

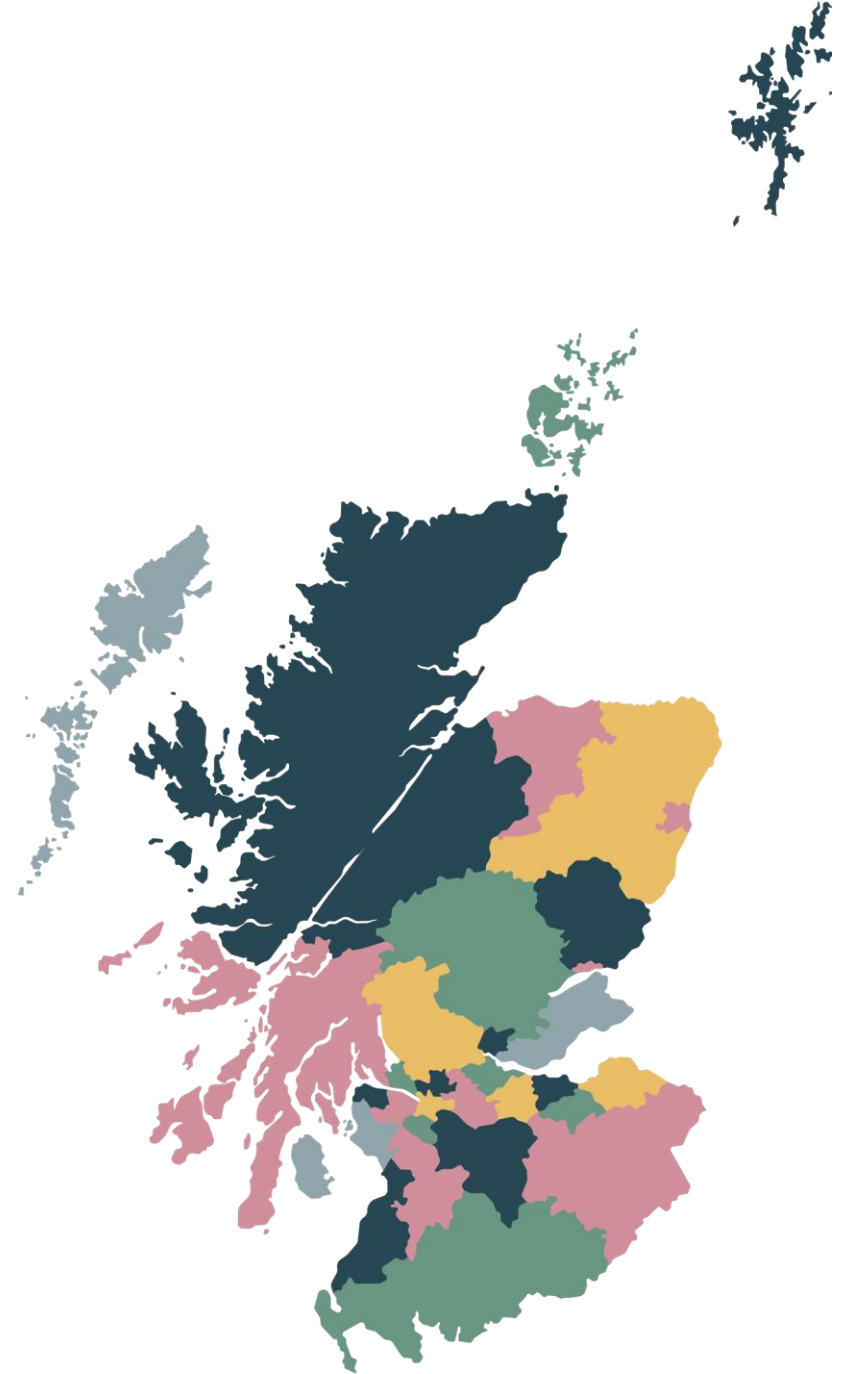


**Development  
Trusts Association  
Scotland**

**A Thriving Community-led Network**

# SO, YOU WANT TO BECOME A DEVELOPMENT TRUST?

AUGUST 2025



# TIPS AND INFORMATION TO GET YOU STARTED



Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTA Scotland) is an independent, members-led organisation that aims to promote, support, and represent Development Trusts across Scotland.

