

Community makes history as South Scotland's biggest land buyout gets over the line to double size of nature reserve



PUBLISHED AUG 5, 2022

BY [PRESSAT](#)

The South of Scotland's largest community buyout is set to double in size having defied the odds and "achieved the impossible" for a second time in two years, following one of the most ambitious community fundraising campaigns ever seen.

A historic agreement for 5,300 acres of land and three properties between The Langholm Initiative charity and Buccleuch will now go ahead, after the Dumfriesshire town of Langholm successfully reached its goal of £2.2m by the 31 July deadline.

This will double the size of the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve, created last year after the buyout's first stage raised £3.8m to purchase an initial 5,200 acres and six residential properties from Buccleuch. The reserve aims to help tackle the nature and climate crises, while boosting community regeneration.

Success for the buyout's second stage was only confirmed as the deadline was reached. In the closing days, thousands of pounds continued to pour into the public crowdfunder. There were significant donations of £300,000 from Alex Gerko, Founder of algorithmic trading firm XTX Markets, £100,000 from Anne Reece of the Reece Foundation, and £50,000 from John Muir Trust.

Jenny Barlow, Tarras Valley Nature Reserve's Estate Manager, said: "We are so grateful to every single person who has backed this beacon of hope for people and planet – together we have achieved the impossible. It's been a rollercoaster, but the generosity and unwavering support of so many wonderful donors and volunteers have got us over the line in the nick of time.

"This is about a grassroots fightback against the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis, and helping to create a better future. We are doing something so special here, and our

expanding reserve is an amazing opportunity for people to visit this part of the world and be inspired by the wonders of nature.”

Benny Higgins, Executive Chairman of Buccleuch, said: “We are absolutely delighted for The Langholm Initiative and have been pleased to work with them and support their project every step of the way. This successful outcome is testament to what can be achieved by people working together constructively.

“When Buccleuch launched its community consultation on the proposed sale of 25,000 acres of land on Langholm Moor, we couldn’t know what the community’s aspirations would be. To see The Langholm Initiative grow the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve from the initial 5,200 acres to almost double that is fantastic, and we look forward to seeing the evolution of the project over the coming years.”

On the reserve, globally important peatlands and ancient woods are to be restored, native woodlands expanded, and a haven ensured for wildlife including rare hen harriers. Community regeneration through a nature-based approach is a central aim, with six new jobs already created. Langholm was once a thriving textile centre, but the industry has declined in recent years.

In June, the Scottish Land Fund awarded The Langholm Initiative £1 million towards the buyout, while an anonymous private donor made a donation of £500,000 at the appeal’s launch last October.

Nearly 3,000 people have donated to the crowdfunder since it launched nine months ago, taking it past its £200,000 stretch target to reach over £242,000. Tens of thousands of pounds poured in during the final weeks alone.

Margaret Pool, Trustee of The Langholm Initiative, said: “The generosity of so many people locally, nationally and worldwide has been amazing. Our heartfelt thanks go to every donor, supporter and volunteer who helped us overcome what so often felt like impossible odds. We are also very grateful to Buccleuch for their ongoing positive engagement, which was absolutely crucial.

“Every single pound donated to the crowdfunder counted. Each donation kept this impossible dream alive, while major donors could see from the outpouring of support that this was an inspiring, serious project of hope.

“This is a historic result for our community now and for future generations. We also hope our story will inspire other community-led nature recovery projects across Scotland and beyond. We know that communities can be powerful forces for positive change.”

Buccleuch has supported the community bid, agreeing with The Langholm Initiative a fixed purchase price in 2019 and extending purchase deadlines to give more time for fundraising. The purchase will be legally finalised between the community and Buccleuch over the coming months.

Leading charities that have backed the buyout include Borders Forest Trust, John Muir Trust, Rewilding Britain, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Trees for Life, and the Woodland Trust.

The Langholm Initiative was formed in 1994 as one of south Scotland's first development trusts. It facilitates projects making a lasting difference to the local area and people. See langholminitiative.org.uk.

Press release distributed by Media Pigeon on behalf of Pressat, on Aug 5, 2022. For more information subscribe and [follow us](#).

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