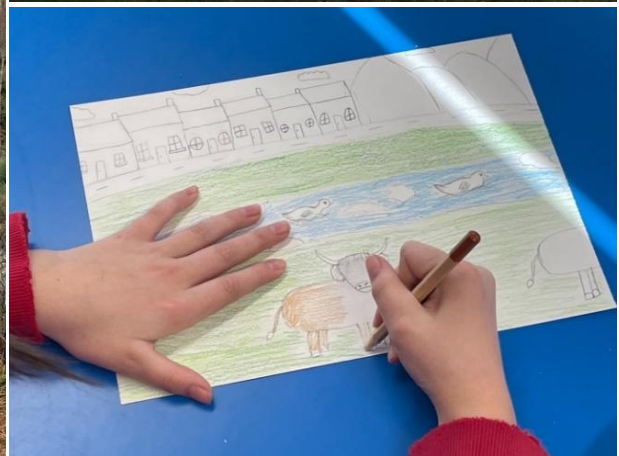


# Social Values Assessment Report: Balmacara Estate

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Cover images

Left: Duirinish (photo credit: S. Jones); Top right: View looking out from Balmacara Estate towards Skye (photo credit: E. Robson); Bottom right: A 'postcard to the future' being created in the social values workshop with Plockton School (the picture is of Duirinish) (photo credit S. Jones).

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## Key Findings

The purpose of this social values assessment is *to understand the meanings, memories, stories, experiences, and feelings associated with Balmacara Estate by people today*, and the ways in which these contribute to people's sense of identity, belonging, and place. Key findings are:

- Place-based identities and attachments are particularly complex due to the scale and extent of the property. For people who live on the Estate, **specific settlements** tend to be the primary focus of social values relating to home, roots, family connections and social memory, but there are complex, **cross cutting networks** of attachment to place within and beyond the Estate.
- As elsewhere in the Highlands and Islands, family connections are an important aspect of establishing 'belonging' to both people and place, but being '**local**' is a **flexible category** that is subject to negotiation.
- **Intangible connections between people and buildings**, and the stories associated with them, are important in the production of social values linked to family and community. The Estate also encompasses a '**peopled landscape**' reproduced through oral histories and narratives, e.g. relating to Clan Matheson.
- Social values linked to **crofting** are a prominent aspect of Balmacara Estate. These are informed by a strong sense of custodianship of the land, which is usually embedded in trans-generational relationships. Relatedly, rights-based values linked to ownership and belonging are an integral part of the living heritage associated with crofting.
- Practices relating to crofting and the boundaries of common grazings are part of the **customary knowledge** of a township; however, **demographic changes** have led to increasingly diverse, and at times conflicting, values associated with these.
- The **environments and landscapes** making up Balmacara Estate are valued for their **variation, visual interest and biodiversity**. **Crofting** is attributed an important role in this, particularly in shaping varied field systems, land use and vegetation cover. **Woodlands and coastlines** are also a source of rich social and aesthetic values.
- Values arising from these varied landscapes are linked to **paths**, which make them accessible and create a sense of **connectivity within and beyond the Estate**. The ways in which the Estate is situated and the **views** it offers within and beyond its boundaries are highly valued, with an emphasis on the juxtaposition of sea and mountains.
- The area encompassed by the property is seen as a **unique and special** place by many, 'magical' even, and is associated with peace, tranquillity, calmness, freedom and safety. Many of these, and related qualities, are reflected in the keywords participants associated with the estate (see Figure 1 below).
- At the same time, **concerns about sustainability, continuity and change** mean that social values linked to the area can be fraught and contested. Three interlinked concerns stand out: affordable housing, sustainability of crofting, and the future of communities.
- People's **varied responses to change** and diversification are informed by tradition, identity and authority. What should be retained, what can or should change, and who decides are questions embedded in social values linked to identity, belonging and inter-generational relationships.
- In terms of both social and environmental sustainability, value-related tensions are often rooted in **diverse forms of care** and how these are understood and recognised.

Many of the values identified in these key findings and discussed in more detail in later sections of this report (see Findings: Social Values) are reflected in the word cloud below (Figure 1), which is based on the key words participants used to describe the Estate. Crofting, community, woodland and coast are some of the most prominent themes, and these are linked to beautiful and scenic. Peace, nature, home, walks, accessible and varied also resonate strongly with the key findings.



Figure 1: Responses from online questionnaires and in-person structured interviews when participants were asked for 3-5 words that described Balmacara Estate (word cloud of stemmed words, produced in NVivo 14).

## Context

### ***The property:***

Balmacara Estate was initially gifted to the Trust in 1946, with additional land acquired subsequently and some other portions sold. Today it comprises of c.2,500 hectares of varied landscape on the Lochalsh peninsula with an extensive coastline and offshore islands. There are eight crofting townships located within the boundaries of the Estate (Badicaul, Balmacara, Drumbuie, Duirinish, Erbusaig, Kirkton, Plockton, and Port an Eòrna) and a total of 84 tenanted crofts. Crofting is a prominent feature of the landscape in terms of field systems, meadows, common grazings, and livestock. It also contributes significantly to the biodiversity, as well as both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, of the area. The Estate includes archaeological and historic features, with multiple scheduled monuments and listed buildings, has areas of woodland (the woods at Coille Mhór are a SSSI), and designed gardens at Lochalsh House (see Annex I: Property Description). The whole Estate is encompassed within the Wester Ross Biosphere Reserve, designated as a core zone and buffer zone. There are a number of service- and tourist-oriented small businesses within the Estate, mainly concentrated in Plockton and Balmacara Square, with the Croft Café in Duirinish.

### ***The wider area:***

Balmacara Estate stretches from just outside Kyle of Lochalsh across to Kirkton and up to Plockton (see Annex II: Maps). It is intersected by public roads, including the A87 along the Southern boundary that connects to

the Skye road bridge, and the Kyle to Inverness railway line that runs up the West side of the peninsular. The total population of the settlements within or immediately neighbouring the Estate, including Kyle of Lochalsh, is estimated at around 1,500 people. According to the Scottish Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation, most of these settlements are ranked in the 7th decile, scoring higher than the national average on most indicators. The exception is Kyle of Lochalsh, which is in the 4th decile overall. Tourism is a major economic driver for the area; however, this also brings some challenges relating to housing and sustainability. Plockton is a hotspot for tourism within the Estate and has also seen a rapid rise in house prices linked to holiday lets and second homes.

### **Management arrangements:**

The Estate is freely accessible. The Trust has a small staff team at the property, at the time of the assessment this consisted of a Property Manager, supported by a Ranger, a Visitor Services Assistant (part-time) and an Apprentice Ranger (full-time). The Trust runs a programme of events throughout the year and works with volunteers to manage the network of footpaths and the wider environment. All the staff live locally (two having also grown up in the vicinity), providing connections to the resident community. There are unstaffed visitor centres in Balmacara Square and Plockton and a kiosk at the car park for the Lochalsh woods (all closed at the time of the assessment) and a gallery in the Steadings at Balmacara Square that hosts visiting artists and events (open). The Trust has two cottages on the Estate that are managed as holiday lets. Some of the people living on the Estate are tenants of the Trust, but other properties are owned privately. Large areas fall under crofting tenure.

### **Trust projects:**

At the time of the assessment, on-going initiatives/discussions included:

- Promotion and support for crofting, which included: a croft management scheme (with payments to support adoption of desired practices); a popular education programme for high school students run in collaboration between the Trust and Plockton School (referred to as 'crofting school'); and an initiative to map and register the boundaries of the common grazings.
- Interpretation review and visitor management planning: supported by the Trust's regional curator and external consultants respectively.
- A Gaelic Placenames project: supported by the Trust and delivered by the Gaelic Development Officer of the Wester Ross Biosphere Reserve.

The property features in the Trust's wider property audits focusing on colonial legacies, *Facing Our Past* (Melville 2022: 8-9), and witchcraft, *Histories of Witch Trials* (Jones 2021: 15). Some of these forms of 'difficult heritage' also feature in the social values associated with the Balmacara Estate, albeit in fragmentary and piecemeal ways.

Community-led initiatives at the time of the research included:

- community buy out plans (Balmacara Square woods/old campsite and Plockton's Old Post Office – both successful).
- a community-led project to restore the community-owned Old Mill Hall in Balmacara Square, with a linked artist in residence project.

Two community development trusts, Balmacara Community Trust (<https://www.balmacara.scot/>) and Plockton & District Community Trust (<https://plockton.com/>), have been particularly active within the Estate, leading these and other projects.

## Assessment Process

### 1. Approach

Given the scale of the property, this was a relatively intensive study involving two researchers with research activities taking place over a period of six months and including three visits: a seven-day trip in September 2024, a ten-day trip in October 2024, and a ten-day trip in February 2025. The combined researcher time spent on data gathering activities was **approximately 8 weeks/2 months**.

Prior to commencing assessment activities, a desk-based scoping was undertaken to gain an initial orientation to the context and to identify key contacts or community groups. In this case, many of the arrangements were made during the research visits, once local contacts had been established. The main exception to this was liaison with the local Head Teacher in preparation for the school workshop, which took place ahead of the February trip to allow time for co-ordination with the teachers and to request consent from the pupils' parents/guardians.

### 2. Recruitment and selection of participants

Ahead of the first research visit, information about the project and an invitation to participate was shared with the crofting Grazings Committees (via the Trust) and local community trusts (directly by the researchers). Additional participants were identified through subsequent referrals (snowball sampling) and direct contacts made during the research visits, with information about the research and opportunities to participate shared through posters and on social media (via the property Facebook page). The Head Teacher advised which year groups would be included in the school workshop.

Priority was given to involving people living on or regularly visiting the Estate, although the online questionnaire did gather some responses from further afield. Care was taken to ensure a diversity of participants, to capture the experiences, attachments and values of people from across the area, of various ages, and who engage with the Estate in different ways.

In total, **104 people directly contributed to the research** (see Annex III: Participants), some participating in more than one activity.<sup>1</sup> All participants have been anonymised in this report.

### 3. Research methods

This study made extensive use of the core research method of **semi-structured interviews** to achieve a depth of understanding of the complex social and environmental context. These were mostly conducted in-person and one-to-one. Where possible, the interviews included walking with participants through the landscapes being discussed. Interviews were complemented by observation and participatory methods:

- Semi-structured interviews (34, including 5 walking interviews)
- Structured interviews (4 in person)
- Questionnaires (34 online)
- Focus group/photo elicitation (1 group of 5 people)
- Participant observation (at a Trust Open Day and a Plockton High School crofting class, which is delivered and funded by the Trust)

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<sup>1</sup> Online questionnaires were anonymous at the point of completion and, while there may be a small overlap with participants in other activities, respondents have been counted separately.

- Participatory mapping (at the Trust Open Day, resulting in 5 responses from 3 people)
- Two-day school workshop with indoor and outdoor components (25 children)
- Observation (in wider area and combined with in-person structured interviews)

Wherever possible, the research was co-ordinated with pre-planned Trust or community-led activities. The **focus group/photo elicitation** was conducted with an existing group that met regularly. Members were asked to bring a selection of photographs that captured aspects of Balmacara Estate, or special places within it. These were then shared, prompting discussion on the images and the feelings, experiences and meanings that they reflected.

Existing initiatives and events were also opportunities for **participant observation**, with the researchers joining the Trust's crofting class for a day of hands-on harvesting in September 2024 (no data was gathered from participating students) and participating in an Open Day organised by the Trust at the Steadings Gallery in February 2025. The Open Day featured the Trust's vision and management plans, the Gaelic Placenames project, and this research. During the Open Day, attendees were invited to contribute to a **participatory mapping** by writing places or aspects of the Estate that were important to them on sticky notes and placing these onto an outline map of the area.

The **two-day school workshop** was devised with the dual purpose of meeting research objectives and educational objectives linked to the Curriculum for Excellence (see Annex IV: School Workshop).<sup>2</sup> Day one focused on a guided walk with small group activities, designed and led by the Balmacara Estate Rangers, encouraging the children to explore part of the Estate in the vicinity of their school. The following day, pupils spent the morning each creating a 'postcard to the future'. On the picture side they were asked to draw something of importance to them about Balmacara Estate and on the other side to write a message to people in the future explaining the importance of what they had drawn and how they would like it to be looked after. The images and messages were enthusiastically shared and discussed by the pupils, generating insights into their social values. Copies of the postcards were kept for analysis and the discussion was recorded.

