

DEVELOPMENT TRUSTS ASSOCIATION SCOTLAND

Survey Findings Report **Community Right to Buy Consultation**

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Introduction

This survey was carried out to inform DTAS's response to the Scottish Government's Community Right to Buy consultation. It captures the lived experiences of community groups across Scotland, focusing on the barriers they face when attempting to use the legislation, and identifying where changes are needed to make the process more accessible, proportionate, and effective.

The survey responses highlight several recurring themes:

- The process is seen as overly complex and bureaucratic, with high upfront costs and requirements such as petitions, ballots, and business planning creating major barriers.
- Timescales are widely regarded as unrealistic for volunteer-led groups, with communities facing short deadlines while decision-making from owners or government can take months.
- Many groups struggle with capacity, relying on a small number of volunteers and lacking the resources to sustain long processes.
- Communities called for simplification and better alignment with Community Asset Transfer and other mechanisms, alongside clearer early-stage guidance.
- Practical support such as funded staff time, dedicated advice, and more responsive local authorities and the Community Land Team were identified as critical needs.
- Definitions of “community” should be more flexible, recognising both place-based and interest-based communities rather than relying solely on rigid boundaries.
- Public benefit should be demonstrated through robust community engagement, inclusivity, and the long-term sustainability of local services and spaces.

Overview

A total of 42 groups responded to the survey. Just over half (51%) considered Community Right to Buy (CRtB) a feasible mechanism for communities to take assets into ownership, while 34% were unsure and 15% did not view it as feasible. In terms of engagement, 21% of respondents had registered an interest or actively progressed a CRtB, 48% had considered it but not pursued it, and 31% had never considered it or ruled it out at an early stage.

Among those pursuing or considering CRtB, Part 5 of the legislation (Sustainable Development) was the most commonly pursued (38%), followed by Part 2 (25%) and Part 3A for abandoned, neglected, or detrimental land (25%).

Responses by Rurality:

Most responses came from **rural areas (44%)**, followed by **small towns (34%)**, **urban/large towns (17%)**, and **islands (5%)**. We asked participants to self-select which of these categories their communities fit into.

From the high response rate from rural areas and small towns we can deduce that most groups engaging with or considering CRtB are based outside major urban centres.

Engagement with CRtB by Rurality:

- **Never considered/rule out CRtB: This was** most common in **rural areas (19%)**, with smaller proportions in **small towns (5%)**, **urban/large town areas (2%)**, and **islands (5%)**.
- **Considered but not progressed: Highest** in **rural areas (21%)**, followed by **small towns (17%)**, and **urban areas (10%)**. No island respondents reported considering but not progressing a CRtB.
- **Registered interest/progressed with CRtB: Predominantly** in **small towns (12%)** and **urban/large town areas (5%)**, with very little engagement from rural areas (2%) and none from islands.

Given the small total number of responses, we are largely unable to draw any generalisable deductions based on a segmentation by rurality, the only noticeable factor being that this seems an issue most on the radar of rural or small-town communities.

CRtBs – progressed or not progressed:

Responses from those that have either considered but ultimately not pursued CRtB and those that are currently or have previously completed a CRtB indicate a desire to fix core challenges in communities such as:

- **Neglect and Decline of Community Assets:** including, heritage and historic buildings that are often abandoned for decades in community centres.
- **Loss of services and lack of community hubs:** responding to closure or sale of key community assets such as shops, churches, and community hubs.
- **Strengthening Community Ownership and Control:** Bringing essential assets into community hands to reduce reliance on councils or external bodies whose priorities may not align with community needs.

