

Deadline extension agreed for community's at-risk nature and climate bid

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With one of the UK's largest community-led nature and climate projects hanging in the balance, agreement has been reached between a community in Dumfries and Galloway and one of Scotland's biggest landowners to allow more time to raise funds from major donors.

Led by local charity The Langholm Initiative, the town of Langholm is battling to raise £2.2m for a community buyout of 5,300 acres of Langholm Moor from Buccleuch Estates, and so double the size of the new community-owned Tarras Valley Nature Reserve.

Despite hopes for a £1m donation from a major funder – and a surging public crowdfunder attracting donations from thousands of people from across the world – there were fears the project could face a £450,000 shortfall at the original 31 May deadline.

Buccleuch has now offered an additional two months for The Langholm Initiative to pursue donations from large funding bodies, meaning the total funds now need to be raised by 31 July.

"This timely support from Buccleuch gives us breathing space to ensure our landmark project for people and planet doesn't fall at the final hurdle. It highlights the value of the positive working relationship we've developed over the past few years," said Jenny Barlow, Tarras Valley Nature Reserve's Estate Manager.

"Despite the wonderful outpouring of support from people worldwide, there was a real risk we might have been some £450,000 short on deadline day – putting at risk our ambitious plans for tackling the nature and climate emergencies while boosting community regeneration. We now need all the support possible to get this historic buyout over the line and safeguard this land for future generations."

The Tarras Valley Nature Reserve was established last year, following the successful first stage of what is South Scotland's biggest community land buyout. This saw the community defy the odds to raise £3.8 million to buy 5,200 acres and six residential properties from Buccleuch in March 2021.

Benny Higgins, Executive Chairman at Buccleuch, said: "We're pleased to be able to extend the timescale for the Langholm Initiative to raise the funds necessary to make this second-phase community buyout a reality.

"We have worked closely with The Langholm Initiative in recent years and have been impressed by their tenacity, vision, and cooperation to bring their plans to fruition. We hope this additional time will help them in their quest to double the size of Tarras Valley Nature Reserve and build on the success achieved so far."

On the reserve, globally important peatlands and ancient woods are being restored, native woodlands established, and a haven ensured for wildlife including hen harrier, short-eared owl and merlin.

Community regeneration and creating new jobs through a nature-based approach is a central aim of the project. Langholm was once a thriving textile centre, but the industry has declined in recent years.

Leading charities backing 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 Moor buyout's public crowdfunder has almost reached its initial target of raising at least £150,000 towards the £2.2m needed. It can be supported at bit.ly/LangholmMoorAppeal.

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