Both in-person **structured interviews** and online **questionnaires** were used in this study (see Annex V: Structured Interview & Online Questionnaire). It was not initially proposed to include an online questionnaire but, following a request from someone unable to contribute in another way, an online option was created. The questions were adjusted slightly, given the online format, but predominantly used qualitative questions with free text responses. The in-person interviews were completed on footpaths within the Estate. Everyone encountered was asked to participate and all agreed; however, footfall was low at the times chosen and only four interviews were completed. The online questionnaire was active for five months and actively promoted in November 2024 and February 2025 through posters within the Estate and posts to relevant Facebook groups. This was more successful in reaching people and attracted 34 responses.

**Observation** took place during and between other activities (such as interviews). It included spending time in the various settlements, walking through the Coille Mhór woods and other popular footpaths (e.g. along the coast by Duirinish, the Lochalsh Woods, and the Plockton-Duncraig path), and viewing the Estate from the water while paddleboarding at Plockton. Visiting the places that people mentioned not only helped to contextualise the research material but also brought an embodied understanding of how the varied landscapes are experienced, which was captured in fieldnotes.

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<sup>2</sup> Initially we planned to collaborate with the Gaelic Placenames project to deliver this activity but, for logistical reasons, this was not possible.

The semi-structured interviews and focus group activities resulted in over 42 hours of recorded material, which was professionally transcribed. Thereafter, the researchers undertook a **thematic analysis** of the material resulting from all the activities, including fieldnotes, transcripts, questionnaires, and creative outputs. The analysis was supported by coding of the material using NVivo (a qualitative data analysis computer software package), followed by preliminary interpretation and synthesis, prior to discussions with Trust staff. The time required for the analysis, interpretation and drafting of the report amounts to **approximately 6 weeks in total**.

#### 4. Ethical considerations

Participation in this assessment is voluntary and based on the principle of informed consent. People were advised before participating about the purpose of the research, what participation would involve (time and activities) and how any data they shared would be used, stored and disposed of. Participants involved in interviews, workshops and focus groups were given written information to keep and asked to sign a consent form (age-appropriate information was provided for children and consent confirmed by their guardians). This information was also available on the first page of the online questionnaire. People directly engaged during participant observation were given information verbally. Participants could withdraw at any stage from the process and consent was regularly reconfirmed with people involved in more than one activity.

Another key principle is that of protecting participants and causing no harm, both during the activities or in the sharing and handling of resulting material. This assessment does not directly address sensitive topics, but any subject matter introduced by participants that appeared to be emotionally charged or distressing was treated with sensitivity during activities. Participants were given unique codes, which are used in this report. Nevertheless, participants may still be identified by people who know them well, based on the things they say and the stories they tell. The limits of anonymisation were therefore discussed with participants. Careful consideration was also given to issues of identifiability when using direct quotes and to how potentially conflicting values and views are presented.

Personal and research data has been kept secure and not shared beyond the research team. The methods and approaches adopted in this assessment were reviewed and approved by the University of Stirling General University Ethics Panel prior to commencing activities.

### Findings: Communities

As described in the Context section, a significant number of people live within the Estate boundaries or immediately neighbouring it, and these villages are also hubs for visitors. As might be anticipated when working across such a large area, the research identified a number of overlapping communities or groups for whom the property has social values. These may be based on identity, location and/or interest, and include people resident on the Estate, as well as more dispersed individuals who maintain an attachment from a distance, and people who use the area regularly for leisure activities. They are not all communities in the formal sense but include looser groups of people with shared interests, who may or may not be associated through joint activities or organisations. The groups identified by the assessment include:

- Communities associated with the eight individual townships on the Estate.
- Crofters across the Estate actively working with livestock or growing crops.

- Members of crofting families (with a hereditary croft – owned or tenanted), but who are not actively involved in crofting.
- People who have moved into the area and are resident on the Estate (some with prior family connections).
- People who grew up on the Estate but currently reside elsewhere.
- People who have never lived on the Estate, but who have family or inter-generational ties to the area, e.g. members of Clan Societies or diaspora Scots.
- Children living on and/or coming to school on the Estate (and school alumni).
- People working with boats and/or earning a living from the sea/fishing around the Estate.
- People who use the Estate for leisure interests, including walking, running, kayaking, cycling and mountain biking, photography, swimming, fishing, foraging, bird/nature watching.

Individuals may identify with more than one of these groups simultaneously. Distinctions are drawn variously between crofters and non-crofters, as well as between locals and incomers, but these distinctions and the relationships they inform are contextual and fluid. Similarly, historic and contemporary population movements mean that feelings of belonging and being part of a community are not purely a matter of residency. For example, people articulated a variety of crofting identities and perspectives on crofting as a practice. Being part of the crofting community and identifying with crofting heritage is not limited to those who have or currently work a croft (with livestock and/or crops).

Nevertheless, for many people, their primary axis of place-based identification/affiliation is with one or more of the eight settlements located within Balmacara Estate. Whether or not they conceive of these as crofting townships, or more generically as rural or seaside villages, depends on their knowledge of the history of the area and their awareness of/participation in crofting. There are also alliances and connections crosscutting these distinct settlements. The topography, infrastructure and local governance of the area create boundaries within, and broader constellations beyond, the Estate. For instance, the main transport routes and settlements are situated along the coastlines, and community councils and development trusts often bring two or more townships together. Encompassing all of this are larger-scale geographic identities, such as Lochalsh, which come to the fore when distinguishing the area from the wider mainland or when discussing connections with Skye.

Within many communities there are individuals who are recognised for their knowledge of place or practice. The stories or perspectives of these knowledge holders/elders are often foundational to how other community members understand the history and significance of a place and how they articulate their own views, validating their experiences and feelings through the authority of these figures. More recent arrivals may also seek to connect with a place through understanding its history and heritage.

The above is not an exhaustive list and alternative community identities may be significant in other discussions. The limitations of the assessment mean there are communities and groups who were identified but for various reasons could not be directly engaged in the assessment and whose views are therefore not necessarily represented in the current report (see Gaps/Future Assessments).

## Findings: Social Values

What follows is a summary of the values identified and the activities and experiences that generate and sustain them (see Annex VI: Statement of Social Values for a more detailed discussion). Due to the scale and

complexity of the property and assessment, it is necessary to retain a level of detail in this summary in order to convey the nuances of the findings. We have therefore used thematic sub-headings to help the reader navigate the key themes. Select quotations are used to illustrate, but a wider, more in-depth range can be found in the Annex.

The assessment encompasses Balmacara Estate as a whole, but it should be noted that many people are unaware of its scale and precise boundaries. People can pass seamlessly on and off Trust land in multiple directions and wider landscapes (and seascapes) are an integral part of their experience of the property. Furthermore, many values are associated with specific locations or features within the property.

## 1. Place-based identities and attachments within the Estate

**The Trust tends to be associated with specific parts of the Estate**, such as Balmacara Square, Lochalsh House and Gardens, and the Lochalsh Woodland Walk, e.g. *“I think I often associated the Balmacara Estate with Balmacara Square and the walks around there [...] I didn't realise the wider extent of the estate”* (INT\_027). People are often unaware of its full extent and, as a named entity, the Estate is not at the forefront of people's consciousness. Instead, **people's sense of place and identity** is informed by other **overlapping geographic categories**, as illustrated by this interviewee: *“I don't think of it as an estate, it's just, I live in Plockton, not in, I don't live in Balmacara Estate [...] [T]he whole thing is part of my heritage, but I would call it Lochalsh, rather than Balmacara Estate”* (INT\_009).

The eight settlements associated with the property are often the primary focus of place-based attachments and identity. For people who live on the Estate, they are the focus of social **values relating to home, roots, family connections and forms of social memory**, e.g.: *“Plockton will always be home [...] I can't say what it is exactly that makes it home, but I think it is just because you have got your memories, you have got your community [...] and you have got people here that you grew up with”* (INT\_016).

The **distinctive character of the settlements**, physically, socially and economically, also informs people's sense of place. Duirinish, Drumbuie and Erbusaig are strongly associated in many people's minds with crofting, both historically and in the present. Balmacara Square, Kirkton and Plockton are also recognised as crofting townships, at least by long-standing residents, but other characteristics are also prominent. For instance, Balmacara Square is valued for its woodlands, its mill/pond, and its Home Farm buildings, whereas Plockton is often valued for its links to the sea and associated traditions (around fishing and sailing).

For those with strong connections to crofting, the boundaries between settlements extend into the wider landscape in the form of the **common grazings associated with specific townships**. Knowledge of the extent and boundaries of these 'commons' is held by a relatively small number of people involved in crofting, often those with multi-generational ties. Nevertheless, these boundaries are important, both in terms of access to resources and symbolically.

## 2. Belonging and relationality

As elsewhere in the Highlands and Islands, belonging is simultaneously about **belonging to people and belonging to place** (see Jones 2006; Macdonald 1997): *“I belong to Plockton, and I belong to Lochalsh, and, you know, even if I lived [somewhere else ...] I would never have said I belong to [that place]”* (INT\_010). Kin relations mapped out through family genealogies play a key role, often creating **connections across multiple generations**: *“your association is not [just] with that one individual, your association is with the generations going back”* (INT\_031). The same interviewee explained: *[my] Grandfather had a saying in Gaelic, [...] the English translation was, who are your people? So, they wouldn't ask, where did you go to school, or what do you do, but who are your people”* (INT\_031).

Belonging is subject to negotiation and **being 'local' is a flexible category**, as explained by this interviewee: *“I'm just going through all the houses. And I can go local, related to a local, related to local, local, because*

*she's had her family here, not local but [owned a local business] for donkey's years. Then round the corner, you've got [...] damned near local [...] [because] they were here as children"* (INT\_025).

**Family ties, social networks and memories** also inform the **multiple attachments to place** that any one person may express, both on the Estate and beyond, revealing a complex web of connections and associated values. In turn, stories about these relationships will often link specific events, people and places to broader forms of cultural memory, such as Highland Clearances, emigration, or World War One and Two.

**Buildings associated with community activities** frequently embody social values, often also connected with key biographical events, such as birthday parties and wedding receptions (e.g. The Plockton Community Hall, The Balmacara Steadings). Kirkton, for instance, was remembered as a place for dances and other community activities, and likewise Balmacara Mill, which prior to the collapse of its roof had been a focus of social events drawing people from across the Estate. As part of the recent fundraising campaigns old photos of the Mill have been collected and stories shared, reinvigorating linked social values in the context of regeneration.

Inter-generational family relationships are also embodied in **houses** as reflected by this interviewee who explained that *"when grandparents, you know, pass a house onto the children and then grandchildren, there's that, sort of, sense of inter-generational connectiveness"* (INT\_012). These **intangible connections between people and buildings, and the stories associated with them, inform a sense of collective identity and heritage**; something which is perceived to be under threat by demographic changes, especially those associated with second homes and tourism.

The Estate also sits at the heart of a **peopled landscape** with family and community **oral histories** encompassing the in-bye fields and common grazings in addition to houses and croft buildings. **Stories of everyday life** in the past are mediated by the landscape in the present, where topographic features and toponyms, such as 'horses hill' trigger memories of past practices for those with multi-generational ties.

**Clan Matheson stories and sites** also form a rich tapestry of relationships to past people and events, revitalised and reconfigured by Torquil Matheson's booklet and map, based on stories the author described as *"gleaned from the memories of Lochalsh people"* (1981: 1). For some, these Clan stories continue to imbue the landscapes of Balmacara Estate with meanings and feelings of attachment and belonging. The Loch Achaidh na h-Inich area in particular has strong associations with Clan Matheson, while the story of the Lord of Caithness's daughter giving birth to Iain Ghallaich at the roadside between Erbusaig and Balmacara is fairly widespread, even if the specific associations have been lost.

**Diaspora Scots also maintain and negotiate claims to belonging and attachment.** For instance, diaspora members of Clan Matheson visited as part of the Gathering in July 2024, walking parts of the Estate and learning the Clan stories and places. Social media platforms, e.g. the Plockton Past and Present Facebook group, also offer an arena for the expression and negotiation of belonging and relationality, with people as far afield as Australia posting old photos of people and places as a way to reconnect and share stories.