CRtB not considered or ruled out at an early stage:

The most common reason for communities not considering a CRtB was the community had not identified a suitable or desirable asset. Reasons for not pursuing CRtB when an asset had been identified include:

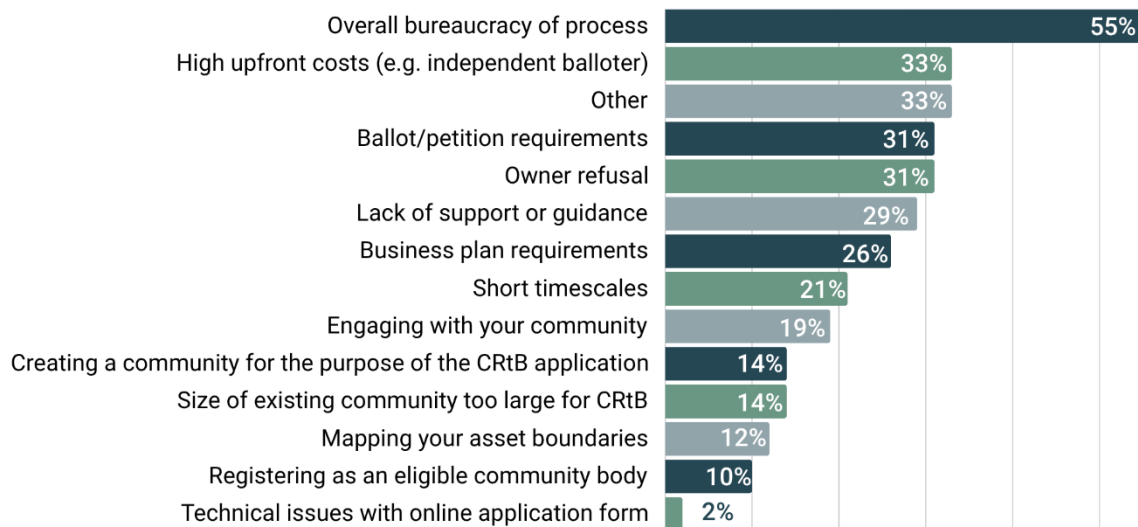
- **Alternative routes:** simpler routes for acquiring the asset such as Community Asset Transfer or Negotiated Sales are often preferred when they are possible.
- **Lack of financial resources, time and capacity:** some responses cited the lack of money for the acquisition of the asset as a key barrier, and the lack of time and capacity to apply for funding. Lack of capacity was also referenced when groups considered going through the CRtB process, with a lack of staff or volunteers that could be dedicated to the process.
- **Lack knowledge and bureaucracy of the process:** This is a common barrier that comes up throughout the survey responses, a lack of awareness of the existence of this right and when learning of its existence being uncertain of how the process works.

One group mentioned a case where the community did not understand the CRtB process and what it entailed, which caused hostility towards the idea with some community members likening it to a land seizure, or ‘stealing land’.

Barriers:

We asked participants to select the most common barriers they faced when undergoing the CRtB process or thinking of submitting a CRtB application. This applied to all parts (part 2, 3A, and 5). Below is a chart of common barriers:

What are the main barriers with progressing a CRtB?



Overall bureaucracy of the process, the high upfront costs, ballot and petition requirements, and engagement with owners came up as the most common barriers.

Other barriers not listed but mentioned echo similar themes around lack of community capacity and burden on volunteers to drive the process. One participant noted that the overall time it takes to complete the process often results in deteriorating condition for the asset, this is especially true when a community is taking on a historic or neglected asset.

Suggestions for how to make the process more feasible:

Common themes when asked what modifications would make the CRtB process as a whole more feasible include:

Simplification of Process: This was by far the most common theme highlighted, with participants noting that the Community Right to Buy process is often overly complex, bureaucratic, and difficult to navigate, especially for volunteer-led groups. Tasks such as forming new legal structures, the petition and ballot requirements, and producing detailed business plans at an early stage were described as onerous. Several suggested harmonising CRtB with other existing processes such as Community Asset Transfer (CAT), which are seen as more straightforward. Calls were made to increase timescales for community groups, provide quicker response times from the CLT and owners, streamline decision-making, and make the online systems more user-friendly. Overall, the process should be proportionate and realistic, rather than overwhelming communities before they even know if an application will succeed.

Support and Capacity Building: Community groups undergoing this process often rely on a small number of motivated volunteers, and burnout or turnover can make long-term projects difficult to sustain. Respondents called for more support and information to de-complexify the process. *Suggestions include:* a dedicated contact who understands CRtB and can guide groups through the process, practical guidance and training at the start-up stage, peer-learning sessions, and funded staff time to ease the burden on volunteers.