Established in 2003, DTA Scotland now has a network of over 350 members. These community-led organisations use a combination of enterprise and creativity to improve the quality of life for local people in urban, rural and island communities across Scotland.

DTA Scotland promotes peer learning and growth through various networking and training opportunities, including an annual conference designed to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and expertise among its members.

Other member benefits include expert advice on governance, crisis management, human resources, and legal issues. For a comprehensive overview of all the services and benefits available to members, please visit our [website](#).

DTA Scotland represents the network at the highest levels, engaging directly with the Scottish Government, local authorities, funders, and other relevant agencies to advocate for members' interests and influence policy changes. DTA Scotland gives members regular opportunities to contribute to developing policy asks and consultation submissions, so the network's aspirations and needs are fully represented.

# WHAT IS A DEVELOPMENT TRUST APPROACH?

You can see the breadth of the Development Trust movement in Scotland by viewing the [Members Map](#) on the DTA Scotland website

The Development Trust approach operates in various settings across the UK, from towns and cities to rural areas and islands, embodying a mix of community initiative and entrepreneurial spirit. Despite their diversity and sometimes different names, organisations following this approach share core principles, centred around collective efforts to tackle local challenges, emphasising self-reliance, innovation, collaborative partnerships, and community entrepreneurship. They manage assets like buildings and land, aiming to drive social, economic, and environmental regeneration. They aim to generate community wealth and ensure its retention with the community, fostering sustainable development and local prosperity.

Sometimes described as community anchor organisations, Development Trusts are membership-based organisations that are democratically accountable to their communities. They can be established as new organisations or from an existing community organisation.

Principles that define a Development Trust include:

- Autonomy, with governance and direction coming from within the community
- A commitment to regenerate the area's economic, environmental, and social fabric
- A dedication to forming and sustaining community-led partnership initiatives, and
- An entrepreneurial spirit that drives innovation and sustainability

An organisation must embody these four principles in its operations and ethos to be recognised as a Development Trust.





### ECONOMIC BENEFITS

- Enhances employability and entrepreneurship
- Stimulates job creation for residents
- Fosters a self-reliant community economy

### ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

- Conserves local landscape and biodiversity
- Promotes decarbonisation and climate resilience
- Revitalises neglected spaces for the community

### SOCIAL BENEFITS

- Aspires to tackle inequality
- Brings communities together
- Collective voice to influence change at a local level

## DEVELOPMENT TRUSTS SEEK TO ADDRESS THE FULL BREADTH OF COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Development Trusts are dedicated to nurturing vibrant, sustainable, and equitable communities for current residents and future generations. This commitment to sustainable development encompasses a holistic approach that balances ecological integrity, economic vitality, and social equity. By tailoring their strategies to meet each community's unique needs and aspirations, Development Trusts ensure that their interventions are meaningful and impactful.

# STEPS TO STARTING A DEVELOPMENT TRUST

## INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

**Identifying your purpose:** begin with a clear vision. What social, economic, and environmental impacts do you aim to achieve in your community?

**Evaluating the need for a Development Trust:** consider whether establishing a development trust is the best approach to realise your goals. Are there existing organisations you can collaborate with?

**Community engagement:** explore innovative and inclusive ways to involve community members from the outset, ensuring their needs and ideas shape the trust's direction.

**Sustainability planning:** identify the skills, resources, and funding necessary to start and sustain your efforts. Building a model for continued growth and impact is essential.