### 3. *Values associated with crofting*

Social values linked to **crofting and crofting practices** are an extremely prominent aspect of Balmacara Estate. The degree to which residents and visitors to Balmacara Estate feel connected to crofting heritage varies and people have different views about how land should be used and crofting sustained. These differences reflect underlying claims to authority and belonging, which are especially apparent in conflicts around crofting practices.

Tangible features of townships, such as **buildings, field systems and common grazings**, are valued for the intangible stories and meanings they embody. Stories are recounted of helping out on the croft as children, of seasonal tasks like haymaking and taking the animals out on the common grazings for the summer. Above all, tangible features of crofting, such as the Duirinish and Drumbuie field systems, are valued because they

are seen as **manifestations of a living heritage** handed down across generations. This is also reflected in place names and people's knowledge of them, as reflected by this interviewee: *"And then there's two islands down Port Cam, Eilean a' Ghabhar Mhor again, goat, and there's Eilean a' Ghabhar Bheag, the island of the small goat [...] Goats were part of the crofting tradition"* (INT\_029).

There is a strong sense of **custodianship of the land** among those associated with crofting, to keep the land productive or *"in good heart"* (INT\_012). This is established through family ties but also an intimate knowledge of the worked land: *"You know, every crofter knew within a spade's depth where their croft started and stopped and what the ground was like"* (INT\_012). Whilst often linked to the past, this familiarity is also carried forward into the present: *"I've spent, what, over 40 years here [...] Maybe you don't go so much to the hill, but I mean, you know the hill, you know the area"* (INT\_028).

Relatedly, crofters also express a strong sense of **ownership and belonging to croft land**, whether they are tenants or owners, and whether they are actively crofting or not. This is often a result of trans-generational family connections as explained by this interviewee: *"[I] have quite a tie to the ground, you know. [...] And some of them will have done it [crofting] in their young days [...] they do have a strong affinity to, well, it's their home. And I don't mean just a house, I think, just the whole thing. [...] Because most people are, you know, it was handed down to you by your father or grandfather or something"* (INT\_028).

Linked to these feelings of custodianship, ownership, and belonging are strong **rights-based social values**. These are underpinned by the genealogical relationships to croft houses and land, which form part of a rich tapestry of oral history, supported by documents that have been kept in the family (e.g. tenancy documents). Furthermore, values concerning crofting rights are set against a backdrop of past injustices, such as Highland Clearances and the harsh tenancy agreements imposed by landlords, which form an integral part of the living heritage of crofting.

**Tensions relating to land use** need to be understood against this backdrop. Disputes over the boundaries of common grazings and access for livestock are evident in a number of townships and are negotiated in various ways. For crofters, the boundaries of common grazings are part of the customary knowledge of the township and access to these grazings is intimately tied to the rights-based values discussed above. In contrast, others acknowledge the historical basis of these practices but argue that having livestock in the village is not appropriate in *"modern times"* (INT\_014) and that it puts cars and gardens at risk, highlighting value-related tensions between the commons and private property (also evidenced by Russell 2022).

#### 4. *Values relating to landscape and environment*

**Crofting is valued for the ways it has shaped environments** and made landscapes what they are today, e.g. *"what I really value about crofting, [... is what] it contributes, in terms of landscape things. And that's a big reason why people come here, because the landscape would look different if it wasn't worked"* (INT\_012). Another interviewee went further and linked crofting to the **beauty of the landscape**: *"the same applies to the whole of the crofting counties. It's the people who've been in those places who have maintained them as they are. It's not an accident that there's all this beautiful nature in these places"* (INT\_010).

The ways in which crofting has **shaped vegetation cover** are a key to these landscape aesthetics. Conversations are often accompanied by commentaries on how things have changed as the number of active crofters has declined, especially in terms of livestock: *"now it's covered in gorse and it's covered in...and that's just lack of animals, you know, the...if you've got the cows then the gorse won't grow"* (INT\_004). For older people, who grew up accustomed to more open landscapes, there is a sense of loss attached to the recognition that views are more closed in than they used to be. For instance, one interviewee suggested that if vegetation growth continues unchecked, *"you're not going to have a landscape to look at. You're not going to have a view. It's just going to be, it's going to be trees"* (INT\_028).

Yet **trees and woodlands** are a rich source of social value in themselves and regarded as a distinctive feature of the area. Although people use the Forestry tracks for leisure activities, it is the 'natural' woodland that features more prominently in these discussions. Extolling the virtues of Balmacara Square, one interviewee explained: *"I mean, you cross the bridge and it's like you've gone into a different world. Because suddenly you're driving along this road and you're surrounded by trees"* (INT\_001). One participant described the woods as *"almost fictional, enchanting, dense. Overwhelming but in a good way"* (SUR\_002) and another noted it was *"Absolutely fascinating to watch the native woodland regenerating"* (SUR\_025).

Balmacara Estate's **coastline** is also highly valued for the experiences it offers, including fishing, sailing, kayaking and paddleboarding. Plockton stands out, with its harbour and regatta, alongside lesser-known portages and the many islands and skerries. The coastline is a focus of visual appreciation by people of all ages, and popular beauty spots are often also significant as a focus for social activities. Coral Beach for instance is valued as a childhood holiday hangout and also a place for parties linked to leaving school, *"some of my favourite memories about school is, we had the leaver's party [...] down on the Coral Beach"* (INT\_027).

Taken together, it is the diversity of **the varied landscapes, the visual interest these create, and the biodiversity they support** that makes the Estate particularly significant: *"You've got forest, woodland, you've got an array of wildlife so from the sea coming up and out, it's just such a varied environment"* (INT\_030). A questionnaire respondent also expressed this clearly, saying *"I love the fact that different parts of it are different from each other in terms of plant life, trees, landscape, hills etc."* (SUR\_031).

For many, the values arising from these varied landscapes and experiences are linked to **walking and footpaths, which create a sense of connectivity** within and beyond the Estate boundaries: *"Well, I've done the walk, right over the forest track, right to Plockton, and then back through the oak woodlands. Just absolutely fascinating"* (FG1\_005) and *"I also love that the path network - whether official paths or unofficial ones - mean that I can do a looping route"* (SUR\_031). It is not just the individual features in the landscape that are important but *"the whole connectivity"* (INT\_022).

The participatory photo elicitation focus group and the postcard activity during the school workshop were particularly effective for exploring **values relating to landscape views**. Participants highlighted the importance of wider horizons looking out from the Estate, juxtaposing water and mountains (e.g. of Applecross from Plockton, of Duncraig from Plockton, or towards Glenelg from Reraig). Interviewees also commented on this: *"The first time I arrived, I thought the views were amazing, the views over Lochalsh. [...] I remember thinking, I wonder if you ever get used to looking at that view, because it's such a gorgeous view"* (INT\_014). For those who go out on the water, **looking back at the Estate also offers a very different perspective**: *"[Kayaking] gave me another perspective [...] just seeing this beautiful place, tiny [...] It just places it differently in the landscape when you see it from a different angle"* (INT\_030).

The values associated with expansive landscape-scale views are counterbalanced by an appreciation of, and attentiveness to, **smaller-scale landscapes and specific places linked to activities**: *"I like Drumbuie, the coastline and the walk [...] the Drumbuie – Port-an-Eorna loop. I think I probably give that the most time, 'cause I'm a birdwatcher too, and it's a good spot for birds"* (INT\_007). Other people talked about foraging in different seasons and particular locations such as the Lochalsh Woodland: *"This was a big part of my childhood, because I learnt how to identify all the mushroom species along here"* (INT\_027).

## 5. A special place

The area where the Estate is located is valued as a **unique and special** place by many. This is illustrated by comments such as, *"it was always a kind of, magic place"* (INT\_011), *"the woodland is incredible"* (SUR\_002), and *"I think its uniqueness is the fact that it still hascrofting townships, isn't it?"* (INT\_022). An awareness and experience of natural phenomena also contribute to this feeling: *"[I] like Coille Mhor especially, the*

*rainforest at the Square, I think it's just amazing. It's such a unique habitat and seeing all the lichens and how different it is throughout the seasons as well as just...it's just magical" (INT\_003).*

**Tranquillity and calmness** were highlighted by several people, sometimes explicitly in contrast to mass tourism experiences on Skye and elsewhere: *"I think the whole essence of it is, it is meant...it's you're allowed to have your own experience" (INT\_027).* This private exploration and the ability to get away from other people, are also highly valued: *"Peace and quiet, rarely meet people out here" (SUR\_037, Duncraig path), and "it's got a stillness and calmness about it which I enjoy" (SUR\_038, Lochalsh woods).*

Feelings of **freedom and safety** are also valued as a special characteristic of the area encompassed by the Estate, linked to location, lifestyle, and the scale of the townships. For those who have grown up locally, these are distinctive features of their childhood memories: *"Just the freedom, honestly, just the freedom. Just being able to go camping on a night and up the hill there and not even think about" (INT\_016).* For some, freedom remains a special quality of the area, often linked to familial and social relationships as much as what the wider landscape offers: *"You know, if you live in the city, you just can't do the same stuff that you can do here, you know. Knock on people's doors, and go into their houses, and you know everyone" (INT\_011).*

## 6. Sustainability, continuity and change

An overarching feature of the social values relating to Balmacara Estate is the way they are entangled in questions of continuity, change and sustainability. **Housing is a significant pre-occupation, informing social values linked to identity and place.** The high demand for second homes and short-term let properties in places like Plockton has led to extravagant increases in house prices, putting many houses in the settlement out of reach for most young people growing up in the area. The increase in the number of properties that are empty some of the year is also seen as a threat to community cohesion and spirit, which are highly valued aspects of local heritage.

The question of **affordable housing** in particular becomes caught up with rights-based values, with the Trust seen as a large landowner with the potential to provide land for new-build homes. Crofting is also linked to tensions around housing. Frequently cited as a route to inheriting or building a house, and a means to sustain new generations, but at the same time these practices are seen as a threat to crofting, a Catch 22 of sorts: *"Crofts were getting smaller and smaller" (INT\_012).* Deciding whether to de-croft is often a financial consideration, but one that risks losing crofting along with *"its influence on the landscape [...] its traditions and heritage" (INT\_002).*

Many people also expressed concerns about **the sustainability of crofting per se**, with comments like, *"I am concerned about the lack of numbers of crofters, active crofters [...] It's very fragile" (INT\_013).* One older crofter reflecting on the problem explained that: *"It is a lot of work. And I think that's what probably makes it harder for it, for people to sustain it" (INT\_028).* People reflected on how changing patterns of family and work life have brought challenges, it was observed that: *"even within the families where crofting has been part of the blood, it's more and more difficult to get the younger ones to do it" (INT\_012).*

More broadly, the fragility of crofting is also seen as a threat to the **social sustainability of communities**, as illustrated by this interviewee: *"When you look at where the crofting counties are, and look at where rural populations are, it's very, very tied to crofting [...] it helps to sustain communities. And if crofting becomes just a commodity, it becomes like any other bit of real estate, I think it'll lose something. And then it won't deliver the social benefits that crofting is delivering at the moment" (INT\_012).* In particular, these benefits are linked by many to valued **communal and cooperative practices**, where people share equipment and come together to help each other out, e.g. with the silage or the hay.

Responses to change reflect **tradition, identity and authority**. What is perceived as continuity or change varies, as do ideas about what makes a person a crofter. For some, to call yourself a crofter you need to have livestock, specifically cows. For others **diversification** is positioned as compatible with crofting, if it is done in

the right way: *“You have to diversify, you know. But you have to diversify in a way that it’s not going to spoil the crofting”* (INT\_020). Whereas some of the younger generation feel that *“in order to keep crofting in communities, you’re going to have to move with the times, and try and collaborate with people with new ideas”* (INT\_027).

What should be retained, what needs to change, and who decides are questions **embedded in community identity and wider social dynamics**. As one person expressed: *“one of the things that is really upsetting is when people come in and they go, oh well we need to change that because there is no point in doing that, why are you still doing that, [...] and you are just like, well you have to understand that there is cultural significance to maybe why we do things that you don’t understand”* (INT\_031).

