

78% of participants ‘strongly agree’ that this aim was achieved, with 22% reporting that they ‘agree’.

Most participants reported making good connections with other Moray-based organisations on the trip, while also finding useful contacts on the site-visits themselves. One participant made a direct contact with the Harbour Master at Morvern to seek advice when necessary for their harbour project in Moray.

Image: The learning exchange group with Strontian host James Hilder (far right).



6. Recommendations for Future Exchanges



Future learning exchanges may benefit from:

- Meeting in-person a week before the trip. While this may be difficult organisationally, especially if people join the cohort late, an evening social would allow participants to meet before the trip. This could allow connections, learning, and working partnerships to form more quickly on the trip.
- There is a tension between taking the opportunity to see as much as possible on a learning exchange and giving participants enough time to absorb information and connect with each other. Future learning exchanges could benefit from intentionally scheduling in open free time, with options for participants to continue conversations, or take some time alone as they require to get the most from the trip.
- Setting up (with requisite permissions) a WhatsApp group, or similar, before the event would be useful to enable participants to share photos and resources while on the trip. For this learning exchange, a group was set up after the event which meant patchy sign-up and engagement.

Image: Visiting the hydro scheme generator at Strontian.



7. Conclusion

The learning exchange to Movern and Strontian aimed to inspire participants, support with new ideas and challenges, and enable networking. The feedback shows that these three aims were successfully achieved with participants expressing various ways in which they have benefitted personally and professionally from the exchange.

tsiMORAY staff intend to follow up with participants with a brief follow-up survey to explore any changes that have come about because of the learning exchange. This will be subject to a second report.

Image: Networking lunch, day two.