Funding: Communities face upfront costs such as independent ballotters, mapping, and initial business plan development, which can deter groups from pursuing CRtB. Suggestions included working capital funding and financial support not just at acquisition, but also to help build sustainability. Respondents emphasised that communities should not be excluded simply because of financial barriers at the start.

Increase Knowledge and Awareness of Process: Communities often begin with little or no knowledge and find the system tricky and confusing to navigate. Calls were made for clearer information at the start-up stage, including guidance on what to include in founding documents and what obligations groups will face. There was also recognition that more visibility of the process could help encourage communities to consider it as a viable option.

Better Support from Local Authorities and Community Land Team: There were mixed experiences with local authorities, with some councils described as unsupportive or even obstructive. Respondents felt that for the legislation to work, local authorities need to play a more enabling role. Suggestions included more enthusiasm and

appreciation from local authorities, and faster response times from the Community Land Team. A recurring frustration was delays or lack of responsiveness, which placed a heavy burden on communities working with limited resources.

Longer Term Support, Post-Acquisition and Post-Project: Managing assets effectively over the long term requires ongoing guidance, resources, and capacity, particularly as most projects are volunteer led. Without longer-term support, there is a risk that community assets could become liabilities.

While organisations such as DTAS' Community Ownership Support Service, and Community land Scotland, among others, provide much of the support mentioned in this section, there is limited capacity within these organisations.

Definitions of community:

The question of how “community” should be defined for the purposes of CRtB drew a wide range of responses. Many groups felt that a geographical definition - based on residents within a community council, or other local boundary - remains the most straightforward and workable approach. Others highlighted that these boundaries often fail to reflect lived reality of communities, for example where assets sit across multiple community council areas or where natural communities are shaped by proximity and use (such as walking distance to a woodland or use of sports facilities) rather than arbitrary lines on a map.

When asked if the CRtB process should be available for communities of interest, such as faith or cultural groups, 38% were supportive, 45% were unsure, and only 17% were not supportive. These responses reflect a recognition that people can be connected by shared culture, identity, or purpose as well as geography. This was particularly emphasised in relation to urban areas, where defining a “community” on purely geographical terms can create artificial boundaries and exclude those most engaged with an asset.

How to better define the public interest:

Finally, we asked participants what they would define as being in the public benefit. A core theme that emerged was that public benefit should be demonstrated through good community engagement. Respondents identified good community engagement as evidence-based, through surveys, consultations, data, and robust plans, and engaging with all sectors of the community particularly those from disadvantaged or underrepresented groups.

Another core theme that emerged was the ensuring the long-term sustainability of local services and community spaces. This was repeatedly mentioned in relation to

community hubs, halls, shops, pubs, sports facilities, libraries, green space, and paths. Particularly when these services are under threat of closure. Responses emphasised that these spaces not only provide vital services to communities but provide employment, opportunities for health, social interaction, and improving the local environment.

Empowerment through community ownership of these spaces was mentioned several times as being part of the public benefit. Making sure assets and land are open and available for broad public use.

Responses also stressed that projects in the public benefit should deliver sustainable benefits for both current and future generations, and be linked to reducing inequalities and building safe, inclusive environments.

Conclusion:

Overall, the survey responses demonstrate both the potential and the limitations of the Community Right to Buy as it currently stands. Communities value the principle of the legislation and recognise the opportunities it offers to safeguard local assets, yet the process is often seen as overly complex, resource-intensive, and difficult to navigate. To be effective, the legislation must balance timescales more fairly, provide clearer guidance and sustained support, and adopt definitions of community and public benefit that reflect the realities of how communities live and work. Addressing these issues will be essential if the CRtB is to become a practical and widely used tool for community empowerment across Scotland.

Any questions, please contact Julia Carreiro Rolim, Research and Insights Coordinator, at Julia@dtascot.org

Read DTAS' full consultation response on the [DTAS website](#).