Alongside social sustainability, people also **value crofting for its contribution to environmental sustainability and care for the land**. However, schemes such as the Trust’s late harvest scheme, which aim to encourage crofters to engage in practices that support species rich meadows, intersect with complex values. Although they are received positively by some, others feel that they make the hay less nutritious and are *“encouraging lazy crofting.”* (INT\_020). Different forms of knowledge and claims to authority (and autonomy) are apparent in discussions on the balance between different types of landcover and use, with some people feeling that conservation measures undermine the viability of crofting.

Above all, **tensions surround the recognition, or not, of diverse forms of care**: *“I think that’s probably something that the Trust can do is bringing that cultural awareness to the younger generations around the fact that you live in this beautiful place, it’s because people have taken care of it. They’ve nurtured it, they have an association with it that isn’t...it’s not a forced association. It’s not false, it is actually almost hidden within you that this place is worth protecting”* (INT\_031).

## Implications

The assessment reveals that there are a range of values associated with the different features and qualities of Balmacara Estate, and the places within it. Multiple values are present concurrently and competing or seemingly contradictory values can co-exist between and within communities. Values are also dynamic and liable to change over time. This report should therefore be considered as indicative of the diversity of values for communities of locality, attachment and interest at the time of the research, rather than a definitive appraisal.

As a landscape property with limited roadside boundary markers and relatively discrete organisational branding, many participants were unaware of the Estate’s full scale and extent. The Trust tends to be associated with specific parts of the Estate, such as Balmacara Square, Lochalsh House and Gardens, and the Lochalsh Woodland Walk, and even those who live on the property might talk about going to those locations as visiting ‘the Estate’. Initiatives to enhance awareness based on the Trust’s ownership of the property would need careful consideration, given existing tensions around the multiple expressions of identity, ownership and belonging, and might be most productively achieved through collaborations with various communities.

The assessment demonstrates that place-based identities and attachments are complex at Balmacara Estate and are informed by overlapping geographic categories at multiple scales, ranging from broader area-based ones, like Lochalsh, to specific places within the Estate. Recognising the synergies and tensions between the Estate’s boundaries and the values associated with overlapping place-based identities could help inform and manage expectations around the Trust’s future community engagements. One area of activity where this may be immediately relevant is the community engagement expectations associated with the implementation of the *Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2025*.

The assessment has demonstrated that there are a wide range of social values associated with diverse aspects of Balmacara Estate. Social values linked to crofting are a prominent aspect of the property, but there is also evidence of wide-ranging social and aesthetic values linked to woodlands, footpaths, and other coastal and landscape features. While many of these values are not directly associated with the Estate (as an entity) in people's minds, a positive aspect of the findings is that a good proportion broadly align with the values which inform the Trust's management of the property. This is particularly the case in relation to the emphasis on crofting, biodiversity and countryside access through development and maintenance of footpath networks.

Social values associated with crofting are accompanied by a strong sense of custodianship and rights-based values linked to ownership and belonging. These need to be understood in the context of historical relationships between tenant crofters and large landowners, set against the wider backdrop of clearances, land wars and crofting legislation. Values arising from these rights-based aspects of crofting heritage explain why, for many crofters, the Trust is primarily conceived of as a landlord. This can lead to tensions around buildings and land use, where conflicting values surrounding conservation, development, and sustainable livelihoods carry the additional burden of the legacies of large landowners and the negative values associated with them in the context of crofting heritage.

Trans-generational connections and the lived everyday heritage of crofting also create strong claims to authority and ownership, which can underpin tensions between crofters and non-crofters, particularly with changing demographics. This is evident, for instance, in conflicts around access to and use of common grazings, the boundaries of which are part of the customary knowledge of a crofting township. Such conflicts are fundamentally about the nature of a place, how it is cared for, and what it should become. The use of neck collars on cattle to enforce GPS-based virtual fencing has helped to resolve tensions around common grazings in Plockton, but diverse values persist. In this context, registration of the common grazings and their boundaries with the Crofting Commission is seen by some as an important step forward, but initiatives aimed at increasing understanding and dialogue may also be useful.

Intangible connections between people, buildings and landscapes, which are reproduced through a rich tapestry of stories, are important in the production of social values and often generate feelings of ownership and belonging. Taking these intangible associations into account in the conservation and interpretation of built heritage and landscape features could help to diffuse the tensions that can arise around authority and ownership of physical property.

The research has demonstrated that the social values associated with Balmacara Estate intersect with concerns about sustainability, continuity and change, particularly in the areas of housing, crofting and the future of communities. Crofting is seen to be linked to both environmental and social sustainability, while the use of croft land to create affordable housing options and associated de-crofting is seen as simultaneously both a necessity and a threat. Community participation and involvement in management and planning (for example, as proposed in the *Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2025*) could play an important role in addressing sustainability concerns and managing change.

However, what should be retained, what can or should change, and who decides are questions embedded in social values and related dynamics. It is therefore important to recognise that people's varied responses to change and diversification are informed by tradition, identity and authority. Different forms of knowledge and types of attachment also inform diverse expectations and views about what is appropriate to conserve and promote about a place. Recognising and acknowledging that value-related tensions are often rooted in diverse forms of care could help in negotiating some of the tensions around different land uses and practices, and support processes such as future visioning/planning.

The importance of brand recognition for the Trust needs to be weighed up carefully in a case like Balmacara Estate, where campaigns to reinforce this may exacerbate existing tensions around expressions of ownership and belonging. Involvement of communities in interpretation and presentation, visitor management and provision of facilities, is likely to be the most effective route to positive development of the property and brand recognition. Instances where the social values assessment is of immediate relevance include the Welcome Hub feasibility study and the redevelopment of interpretation for the Visitor Centre in Plockton.

## Gaps/Future Assessments

In terms of addressing recognised limitations in representation and scope, complementary research could be conducted with:

- People living abroad, including diaspora Scots, who have a genealogical connection or other attachment or interest in the area. This assessment involved some small-scale qualitative appraisal of publicly accessible social media groups and the networks and memory practices they support (e.g. Plockton Past and Present on Facebook). However, there is scope for more systematic social media analysis (see Jones et al. 2024; also <https://www.deepcities-toolbox.unifi.it/vp-82-online.html>).
- The Clan Matheson Society traces the Clan's origins back over 800 years to Lochalsh and identifies several places of interest connected to Clan history on the Estate, including the Clan Gathering Place at the head of Loch Achaidh na h-Inich (<https://www.clanmatheson.org/history.html>). Social values relating to Clan Matheson associations came up in some interviews with local residents but there is scope for more systematic research with Clan Society members, especially of branches overseas.
- Repeat visitors whose families have holidayed here for many years (multi-generationally). Such families were referred to in interviews but were not a specific focus within this study.
- Scottish Traveller communities. Participants identified areas in both Plockton and Duirinish where Traveller families used to stay. Connecting with Traveller communities to understand the significance of this area to their heritage could help address this informally recognised, but formally overlooked, aspect of the Estate, both past and present. Consideration would need to be given as to how any engagement would benefit the Traveller community and research activities co-designed with them.
- Special interest and leisure groups (e.g. kayakers and mountain bikers). We were able to connect with people who use the Estate in a variety of ways and reflect some of that diversity in this report, but there is scope for more focused discussions with such groups to gain greater understanding of their connections and values.

## Annex I: Property Description

### **Location:**

Balmacara Estate is located in Lochalsh on the West coast of Scotland (see Annex II: Maps). The Estate perimeter boundary stretches from just outside Kyle of Lochalsh across to Kirkton and up to Plockton with an extensive coastline, being bounded to the North, South and West, by Loch Carron, Loch Alsh and the inner sound of Skye respectively. The land neighbouring the Estate to the East is managed by Forestry and Land Scotland and used for commercial tree plantations. The Estate is intersected by several single-track public roads and in the 1960s a single carriageway route for the A87 was created along the southern boundary (the old road goes via Balmacara Square and over the Hill to enter Kyle of Lochalsh from the North). The Skye road bridge connects to the mainland at Kyle, where there is also a railway station with services to Inverness that stop at Duirinish and Plockton. Most of Kyle of Lochalsh and parts of Plockton village, which is a Conservation Area, are outside the boundaries of the Estate.

### **Socio-economic profile of population:**

The total population living within or neighbouring the Estate, including the larger village of Kyle of Lochalsh, is estimated at around 1,500 people (covered by Data Zones S01010670, S01010671, and S01010672 in the 2011 Scottish Census: <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/>). According to the Scottish Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020), most of the settlements in the area are ranked in the 7th decile, scoring higher than the national average on the majority of indicators.<sup>3</sup> The exception is Kyle of Lochalsh, which is in the 4th decile overall (Data Zone S01010672). Schools and other local services are principally concentrated in Plockton and Kyle, but there are numerous small businesses operating across the Estate. Tourism is a major economic driver for the area, which is situated between the major destinations of Skye and the North Coast 500. However, this also brings some challenges and puts a strain on local infrastructure. In Plockton in particular, residents have raised concerns over properties being sold for holiday lets/second homes.

### **The property (including formal heritage designations):**

Balmacara Estate was initially gifted to the Trust in 1946, with additional land acquired subsequently and some other portions sold. Today it comprises of c.2,500 hectares of varied landscape and numerous small offshore islands.

The Estate includes multiple archaeological and historic features, including the remains of roundhouses, old field boundaries, and a deserted settlement at Scalpaidh. The Open-Air Church at Plockton is a scheduled monument (SM8863) and the Balmacara Steadings (LB7002 - Category B) and Kirkton Barn (LB6993 - Category C) are listed buildings. The woods at Coille Mhór are a Site of Special Scientific Interest (<https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/382>) and the coastal zone from Plockton to Kyle of Lochalsh has local landscape designation. The gardens and woodland walks at Lochalsh House are in the inventory of garden and designed landscapes. The whole Estate is encompassed within the Wester Ross Biosphere Reserve, designated as a core zone and buffer zone.

### **Management arrangements:**

The Estate is freely accessible. There are visitor centres in Balmacara Square and Plockton and a kiosk at the car park for the Lochalsh woods (all closed at the time of the assessment) and a gallery in the Steadings at

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<sup>3</sup> The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (<https://simd.scot>) is a relative measure across 6,976 small areas (called Data Zones). It ranks all the Data Zones and divides them into ten equally sized segments: the first decile (ranked 1) are the 10% most deprived areas, and the tenth decile (ranked 10) are the 10% least deprived areas.

Balmacara Square that hosts visiting artists and events (open). The Plockton visitor centre has previously been operating as a shared space with the Plockton Historical Society, which produced their own displays. The Trust's small staff team (4 people at the time of the assessment) runs a programme of events throughout the year and works with volunteers to manage the network of footpaths and the wider environment. The Trust has two cottages on the Estate that are directly managed as holiday lets.

Some of the people living within the Estate perimeter boundary are tenants of the Trust, but other properties are owned privately by individuals, community development trusts or housing associations, or by the Council. Large areas of the Estate (c75%) fall under individual or collective crofting tenure. There are 84 tenanted crofts within the Estate associated with eight crofting townships (Badicaul, Balmacara, Drumbuie, Duirinish, Erbusaig, Kirkton, Plockton, and Port an Eòrna) and crofting is a prominent feature of the landscape. Whilst the land is owned by the Trust, crofters have rights enshrined in law through the Crofting Acts (e.g. security of tenure, right to transfer a tenancy, right to buy). The Trust has been running a Traditional Croft Management Scheme since 2006, which provides payments to encourage specific practices, and has been supporting a Crofting Educational Programme since 2013, which introduces high school pupils to crofting practices.

