

KINGHORN

LAND FUND GRANT AND RIGHT TO BUY CLAIM ALLOWED ECO-CENTRE TO KEEP CREATING JOBS AND IMPROVING LIVES

OPPORTUNITY FOR COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

The Ecology Centre is a community-based charity which has been running community projects on land adjacent to Kinghorn Loch in Fife since 1998. Its projects enable young people to experience and learn about the natural world, while at the same time providing fulfilling volunteering opportunities, offering unemployed adults work experience and training opportunities.

However, the lease on the grounds and buildings that previously housed The Ecology Centre expired in November 2014, threatening to leave the charity homeless. Fortunately, land on the east bank of Kinghorn Loch came onto the market at around the same time, providing a solution.



HOW THE COMMUNITY ACQUIRED THE ASSET

The land which would allow The Ecology Centre to continue working with the community was owned by a housing developer who had gone bankrupt. Armed with a Scottish Land Fund grant of £54,901, the charity used the Scottish Government's community Right to Buy scheme to secure community ownership of the five acres of land, a process which took more than a year to complete.

HOW HIE HELPED

Highlands and Islands Enterprise's Scottish Land Fund advisors assisted closely in the process of bringing a claim under the Right to Buy scheme, the application for SLF funding, and the negotiations around the sale.

SLF advisor Munro Gauld said: "For The Ecology Centre, this was a make or break deal and we were pleased that the charity could continue the good work they do for the area. This is an excellent illustration of how the Scottish Land Fund can help groups take ownership of unused or derelict land and transform it for the wider benefit of their community."

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

Since agreeing the purchase, The Ecology Centre has been working on its new centre and the surrounding land, a well-managed area of biodiversity and a haven for wildlife that welcomes more than 20,000 visitors annually.

Its Tool Shed workshops continue to run in their iconic refurbished shipping containers on the new site and more projects are in the pipeline. All of the staff working at The Ecology Centre are looking forward to continuing their work in their new building on the banks of Kinghorn Loch.

Julie Samuel, general manager at The Ecology Centre said: "The grounds are currently being developed by staff and volunteers and will be used in the future for our growing projects. We're already using the site for some of our existing projects including environmental education visits and outdoor volunteer days.

"As the Ecology Centre has grown, so has the need for additional volunteers and staff to help with the delivery of the organisation's services. On our new site, we are rebuilding our volunteer team after our transition period. This team regularly attend the centre and help with the many and varied tasks around the Site. We employ 11 members of staff as well as providing employment training opportunities through Project Scotland and Community Jobs Scotland. Demand for educational visits has grown over the years and we now work with hundreds of school children each year, helping them to understand the importance of and how to care for our environment."