This guide outlines how to start answering these questions. However, there is no 'right way' to set up a Development Trust, and this guide will not provide all the answers. For further resources, support and, most importantly, successful examples, please visit the [DTA Scotland website](#) at or [email us](#).



**In starting your own development trust, the aim is to create an effective independent organisation that can both serve local needs and sustain its own operations.**

**Every community is different and consequently every approach should meet its own community's needs and opportunities.**







*DTA Scotland has a wealth of experience and knowledge in helping groups set up Development Trusts, so please get in touch with us when you would like further information or support.*



## STARTING OUT

Gather a group of passionate individuals within your community. Share experiences and skills and identify gaps to be filled. Transparency and inclusivity from the start reinforces the collective ownership of the project. Engage the community through diverse methods, from surveys to casual conversations, ensuring a broad understanding of community needs and aspirations.



## DEVELOPING A PLAN

With a deeper understanding of community needs, start shaping your strategy. Identify opportunities for social, economic, and environmental enhancements. Collaborate with other organisation to amplify your impact and avoid overlap. Sort out initiatives into immediate, short-term, and long-term goals, starting with achievable projects to build momentum and trust.



**Hundreds of communities across Scotland have set up successful Development Trusts and learnt many lessons along the way. If you know of a development trust near you, it's a good idea to get in touch with them to make connections and benefit from their experience. DTA Scotland can connect you with relevant established development trust for peer-learning opportunities and visits, so get in touch with us to arrange this.**





**Come up with fun and interesting ways to consult with and engage your community in what you are doing.**

**Remember why you are doing this and articulate it to others – the strength of your organisation will depend on the level of support it has from local people.**



*For comprehensive guidance and examples of successful Development Trusts, visit the DTAS [website](#) or [email us](#).*



## GETTING ORGANISED

Transition into a structured group to turn plans into actions. Document steps, assign responsibilities, and explore funding avenues. Engage the community in refining ideas, aligning with broader regional objectives, and leveraging local assets for sustainability.

Establishing a legal and governance framework ensures accountability and community ownership, laying the groundwork for a resilient Development Trust.

**Your plans should be based on the needs of your community. Being able to demonstrate that the Development Trust has been set up to meet these needs will be essential for securing funds and, more importantly, for earning the support from your community.**



## RAISING MONEY

Your strategic plan is your blueprint for funding. Recognise the value of volunteer contributions and in-kind support as significant assets. Diversify funding sources, including grants, community shares, and partnerships with local authorities and businesses. Prioritise community needs over funder preferences to maintain your mission's integrity. Forge connections that offer more than financial support, including advice, resources, and advocacy.

# GOVERNANCE

Unlike Community Councils or other community-based voluntary groups, Development Trusts are not grounded in any specific legal framework. No designated statutory body is tasked with their approval or oversight of their operations. Development Trusts can adopt various legal forms tailored to their local context and the specifics of their intended activities. This adaptability effectively allows them to respond to their communities' unique needs and aspirations.

Development Trusts exist to proactively make things happen for the benefit of their communities and are therefore likely to become involved in activities that carry a degree of financial exposure and risk, such as trading, owning assets, entering leases or other contracts/agreements, or taking on employees. DTA Scotland therefore recommends incorporation before any such commitments are made. Development Trusts in Scotland commonly align with one of the following legal structures, each offering different advantages and considerations:

**Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG):** This structure is favoured for its flexibility and the option to register as a charity, providing both legal identity and potential tax benefits.

**Two-tier Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO):** Ideal for those seeking charitable status from the outset with a structure that allows for a clear separation between members and trustees, offering protection and governance clarity.

**Community Benefit Societies:** Specialising in community ownership and democratic governance, this model is particularly suitable for projects aiming to raise capital through community shares. DTAS's Democratic Finance programme offers extensive guidance and support for setting up such entities.

DTA Scotland has a 'Startup Toolkit' which will provide you with the information you need to choose the right legal structure for your organisation.