**Popular culture:**

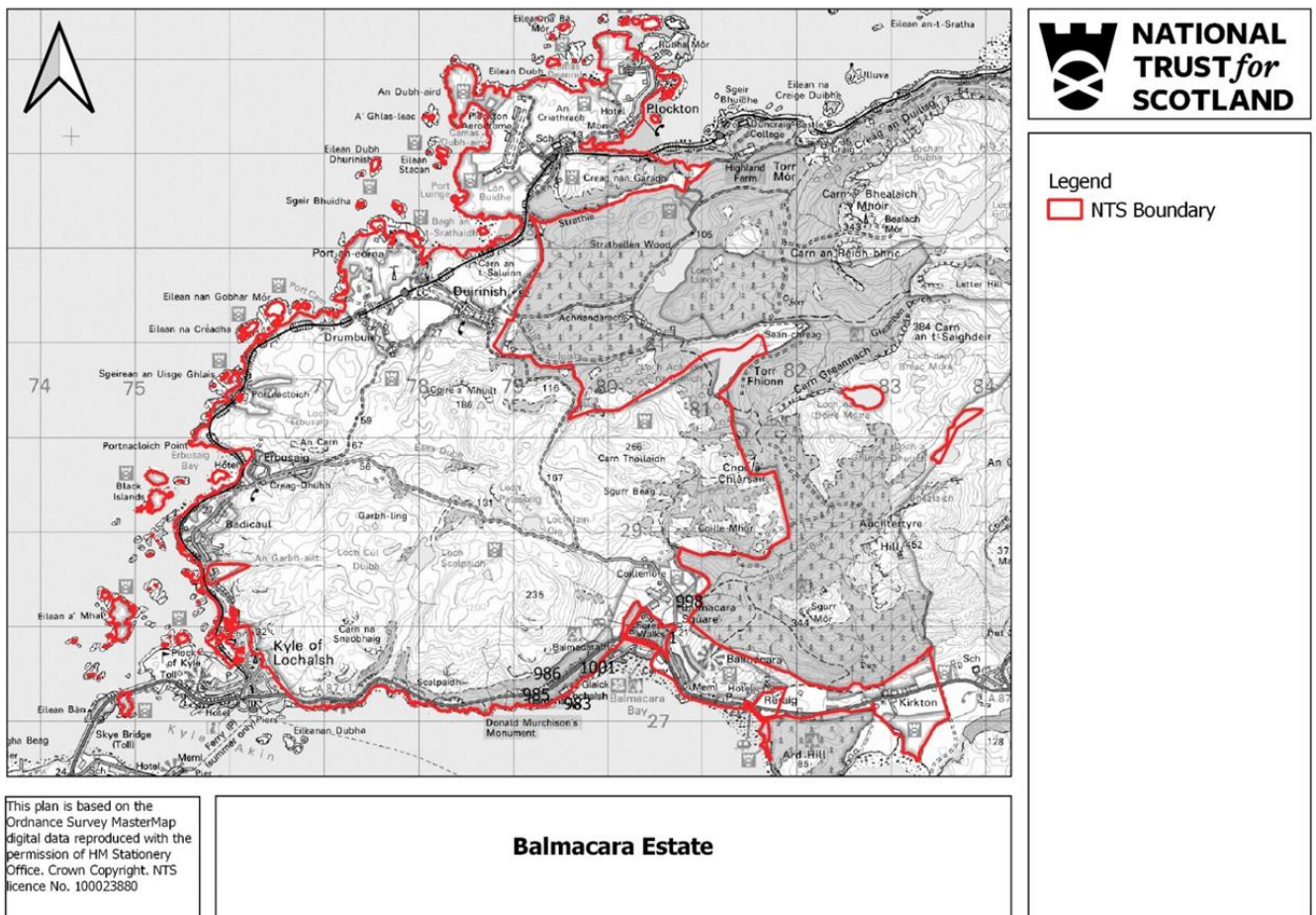
Plockton was the setting for the BBC series *Hamish Macbeth* (1995-1997) and was used as a location for the film *The Wicker Man* (1973). The rail line between Kyle of Lochalsh and Inverness is promoted as one of the most spectacular railway journeys in Britain and has featured in television series, such as *The World's Most Scenic Railway Journeys* (2022).

The network of footpaths and tracks, combined with trails on the neighbouring land owned by Forestry Land Scotland, is considered one of the best for mountain biking in the wider Skye, Lochalsh and Wester Ross area.

## Annex II: Maps



Map 1: Property location (blue dot). Based on Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright, licence no. 100023880. All other data © National Trust for Scotland. Not to be reproduced without permission.



Map 2: Property boundary. Based on Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright, licence no. 100023880. All other data © National Trust for Scotland. Not to be reproduced without permission.

## Annex III: Participants

Date	Method	Primary affiliation/reason contacted
22/09/2024	Walking interview	Community group member
23/09/2024	Walking interview	NTS staff member
24/09/2024	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Balmacara Square)
24/09/2024	Semi-structured interview	Community group member
24/09/2024	Semi-structured interview	Community group member
25/09/2024	Walking interview	NTS staff member
25/09/2024	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Badicaul)
25/09/2024	Semi-structured interview	Community group member
26/09/2024	Semi-structured interview	Community group member
26/09/2024	Semi-structured interview	Community group member
26/09/2024	Semi-structured interview	Community group member
26/09/2024	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Plockton)
02/10/2024	Semi-structured interview	Community group member
22/10/2024	Semi-structured interview	NTS staff member
22/10/2024	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Balmacara Square)
24/10/2024	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Plockton)
24/10/2024	Structured interview	Walking Lochalsh Woods path
24/10/2024	Structured interview	Walking Lochalsh Woods path
25/10/2024	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Erbusaig) [also mapping]
25/10/2024	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Erbusaig)
25/10/2024	Semi-structured interview	NTS staff member
26/10/2024	Walking interview	Local resident (Duirinish)
26/10/2024	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Plockton)
28/10/2024	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Duirinish)
29/10/2024	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Plockton)
29/10/2025	Structured interview	Walking Lochalsh Woods path
30/10/2024	Walking interview	Local resident
30/10/2024	Semi-structured interview	Community group member
30/10/2025	Structured interview	Walking Plockton-Duncraig path
12/11/2024	Semi-structured interview	Community group member
13/02/2025	Focus group	NTS staff member [also interviewed]
13/02/2025	Focus group	Community group member
13/02/2025	Focus group	Community group member
13/02/2025	Focus group	Community group member
13/02/2025	Focus group	Community group member
13&14/02/2025	School workshop	Primary school pupil
13&14/02/2025	School workshop	Primary school pupil
13&14/02/2025	School workshop	Primary school pupil
13&14/02/2025	School workshop	Primary school pupil
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13&14/02/2025	School workshop	Primary school pupil
13&14/02/2025	School workshop	Primary school pupil
13&14/02/2025	School workshop	Primary school pupil
15/02/2025	Participatory mapping	Local resident
15/02/2025	Participatory mapping	Local resident
17/02/2025	Semi-structured interview	NTS staff member
18/02/2025	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Erbusaig)
18/02/2025	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Plockton)
19/02/2025	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Balmacara Square)
19/02/2025	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Balmacara Square)
20/02/2025	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Plockton)
20/02/2025	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Plockton)
20/02/2025	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Plockton)

### **Online Questionnaire respondents**

A total of 34 people responded to the online questionnaire. In terms of ‘main place of residence’, 13/34 (38%) specified a location on the Estate, with 15/34 (44%) specifying ‘elsewhere in Lochalsh’ and 6/34 (18%) specifying ‘elsewhere in Scotland’. Over half of respondents were aged 60 years or more (18/34 = 53%), with only two respondents under 40, and around two thirds (21/34 = 62%) identified as women. A minority (4/33 = 12%) indicated that they were currently NTS members and slightly higher number (6/34 = 18%) had worked or volunteered for the Trust at some time (either at Balmacara Estate or elsewhere). The majority of respondents felt they had some kind of relationship to both crofting and to the Estate, as can be seen from the table below.

Date	Relationship to Estate	Main place of residence	Association with crofting
13/11/2024	Live here	Balmacara Square	Family connections to crofting
13/11/2024	Own a property here & regularly visit	Elsewhere in Scotland	Familiar with crofting
13/11/2024	Live within Estate	Duirinish	Familiar with crofting

13/11/2024	Lived within Estate & family connected to land	Elsewhere in Lochalsh	Actively work a croft
13/11/2024	Live within Estate	Reraig	Familiar with crofting
13/11/2024	Live within Estate	Reraig	Familiar with crofting
13/11/2024	Born here	--	--
13/11/2024	Live here	Balmacara Square	Familiar with crofting
13/11/2024	Visit regularly	Elsewhere in Lochalsh	Actively work a croft
13/11/2024	Resident	Plockton	Familiar with crofting
13/11/2024	Live and walk there	Elsewhere in Lochalsh	Familiar with crofting
13/11/2024	Visited & now live here	Balmacara Square	--
13/11/2024	Use for leisure activities	Kyle of Lochalsh	Familiar with crofting
13/11/2024	Live within Estate	Elsewhere in Lochalsh	Family connections to crofting
13/11/2024	Visit to work	Elsewhere in Scotland	Familiar with crofting
13/11/2024	Live nearby	Elsewhere in Lochalsh	Actively work a croft
13/11/2024	Live within Estate	Duirinish	Familiar with crofting
13/11/2024	Visit regularly to walk	Balmacara Square	Familiar with crofting
13/11/2024	Live here	Kirkton	Familiar with crofting
13/11/2024	Live nearby & visit regularly	Duirinish	Familiar with crofting
14/11/2024	Live on edge & use for leisure activities	Elsewhere in Lochalsh	Familiar with crofting
14/11/2024	Walking and educational visits	Elsewhere in Lochalsh	Actively work a croft
16/11/2024	Family member works there & visit	Elsewhere in Scotland	Familiar with crofting
20/11/2024	Live and work there, family connection	Plockton	Actively work a croft
23/11/2024	Visit regularly	Isle of Skye	Familiar with crofting
24/11/2024	Live here	Balmacara Square	Familiar with crofting
27/11/2024	Live just outside	Elsewhere in Lochalsh	Familiar with crofting
28/11/2024	Grew up here & recently moved back	Elsewhere in Lochalsh	Family connections to crofting
30/12/2024	Near neighbour	Elsewhere in Lochalsh	Familiar with crofting
30/12/2024	Live nearby & visit regularly	Elsewhere in Lochalsh	Family connections to crofting
23/01/2025	Live nearby & visit regularly	Elsewhere in Lochalsh	Actively work a croft
15/02/2025	Used to work in area	Elsewhere in Scotland	Familiar with crofting
16/02/2025	Live just outside	Elsewhere in Lochalsh	Familiar with crofting
24/03/2025	Went to Plockton High School & still visit area	Elsewhere in Scotland	Family connections to crofting

## Annex IV: School Workshop

**Aim:** to provide a productive learning experience (with outdoor learning component) and produce research data on the ways in which children value Balmacara Estate so that their views can be included in the social value assessment.

### **Activity plan and resources:**

Day 1 (13:15 – 15:25): Fieldtrip focusing on crofting heritage, conservation and biodiversity within the Estate.

- Introduce ourselves and Balmacara Estate - show them on a map where we are on the Estate, see if they recognise anywhere and/or if they live on the Estate.
- Mention that the landscape is a product of nature and humankind, with people influencing the natural landscape through practices such as crofting for hundreds of years - ask if anyone knows what a croft is; point out that we are surrounded by crofts.
- Divide into 2-3 groups that will follow the same route trying to spot the various animals and plants on their spotter sheets (one per group). Rangers, researchers and teachers will support each group and discuss what they are spotting.
- Debrief on what people found out, briefly discuss answers.
- Sensory activity to close - ask the children to reflect on their surroundings for a minute or two and then name something they can see, hear, feel, and smell.

Resources: maps of the Estate, historic photographs of crofting, spotter sheets and pencils.

Day 2 (09:10 – 13:15 including lunch break): Classroom-based activities building on the fieldtrip.

- Recap learning and questions from yesterday's fieldtrip.
- Introduce the 'postcard to the future' exercise, to facilitate reflection on discussing values and experiences, writing and drawing.
- Drawing stage – individual work followed by group discussion.
- Writing stage – individual work followed by group discussion.

[a Gaelic story telling activity was planned but not needed as the discussions filled the time]

Resources: A4 cards, maps, sample postcards, class stationary.

### **Curriculum areas and learning outcomes** supported by the activities:

- Sciences – build curiosity and understanding of the environment and our place in the living, material and physical world.
- Social Studies – understanding and appreciation of local heritage.
- Social studies – how to locate, explore and link features and places locally.
- Social Studies – an understanding of your own values and those of others.
- Literacy/communication – listening, talking, discussing, writing skills.
- Expressive arts – creative response and exploration of values through visualisation/drawing.
- Wellbeing – experience learning in an outdoor environment and collaborative learning.

### **Learning style/approach:**

- Active learning with an outdoor component, which provides opportunities to observe, explore, experiment and play.
- Collaborative learning with discussion and informed debate.
- Harnessing the experience and expertise of different professions in the learning environment.

## Annex V: Structured Interview & Online Questionnaire

Participants were advised about the purpose of the research project before participating and asked to confirm their consent. In-person respondents were given an information sheet including contact details to keep, the same information was provided on screen at the start of the online questionnaire.

### ***In-person Structured interview questions***

Question 1: Where did you come from today?

Question 2: What brings you here? Do you normally come together/with others/alone?

Question 3: Is this your first visit? If no, how often do you visit? [multiple choice] First visit; once before; 3-6 times/year; 1-3 times/month; weekly; more than once a week

Question 4: What do you enjoy about this place (for this activity or more generally)?

Question 5: Is there anything you don't like about it or would like to see change in future?

Question 6: Are there other places you go for this activity? How does it compare?

Question 7: Are there other things you come here for? Who with?

Question 8: Does this place have any special significance or meanings for you (could be related to or beyond this particular activity)?

Question 9: How would you describe this place - are there three key words that sum this place up for you?

Question 10: Is there anything else you would like to add?

### ***Online Questionnaire***

Question 1: What is your relationship to Balmacara Estate or the places within it? For instance, it might be where you grew up, went to school, have lived or worked, have family connections, visit regularly, etc. It may be that more than one of these apply.

Question 2: How would you describe Balmacara Estate or the area it encompasses and your impressions of it? Please provide up to 5 keywords that come to mind when you think of it.

- Please add a comment on your keyword choices or expand on your impressions, if you wish.

Question 3a: Are there places within Balmacara Estate that are special or important to you? Please specify up to 3 places.

Question 3b: What is the significance of those places to you? Please select all the options that apply in each case

	Place 1	Place 2	Place 3
It is associated with memories (personal/communal)			
It is associated with stories (community/family)			
I have family connections to it			
It is place that I go for everyday tasks			
It is a place I use for leisure activities			
It is a place for community activities / events / festivities			
It has spiritual or religious significance for me			
I think it is a beautiful/evocative place			
It allows me to connect with nature			
It is a meeting place			
It is a place for learning			
It is connected to my livelihood/job			
Other			
If you selected Other for any of the places listed, please specify the significance of that place to you			

Question 4: Do you use Balmacara Estate or areas within it for leisure activities? For instance, these might include walking, cycling, kayaking, sailing, horse riding, bird watching, amongst other things.

- If "Yes", please indicate the type of activities, where you go, who with, and roughly how often.

Question 5: In your view, what role does Balmacara Estate play in the area and does it have any communal importance?

Question 6: What would you like to see happen in future with Balmacara Estate? This might be in terms of conservation, management, uses, developments/changes, or any other aspects.

Question 7: Is there anything else you would like to add?

At the end of both the interviews and questionnaires, participants were asked to provide some basic demographic information (all questions optional).

In the online questionnaire only, there was a question about the participant's relationship to crofting: Approximately 75% of the Balmacara Estate is crofting land. Which of the following best describes your association with crofting [multiple choice]: I live on a croft; I actively work a croft; I have family connections to crofting; I am familiar with crofting; I don't know what crofting is.

## Annex VI: Detailed Statement of Social Values

This Statement illustrates a range of values associated with Balmacara Estate. Multiple values are present concurrently and competing or seemingly contradictory values can co-exist between and within communities. Values are also dynamic and liable to change over time. This Statement should therefore be considered as indicative of the diversity of values for communities of locality, attachment and interest at the time of the research, rather than a definitive appraisal.

The assessment encompasses Balmacara Estate as a whole but, as a landscape property with limited roadside boundary markers and relatively discrete organisational branding, many participants were unaware of its scale and extent. People can pass seamlessly on and off the Estate and therefore the wider landscape (and seascape) forms an integral part of their experience of the property. Furthermore, many values and activities are associated with specific locations or features within the property rather than the Estate as a whole, as is highlighted in the analysis below.

It is important to emphasise that, while many of the social values are not directly associated with Balmacara Estate in people's minds, **a significant proportion of them align with the values which inform the Trust's management of the property.** This is particularly the case in relation to those values associated with crofting, woodlands, footpaths, and other landscape features. As discussed in the Implications section, understanding the complexity of the social values associated with large countryside properties, and managing with these in mind, will be increasingly important in the context of the *Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2025* with the introduction of land management plans and associated community engagement expectations.

### 1. Place-based identities and attachments within the Estate

- 1.1. As a named entity, Balmacara Estate is not a prominent focus of values relating to place-based attachments and identities. **People generally know of the Estate but not its precise boundaries.** As one interviewee explained, *"pretty much every year of my life I'll have come onto the Balmacara Estate [... but] like I think a lot of people, I didn't realise I was on the Balmacara Estate a lot"* (INT\_027). Another explained, *"I don't think people really view the estate as such"* (INT\_026). One of the questionnaire respondents starkly illustrated this by stating: *"I live here and have no idea of the exact boundaries"* (SUR\_027). This does not necessarily correlate with a strong desire for greater knowledge of Estate boundaries, but it was interesting to note that in the school workshop the children expressed a high level of interest in the property map included in the Trust's leaflet.
- 1.2. Some **specific parts of the landscape are more clearly associated with the Estate in people's minds**, for instance Balmacara Square (by name and also as the historical location of the Old Home Farm steadings), Lochalsh House and Gardens (location of the Trust's office and manager accommodation), and the Lochalsh Woodland Walks. Interviewees and questionnaire respondents often highlighted these as places they would visit and associate with the Estate, even in the case of those who live on it: *"I think I often associated the Balmacara Estate with Balmacara Square and the walks around there. So, I think I didn't realise [the wider extent of the estate] ...I mean, I always thought it was an important part of my life"* (INT\_027). They are also **valued aspects of many people's lives**, as indicated by this structured interview respondent, talking about the woodland walks near Lochalsh House: *"I bring my wee boy, he's 4 and calls it the forest, he likes to paddle in the stream and float sticks and can walk at own pace with the dog off the lead. It's perfect"* (SUR\_035). Another interviewee said, *"I always liked Balmacara itself, the Balmacara Square, you know, I liked that little, sort of, area there. There was the lovely woodland walks up above it, which are great, I still love those to this day"* (INT\_021).

- 1.3. **While the Trust is recognised by many as the landlord, the Estate is rarely foregrounded in how people describe the wider area.** One interviewee reflected that *“I don't think of it as an estate, it's just, I live in Plockton, not in, I don't live in Balmacara Estate”* (INT\_009). When asked if the wider landscape around and beyond Plockton is important, they went on to say, *“Oh yes, Lochalsh, uh-huh, the whole thing is part of my heritage. But I would call it Lochalsh, rather than Balmacara Estate”* (INT\_009).
- 1.4. As highlighted by this interviewee, **the townships are often the primary focus of place-based identities and attachments for people who live on the Estate.** These settlements were frequently referred to as the places people identify with in the interviews, questionnaires, and by children in the school workshop. At one level, townships take the form of matter of fact references to where people live, but they are also associated **with a strong sense of belonging and values relating to home, roots, family connections and forms of social memory.** The complex relationships that are often involved in these kinds of attachment are discussed in more depth below, but they are summed up well by this interviewee:
- “Plockton will always be home regardless of where we are and what we are doing. Out on the water, just...the whole area is just familiar. It is our home [...] I can't say what it is exactly that makes it home, but I think it is just because you have got your memories, you have got your community. You still have your community, and you have got people here that you grew up with”* (INT\_016).
- 1.5. **The distinctive character of the different settlements on the estate, physically, socially and economically, is also an important aspect of people's sense of place.** Across the entire Estate, settlements are associated with **crofting** and referred to as townships, but this is more prominent for some than others. For instance, on the northern and western sides of the Estate, Duirinish, Drumbuie and Erbusaig are strongly associated in many people's minds with crofting, both historically and in the present, although there are complex values surrounding future sustainability and change (see section 6 for discussion of these themes). In part, this emphasis on crofting identity is due to the prominence of traditional field systems in the surrounding landscape. However, long-standing residents see the individual settlements as *“very distinct [...] The people of Drumbuie ... do work a bit in the other township [Duirinish], but not much at all”* (INT\_013).
- 1.6. While Balmacara Square, Kirkton and Plockton are also recognised as crofting townships, people also associate them with **other distinctive characteristics.** For instance, woodlands were often highlighted as a special feature, particularly associated with Balmacara Square and its surrounding area. Whereas, for many, Plockton's proximity and orientation to the sea, in terms of its physical layout, its economy (seafood, leisure activities and associated tourism), and its social and cultural traditions (particularly around fishing and sailing, especially its regatta), set it apart from other crofting settlements. This is captured very well by the following two interview extracts: *“With Plockton, [I] always loved the harbour, just always, ever since I was a little kid, I loved the harbour, you know, it was great”* (INT\_016); and *“from my perspective, if it wasn't for the boating, and the sea, and the connection to the sea, I mean, Plockton wouldn't even exist, so that side of it is the bit I find the most important for me, probably”* (INT\_011).
- 1.7. **Expressions of authenticity are connected to values associated with understandings of time-depth and perceived continuity of connections between people and place,** as illustrated by the following interview quote:
- “Well, I feel that Duirinish is probably one of the more authentic townships. [...] Because it's an old original township. Plockton after all only dates from 1800 and is a settled place. [...] Duirinish, I feel is more authentic, and for that reason is worth keeping it authentic, even if they're 19th century buildings [...] at least they're from when somebody built them because they needed them”* (INT\_022).

- 1.8. Such **conceptions of authenticity are situational and relational**, as in this case where an interviewee links authenticity to people living in a place year-round, in the face of the growing number of second homes and holiday accommodation in Plockton:

*“I would say that Drumbuie and Duirinish are probably authentic. Plockton still has a lot of authenticity, but obviously, the more people who have got no connection to the place, moving into the place, it’s going to change things a wee bit. [...] it still feels authentic because people still live here. And what we want to do is to hold onto that, and to make sure that people can still live here”* (INT\_012).

- 1.9. For those with strong connections to crofting, **the boundaries and distinctions between settlements also extend out into the wider landscape in the form of the common grazings associated with each township**. Knowledge of the extent and boundaries of these commons is held by a relatively small number of people involved in crofting, often those with multi-generational ties. Nevertheless, these boundaries are important, both in terms of access to resources and symbolically. For instance, one crofter recounted how Duirinish, Drumbuie and Erbusaig all had a share of Loch na Cnoc for their cattle to get access to the water, but subsequently the boundaries had been altered and put under Balmacara Grazings. Such changes to boundaries, whether through formal Estate management or informal encroachments, tend to be recounted as a source of controversy activating diverse values and at times resulting in overt conflicts (see section 3 below).

## 2. *Belonging and relationality*

- 2.1. As elsewhere in the Highlands and Islands, **belonging is a relational construct, produced and negotiated simultaneously through belonging to people and belonging to place** (see, for instance, Jones 2006; Macdonald 1997). Kin relations mapped out through family genealogies play a key role, often creating connections across multiple generations. Belonging is therefore often expressed according to the extent to which people are **born and bred and/or related to local families** and how long they have been away. One interviewee elaborated on this relational nature of belonging, explaining that:

*“[my] Grandfather had a saying in Gaelic, it was something like...the English translation was, who are your people. So, they wouldn’t ask, where did you go to school, what do you do, but who are your people. I think that that is lost because the people that I grew up with and my family and the people that lived down there, they were our people, and it wasn’t just that you knew them [...] I was the third generation to have this croft. There are other families like that, so if I met somebody from Duirinish [...] I knew their grandfather, I knew their father, I knew their mother, I knew them, they were my generation, I know their children, I know their grandchildren. So, when you meet somebody, your association is not with that one individual, your association is with the generations going back”* (INT\_031).

- 2.2. In this sense, as Macdonald observed from her research in Skye, **discourses of belonging play a role in negotiating “who is and who is not ‘part of a place’, and who is and who is not authentically ‘local’”** (1997: 131). One interviewee captures this differentiating aspect very clearly, reflecting that: *“I belong to Plockton, and I belong to Lochalsh, and, you know, even if I lived [somewhere else ...] I would never have said I belong to [that place], I would always have said I belong to Plockton”* (INT\_010).