**The formalities are relatively easy to set up, and DTA Scotland can support you along the way and offer advice on legal incorporation. The harder bit is to stimulate local interest, energy and commitment in a way which will sustain the emergent trust, and help it mature – this is something you, as the people embedded in your community, will know how best to do!**





## CASE STUDY

# GLENURQUHART RURAL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION (GURCA)

In 1999, a heritage group in Glenurquhart published a book documenting the area's history, highlighting the importance of preserving local traditions. This effort led to the Glenurquhart Rural Community Association (GURCA) in 1949. Initially, GURCA focused on social events and managing community assets like the park, village green, and hall.

Over the years, GURCA has transformed significantly, particularly with the transfer of the village hall's ownership from trustees to the association. This transition marked GURCA's evolution into a two-tier Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO), enabling GURCA to undertake more substantial community projects.

Originally focused on social events, GURCA expanded to include asset management and community development projects. A key initiative was acquiring the village tourist information centre through community shares, ensuring financial sustainability. This centre now serves as a tourism and transport hub, benefiting the local economy.

The success of the tourist information centre led to further expansions, including acquiring village toilets and increasing focus on community initiatives.

GURCA's significant achievements include developing and managing a community-owned daycare centre staffed by local employees, partnering with other organisations to build housing for the elderly and demonstrating its commitment to supporting vulnerable community members.

Another notable project is the mental health initiative administered through Highland Third Sector Interface (TSI). This includes community lunches, men's social evenings, and support for those dealing with grief or illness. They also manage funds from a local wind farm, benefiting multiple community organisations and supporting various projects to ensure Glenurquhart's sustainable development.

### **Sustainability and Community Impact**

GURCA's diverse projects and revenue streams ensure financial stability, allowing reinvestment in the community. The organisation's impact is widespread, improving amenities, infrastructure, and social support services across Glenurquhart.

GURCA's evolution from a social events organiser to a pivotal community development organisation underscores its adaptability and commitment to Glenurquhart's growth. With a focus on sustainability, social welfare, and community empowerment, GURCA is well-positioned to tackle future challenges and seize opportunities for the benefit of all residents.

# FOR EXISTING ORGANISATIONS OR PARTNERSHIPS

For organisations and partnerships aspiring to embrace more sustainable, enterprising, and community-led approaches, transitioning into a Development Trust presents a viable pathway to amplify their impact. This evolution is particularly relevant for town or local authority improvement partnerships, which comprehensively unite various sectors to address regional challenges. Such instances can be found in the network, such as the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnerships, which established Huntly Development Trust.

Many Development Trusts originate from community groups, residents' associations, or other grassroots organisations. Transitioning to a Development Trust model enables these entities to broaden their scope of activities and enhance their community impact significantly.

**SO, WHAT SHOULD A PARTNERSHIP OR EXISTING ORGANISATION CONSIDER?**

## STEP 1: REFLECTIVE ASSESSMENT

Begin with a reflective evaluation of your status and achievements. Understand your partnership or organisation's value to the community and identify the benefits, opportunities, and challenges associated with further development. This assessment should extend to other organisations, considering potential roles within the community and how to engage with other local agencies and enterprises.





## **STEP 2: ALIGNMENT WITH CORE PRINCIPLES**

Revisit the principles highlighted earlier in this guide. Assess how these principles align with your current operations and future aspirations. Gauge the readiness of your members or partners to embrace a more community-oriented approach and consider strategies to enhance community ownership and diversify income through trading and contracts.

## **STEP 3: CREATE A STRATEGY**

Utilising insights from the previous steps, set out actionable steps and necessary organisational changes. Balance ambition with realism, acknowledging potential gains and losses. Update or develop your strategic plans, outlining the feasibility, financing, and implementation processes. Explore opportunities for investment in the community, including leveraging planning mechanisms for land and asset development or negotiating transfers of underutilised properties.



Maintain transparent communication with the community, offering avenues for their involvement and input. Stay open to revising your plans based on community feedback and invest in mechanisms that facilitate deeper community engagement in the trust's development.

This approach strengthens the foundation for a Development Trust and ensures that growth strategies are inclusive, realistic, and aligned with community needs and aspirations. Keeping the community at the heart of planning and decision-making processes fosters shared ownership and commitment to the trust's success.



**Make sure you regularly update the community on your plans so local people know they can get involved.**

**You can spread the word on social media and in the local press and hold fun and informative events – this will ensure people don't feel left behind.**

**Engaging with other local groups to ensure they know what is happening is also important.**



# IS THE DEVELOPMENT TRUST APPROACH RIGHT FOR YOU?

Utilise the following checklist to determine if your group aligns with or is on the path towards becoming a Development Trust.

This assessment is crucial in understanding the fundamental characteristics and commitments necessary for such an endeavour.

If any of your answers to these nine critical questions are 'No', it may indicate that the envisioned organisation may not align with the Development Trust model. In such instances, it is advisable to consider alternative forms of support tailored to your group's needs and objectives. We recommend consulting with a local Third Sector Interface or another relevant third-sector support organisation for guidance tailored to your specific circumstances and goals.

INDICATOR	YES	ASPIRE	NO
1 Has a defined geographical community of benefit?			
2 Membership is open to everyone within the community and has a commitment to develop a substantial membership?			
3 Majority serving on the organisation's governing board is elected from the membership resident in the defined community of benefit?			
4 Organisation is independent of personal, political, religious, outside agency, local authority, corporate or funder interests or agendas?			
5 Objectives/ planned activities identified through community consultation, and set out in a publicly available community development plan?			
6 Objectives/ planned activities embrace a broad range of issues (social, economic, environmental and cultural)?			
7 Committed to becoming financially sustainable through income generation, with any surplus generated being used solely for community/public benefit?			
8 Wider community kept informed of, and involved in, activities?			
9 Proactively working in partnership with the voluntary, community, private and public sectors?			

# FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

## DTA Scotland Programmes

DTA Scotland delivers two national programmes promoting and supporting community ownership/asset transfer and the use of democratic finance. These programmes support community-led organisations, including Development Trusts. You do not need to be a member of DTA Scotland to access support from them:

### Community Ownership Support Service (COSS)

Our COSS team provides a focal point and central resource for asset transfer and community ownership activity in Scotland, providing information, expert advice, guidance and advisor support, including for communities interested in taking on former places of worship.

[COSS Website](#)



### Democratic Finance Scotland

Our Democratic Finance Scotland team provides support to explore and use alternative methods of raising finance and funding, including using community shares; offering expert advice and guidance for raising money locally to take ownership of important community assets and run democratic-led businesses.

[Democratic Finance Website](#)



## Other useful links:

[DTA Scotland Website](#)

[DTA Scotland Interactive Members Map](#)

[DTA Scotland Events](#)

[‘Involving Your Community’ Publication](#)

[Third Sector Interface \(TSI\) Scotland Network](#)

[Governance Wiki](#)

[Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations \(SCVO\)](#)

[Community Planning Tools](#)

[Scottish Town Centre Toolkit](#)

[Understanding Scottish Places](#)

[Planning Aid Scotland](#)

[Our Place Portal](#)

[Scottish Community Alliance](#) (see the ‘Community Learning Exchange’ tab for information on funded learning visits to community organisations)

[Social Enterprise Support Map](#)

[Highlands and Islands Enterprise \(HIE\)](#)

[South of Scotland Enterprise \(SOSE\)](#)





# Development Trusts Association Scotland

**A Thriving Community-led Network**

## DTA SCOTLAND (MAIN OFFICE)

1B WASHINGTON LANE  
EDINBURGH  
EH11 2HA

0131 220 2456



[INFO@DTASCOT.ORG.UK](mailto:INFO@DTASCOT.ORG.UK)

DTA Scotland is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) No. SC034231



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