- 2.3. Belonging is therefore a means of negotiating inclusion and exclusion in terms of community boundaries, but it is also complex, layered and dynamic, subject to negotiation in changing social contexts. There are degrees of insidersness and outsidersness, and **being ‘local’ is a flexible category**,

as explained by this interviewee, reflecting on how their village seems to hold onto people for generations:

*"I'm just going through all the houses. And I can go local, related to a local, related to local, local, because she's had her family here, so we count that as [local], if you've had your family here. Next door to her, long, long-term residents, not local but [works locally]. Not local, but [owned a local business] for donkey's years. Then round the corner, you've got [...] locals, locals, locals, local, local, damned near local [...] they were here as children and they've brought up their children and now they've got grandchildren, that local" (INT\_025).*

- 2.4. **Family ties, social networks and memories were also apparent in how people talk about their relationships to place** more broadly, revealing a complex web of connections and associated values. For instance, this interviewee's biographical narrative links to places within the Balmacara Estate in similar ways to others who participated in the research: *"I was brought up in Kyle until I was 20-odd. And Balmacara was always just part of our family, you know, because my father had...his auntie that was on his dad's side [had connections] and his uncles that were on his mum's side, you know [...] so both families were here. So, you know, it was a place that we visited regularly" (INT\_004).* In the school workshop, the children's postcards focusing on places of significance to them, provide further evidence of these relationships, often referring to family connections, especially grandparents, in their depictions of specific buildings, townships and other places.
- 2.5. While interviews were particularly useful in providing an arena to explore values relating to community, place and belonging, other methods also revealed the significance of these. For instance, questionnaire respondents, the majority of whom live beyond the Estate (62%, although most of these reside in the wider Lochalsh region), often noted connections to specific townships on the Estate through social and family and connections. Likewise, when discussing their images, participants in the photo elicitation group often focused on social connections forged in relation to people and places. Similarly, when people highlight specific buildings in their responses, their significance seems to lie in their family and communal social connections, as homes or gathering places (e.g. the Old Mill in Balmacara, The Plockton Community Hall, The Balmacara Steadings). Kirkton's prominence, for instance, was in connection with community activities and family connections.
- 2.6. For those people with inter-generational family ties to the townships, the **networks of relationships embodied in buildings** are a prominent aspect of place-making and in expressing belonging. Discussing the heritage of the township they grew up in, one interviewee explained *"what I like is knowing who's related to who and how they are related. Which is a very Gaelic thing to do, to work out" (INT\_010).* Inter-generational family connections are materialised in houses as forms of social memory about communal activities and services:

*"There was a grain store up and down the back. A butcher's beside the river, they had a wee shed by the river, that was the butcher's [...] where the Bay Arts is now, that was one of the shops [...] And the wee pink house over there, it's all closed up. That was the dressmaker" (INT\_020).*

Informal walking interviews around townships with older residents also revealed a rich tapestry of genealogical and social memory mediated by buildings encountered along the way.

- 2.7. **Houses and other buildings are therefore rich in social values** because of the intangible stories and kin/communal relationships they embody, and which serve to link past, present and future, creating a sense of continuity but also potential dislocation. The importance of maintaining these relationships was highlighted by accounts of houses that had been purchased as second homes or short-term holiday lets on the one hand, and those which emphasised inheritance and continuity on the other. As one interviewee reflected, *"when grandparents, you know, pass a house onto the*

children and then grandchildren, there's that, sort of, sense of inter-connectiveness and inter-generational connectiveness. And just the reality is that now the village... There's still some of these families here, but the reality is that there's lots of new families or individuals have moved in. And so, the collective history is diluted because there's fewer and fewer people" (INT\_012). Another recounted how family houses would be passed on to specific children and even grandchildren, creating a sense of continuity by projecting the relationships embodied forward into the future.

- 2.8. The Estate also sits at the heart of a **peopled landscape** with family and community **oral histories** encompassing the in-bye fields and common grazings in addition to houses and croft buildings. **Stories of everyday life** in the past are mediated by the landscape in the present, where topographic features and toponyms, such as 'horses hill', trigger memories of past practices for those with multi-generational ties.
- 2.9. For some people, **Clan Matheson stories and sites also form a rich tapestry of place-based relationships** to past people and events. One interviewee explained that, "*The Mathesons have been here since Viking time virtually... yeah, they've been here*" (INT\_020). In 1981, on his return to Lochalsh, Torquil Matheson, Chief of Clan Matheson, published a booklet and accompanying map, which set out to link the place names mentioned in the book *History of the Mathesons* (by Alexander MacKenzie, 1838-1898) "*to the ground and record some of the history that is associated with those places*" (1981: 1). The locations were said to be based on placenames and stories "*gleaned from the memories of Lochalsh people*" (ibid.) and a number of these were recounted by interviewees during this assessment. In particular, the Loch Achaidh na h-Inich area has strong associations with Clan Matheson, including the historic Gathering Place and key battles. While the story of the Lord of Caithness's daughter giving birth to Iain Ghallaich at the roadside between Erbusaig and Balmacara at a place now marked by a cairn is a fairly widespread association, imbuing the landscape with meaning even when the association is only vaguely known.
- 2.10. **Diaspora Scots also maintain and negotiate claims to belonging and attachment.** For instance, diaspora members of Clan Matheson visited as part of the Gathering in July 2024, walking parts of the Estate and learning the Clan stories and places. Social media groups, like Plockton Past and Present on Facebook, also offer an arena for the expression and negotiation of belonging and relationality, with people as far afield as Australia posting old photos of people and places as a way to reconnect and share stories. One émigré who had settled in Australia posted that "*I sometimes went up to the barns with my granny to help her milk the cows. When we were young, we had to go off at night looking for the cows [on the common grazings]*" (recounted by INT\_009). Browsing through other photos posted by the same person, the interviewee illustrated the kinds of memory practices associated with such social media networks: "*oh that's her sister's wedding, and that's [the person who posted], and that's [redacted name], who was brought up in the house next door, she lives in Australia too*" (INT\_009).

### 3. Values associated with crofting

- 3.1. **Values associated with crofting and crofting practices** were raised by many participants. Crofting is not only significant to those living on or actively working a croft, it has also shaped the landscape and is a feature of daily village life. While crofting rights are encoded in national policies, crofting culture more broadly is maintained by communities across the generations. The degree to which residents and visitors to Balmacara Estate feel connected to crofting heritage varies and people have different views about how land should be used and crofting sustained. These differences reflect a range of underlying claims to authority and belonging, which are especially apparent in conflicts around crofting practices.

- 3.2. **Tangible features of townships such as buildings, field systems and common grazings are valued as expressions of crofting tradition.** For instance, people value how in-bye fields and common grazings have shaped the character of the landscape (see section 4 below), as well as the distinctive design of buildings associated with crofting. For instance, the design of barns in the area, with wooden-slatted sections in the walls for drying hay, was discussed at length by some older interviewees, with stories of how as children they had helped lay out the hay on internal platforms and turn it periodically. A few interviewees even expressed concerns about dilapidated examples and the need to protect and preserve them. Yet, more often than not, tangible heritage is valued for the intangible stories and meanings it embodies.
- 3.3. **The inextricable links between tangible things – croft houses, barns, and associated croft lands – and intangible heritage are a rich source of social values.** As discussed above, buildings embody personal and social memory handed down between generations. In the context of crofting these take on additional resonance, with family histories and relationships extending to the fields and common grazings, connections that are sustained through memory practices even when crofts have been de-crofted and houses sold. Stories are recounted of helping out on the croft as children, of seasonal tasks like haymaking and taking the animals out on the common grazings for the summer. Above all, the surviving tangible features of crofting, such as the Duirinish and Drumbuie field systems, are valued because they are seen as manifestations of a living heritage; stimulating comments such as, *“Glad to see crofting still flourishing in the hands of local families”* (SUR\_025).
- 3.4. There is a **strong sense of custodianship of the land** among those associated with crofting, to keep the land productive or *“in good heart”* (INT\_012). This sense of custodianship is often underpinned by family connections and a related sense of belonging, as another interviewee put it: *“It’s because of the crofting and because you feel you belong to it, you look after something you belong to, you know? It’s like your family, you don’t mess up your own back yard, you know? It’s important to you that your own place is good”* (INT\_010).
- 3.5. Crofters in particular also expressed a sense of **deep familiarity and intimate knowledge of the worked land**: *“years and years ago, before there was a Co-op in Kyle, every bit of croft land was worked. You know, every crofter knew within a spade’s depth where their croft started and stopped and what the ground was like. People absolutely worked the ground, they knew the ground”* (INT\_012). Whilst often linked to the past in the context of concerns about the sustainability of crofting (see below), this familiarity is also carried forward into the present: *“I suppose, I’ve spent, what? Over 40 years here [...] Maybe you don’t go so much to the hill, but I mean, you know the hill, you know the area, [...] And you’re still out chasing cows on the hill in the summer”* (INT\_028).
- 3.6. Deep familiarity with the worked landscape of crofting is also reflected in people’s **knowledge of placenames**: *“away back in the olden days, they always had goats. And then there’s two islands down Port Cam, Eilean a’ Ghabhar Mhor again, goat, and there’s Eilean a’ Ghabhar Bheag, the island of the small goat [...] Goats were part of the crofting tradition”* (INT\_029). Another resident recalled, *“[T]hat hill there was referred to as the Horses Hill so when...going back when they were using horses, that was the hill where the horses are. Now that has been sold off. When I don’t know, but it’s been sold off to the Forestry Commission [...] it’s no longer any use for grazings, whether the trees are taken down or not. It takes so long for it to recover, you know”* (INT\_004).
- 3.7. **Relatedly, people living on crofts also express a strong sense of ownership and belonging to the land**, whether they are tenants or owners, and whether they are actively crofting or not. This is often a result of trans-generational family connections, as explained by this interviewee:
- “[I] have quite a tie to the ground, you know. I think that’s the thing. And some of them will have done it [crofting] in their young days [...] they do have a strong affinity to, well, it’s their home. And*

*I don't mean just a house, I think, just the whole thing. And it was their father's before, you know. Because most people are, you know, it was handed down to you by your father or grandfather or something" (INT\_028).*

Another person reflected, *"I got my croft because of who my parents were, my grandparents. And I could never buy into crofting" (INT\_012).* A similar sense is reflected in this response to the questionnaire when asked what is your connection to Balmacara Estate: *"lived on the Estate for 20 years and my family have been on the land for over 200 years" (SUR\_004).* As one person said of their croft, *"Oh, it's everything, it's everything to me. Everything. It's precious, is what it is, extremely precious" (INT\_020).*

- 3.8. **Linked to these feelings of custodianship, ownership and belonging are strong rights-based social values.** These are underpinned by genealogical relationships to croft houses and land, which form part of a rich tapestry of family documents and stories. They were frequently recounted by interviewees with multi-generational ties to crofts, sometimes with reference to documents and photographs. One interviewee, for instance, produced original Estate Missives dating to 1849 that had been kept in the family and discussed them at length, highlighting the ways in which the document tightly controlled what tenant crofters could do, for instance imposing specific crop rotations with the penalty of paying double rent for their lot that year.
- 3.9. **Values concerning crofting rights are therefore set against this backdrop and people's sense of past injustices as an integral part of crofting as a living heritage.** Family genealogies were often traced back to other areas of the Highlands and Islands, such as Lewis, Raasay, Strathnaver and Assynt, at times their stories explicitly linked to clearances of various kinds: *"my father [...] his people were from Sutherland, Strathnaver, the clearances you'll have heard, they were kicked out of Strathnaver" (INT\_010).* Another interviewee talked of how her forebears could see the fires on Raasay during the clearance and *"how they were living in terror" as a result (INT\_020).* The rights and duties established and developed by the various Crofting Acts are keenly felt and in one instance an elderly crofter produced a copy of a testimony presented to the Napier Commission (1883-1884) by one of their ancestors.
- 3.10. Values arising from these rights-based aspects of crofting heritage in part explain why, for many crofters, the Trust is primarily conceived of as a landlord. This can lead to planning-related tensions around buildings and land where **conflicting values surrounding conservation, development and sustainable livelihoods carry the additional burden of the legacies of large landowners and the negative values associated with them in the context of crofting heritage.**
- 3.11. Tensions between crofters and non-crofters relating to land use also need to be understood against this backdrop. **Conflicting values relating to the boundaries of common grazings and access for livestock are evident in a number of townships and are negotiated in various ways.** However, they have been especially heightened in Plockton where **changing demographics** have led to polarised positions over cattle accessing unfenced common grazings in the village and use of these 'commons' by some householders as private gardens and spaces to park cars or place sheds.
- 3.12. For crofters, **knowledge of the boundaries of common grazings is handed down between generations,** part of the customary knowledge of the crofting township. Furthermore, access to these grazings for cattle is intimately tied to the rights-based values discussed above. In contrast, others acknowledge the historical basis of these practices, but argue against continuing the practice by emphasising values linked to progress and private property:

*"People go, oh, it's something that's always happened and it should happen, but really, in modern times, do people want to be treading on cow pats and taking it into their houses? Yes, people did have their animals grazing round about where they lived before, but it's different now. They don't*

*need to be walking down the main street in Plockton when they've got other places they can be. So that causes a bit of hassle" (INT\_014).*

While another person remarked that, *"cattle coming into the village was a real problem years ago, and you know, you couldn't leave your garden gate open, because the cows would, I mean, people had their gardens completely trashed by the cattle" (INT\_034).*

#### 4. Values relating to landscape and environment

- 4.1. **Crofting is valued for the ways it has shaped environments and made landscapes what they are today.** One interviewee argued that *"it [crofting] has had such a massive part on our landscape, that I think that's also important to recognise. Because it highlights why things look the way they do and why things are kept the way they are" (INT\_027).* Similarly, this interview explained, *"what I really value about crofting, [... is what] it contributes, in terms of landscape things. And that's a big reason why people come here, because the landscape would look different if it wasn't worked" (INT\_012).*
- 4.2. Another interviewee went further and **linked crofting to the beauty of the landscape:** *"The fact that it is still in the natural state and so beautiful is a lot down to the people who've lived here, who kept it this way. And the same applies to the whole of the crofting counties. It's the people who've been in those places who have maintained them as they are. It's not an accident that there's all this beautiful nature in these places" (INT\_010).*
- 4.3. At the same time, **the consequences of the landscape being a 'lived and worked' one can produce competing social values and aesthetics.** For instance, some people expressed the view that the material effects of crofting, such as machinery in the landscape is *"untidy"* and visually unappealing (SUR\_017). Whereas others value this as an expression of living heritage, through shared jokes and tongue in cheek stories, such as this story recounted by an interviewee about a visiting crofter who *"went for a walk and it was like this beautiful weather all around the village, and they came back and they said, it's very nice but it's almost too perfect, you know? You really need a couple of wrecked cars down on the shore just to give it more of a crofting village vibe, you know?" (INT\_010).*
- 4.4. For the most part, **social values that link landscapes to crofting are rooted in an appreciation of how it has shaped vegetation cover.** Conversations are often accompanied by commentaries on how things have changed as the number of active crofters has declined, especially in terms of livestock and specifically cattle, which are attributed an important role in shaping the character of the vegetation on the common grazings. One crofter said, *"I would still like to see livestock on it because I think, I just think it doesn't turn into the same wilderness" (INT\_028).*
- 4.5. Old photos become talking points for how the land was more productive and less 'scrubby', but also how it was more open with fewer trees and broader horizons rendering different features visible.  
  
*"[I]f you look at some of the old historical photos [...] there were no trees. No trees anywhere. You know, it's all just lush fields and that's the same all over, that...when I was growing up in Kyle, there were no trees about. You know, it was like...places that we used to go and there'd be no trees about. But now it's covered in gorse and it's covered in...and that's just lack of animals, you know, the...if you've got the cows then the gorse won't grow" (INT\_004).*
- 4.6. For older people, who grew up accustomed to more open landscapes, **there is a sense of loss attached to the recognition that views are more closed in than they used to be,** because of the decline in livestock on the common grazings. This was summed up by one interviewee who explained that if vegetation growth continues unchecked, *"you're not going to have a landscape to look at. You're not going to have a view. It's just going to be, it's going to be trees" (INT\_028).*

- 4.7. For others, trees and woodlands are an integral part of the way **the Estate is valued for its varied landscapes, the visual interest this creates, and the biodiversity it supports**, as illustrated by the following interview and questionnaire extracts:

*“Well, I think the magic of the...it's interesting, we're talking about the sea and land thing [...] I marvel at the fact that you have the marine life, you have this landscape here on the shore, and then you're leading up to hills, not mountains, but hills. You've got forest, woodland, you've got an array of wildlife so from the sea coming up and out, it's just such a varied environment” (INT\_030).*

*“I love the fact that different parts of it are different from each other in terms of plant life, trees, landscape, hills etc. I like the fact that you can accidentally find new places - new bits of old wall or old trees that lead you to wonder what was there before” (SUR\_031).*

- 4.8. For many, **the values arising from these varied landscapes and experiences are linked to walking and footpaths**, which create a sense of connectivity within and beyond the Estate boundaries:

*“Well, I've done the walk, right over the forest track, right to Plockton, and then back through the oak woodlands. Just absolutely fascinating” (FG1\_005) and “I also love that the path network - whether official paths or unofficial ones can make mean that I can do a looping route and either add bits or cut it shorter depending how I'm feeling - and still be interesting and enjoyable. It's liberating because my weekly run there is exactly that” (SUR\_031).*

- 4.9. When asked about places important to them, many people responding to the questionnaire identified **walking routes and tracks**, rather than specific locations. This is perhaps linked to a greater proportion of respondents living elsewhere as opposed to being resident somewhere on the Estate. Nevertheless, it highlights a sense in which it is not just the individual features in the landscape that are important, but what an interviewee called *“the whole connectivity”* (INT\_022).

- 4.10. **Regular walks are described using colloquial names, many of which relate to particular topographic features**, as indicated by this focus group conversation when one participant explains:

*“there was these very large, concrete culvert pipes that were stored up at the top of the bend. And you always said, we're going to walk up to the pipes, and that was, kind of, what I was introduced to when I came here” (FG1\_005), and later another participant says, “Yeah, I'm going up to where you said, the pipes, I've never been up there” (FG1\_004).*

- 4.11. The participatory photo elicitation focus group and the postcard activity during the school workshop were particularly effective arenas for exploring social and aesthetic values at a large landscape scale. In particular, these highlighted **values linked to views out from the Estate landscapes and the juxtaposition of water and mountains** (Applecross from Plockton, Duncraig from Plockton, towards Glenelg from Reraig etc.). Interviews reinforced this: *“The first time I arrived, I thought the views were amazing, the views over Lochalsh. And as you drive down into Kyle, I remember thinking, I wonder if you ever get used to looking at that view, because it's such a gorgeous view” (INT\_014).*

- 4.12. For those able to get **out on the water, looking back at the Estate also offers a very different perspective on a familiar landscape**: *“There's a kayaking club up here, so a few people do that. But of all the people I know, I was probably one of the few who did that. That gave me another perspective. Literally sitting out halfway across that Loch looking back and just seeing this beautiful place, tiny...just sitting there. It just places it differently in the landscape when you see it from a different angle” (INT\_030).*

- 4.13. The values associated with expansive landscape-scale views are counterbalanced by an appreciation of, and attentiveness to, **smaller-scale landscapes and specific places linked to activities**: *“I like Drumbuie, the coastline and the walk [...] the Drumbuie – Port-an-Eorna loop. I think I probably give that the most time, 'cause I'm a birdwatcher too, and it's a good spot for birds” (INT\_007).* Other

people talked about foraging in different seasons and particular locations such as the Lochalsh Woodland: *“This was a big part of my childhood, because I learnt how to identify all the mushroom species along here”* (INT\_027).

- 4.14. **Fishing, sailing, kayaking and paddleboarding** are associated with Plockton in particular, for example one of the children’s postcard messages was: *“I did the Plockton small pìre [pier] because I love sailing”* (SCH\_010). This was reflected in adults’ responses too, e.g. *“With Plockton, [I] always loved the harbour, just always, ever since I was a little kid, I loved the harbour, you know, it was great”* (INT\_016). Another person said, *“from my perspective, if it wasn’t for the boating, and the sea, and the connection to the sea, I mean, Plockton wouldn’t even exist, so it’s kind of, but that side of it is the kind of bit I find the most important for me, probably”* (INT\_011).
- 4.15. Questionnaire respondents gave **bays, shorelines, and coastal walks** as places of significance. These were strongly connected to visual appreciation and beauty by people of all ages. Coral Beach in particular is highly valued for its beauty, as explained by one of the children in the message they wrote on their postcard: *“I drew this pic [picture] of coral beach because I think it is a very pretty place. It is really pretty at sunset too and the sand is made out of coral, that is why it is cold [called] coral beach. I think you sud [should] tak care of it, so it stays pretty”* (SCH\_009).
- 4.16. **Popular beauty spots are also significant as a focus for social activities.** Coral Beach, for instance, is valued as a childhood holiday hangout and also a place for parties linked to leaving school. As one interviewee reminisced, *“thinking about it, it’s one of my...some of my favourite memories about school is, we had the leaver’s party, they’d always be down on the Coral Beach, and then in the morning you’d come back up to the school, and they would put on bacon and eggs for everyone”* (INT\_027).
- 4.17. **Woodlands are also highly valued and regarded as a distinctive feature,** particularly associated with the Lochalsh side of the Estate. Extolling the virtues of Balmacara Square, one interviewee explained: *“I mean, you cross the bridge and it’s like you’ve gone into a different world. Because suddenly you’re driving along this road and you’re surrounded by trees. And this much more healthy looking, kind of, environment. Much more lush environment”* (INT\_001). Although people use the Forestry tracks for activities, it is the ‘natural’ woodland that features more prominently in these discussions. Another person noted it was, *“Absolutely fascinating to watch the native woodland regenerating”* (SUR\_025).

## 5. A special place

- 5.1. The area where the Estate is located is valued as a **unique and special** place by many. This is illustrated by comments such as, *“it was always a kind of, magic place, up here”* (INT\_011) and *“I think its uniqueness is the fact that it still has crofting townships, isn’t it?”* (INT\_022). An awareness and experience of natural phenomena also contribute to this feeling. One person in the photo group discussion reflected, *“some days, you’ve gone out, and you stand in the garden, and you’ve got the Milky Way, and it’s so bright, and the Milky Way is reflected in the loch. And I’ve got a couple of shots where you’ve got the reflection in the loch, and I’ve never seen that anywhere”* (FG1\_004).
- 5.2. The **woodlands** were again highlighted by several people in this context: *“Like, just now it’s beautiful down in the campsite [woods by Balmacara Square] [...] I just think the change in seasons are beautiful here”* (INT\_026). One visitor interviewed in the Lochalsh Woodland said, *“The woodland is incredible. We’ve done a few walks, the diversity and planting, the rainforest feeling in Kyle woods, plus the shoreline and the noise of the waves”*; later they went on to describe the woods as *“almost fictional, enchanting, dense. Overwhelming but in a good way”* (SUR\_002). For those more familiar with the area, the woodlands are also regarded as special: *“[I] like Coille Mhor especially, the*

*rainforest at the Square, I think it's just amazing. It's such a unique habitat and seeing all the lichens and how different it is throughout the seasons as well as just...it's just magical"* (INT\_003).

- 5.3. **Tranquillity and calmness** were highlighted by several people, sometimes explicitly in contrast to mass tourism experiences on Skye and elsewhere: *"I think the whole essence of it is, it is meant...it's you're allowed to have your own experience"* (INT\_027). This private exploration and ability to get away from other people, to experience peace and tranquillity, is also reflected in responses from structured interviewees when asked what they enjoy about the area: *"Peace and quiet, rarely meet people out here"* (SUR\_037, Duncraig path), and *"its got a stillness and calmness about it which I enjoy. Open all year round and enjoy all four seasons and the changes"* (SUR\_038, Lochalsh woods).
- 5.4. **Multi-sensory experiences** are also mentioned as contributing to the special qualities of the landscapes, linked to plants, the weather and the seasons. For example, when asked why the walk to Duncraig is their favourite, one person said, *"I don't know, there is just something about it. I think it is the smell, it is trees, it is the sound"* (INT\_016). Another interviewee also reflected on smells, *"the smell of gorse always makes me think of Coral Beach and just being up in that area. Like you know when it's just that time of year, it's usually May, when it's just about to start, and you have that really nice, warm spell"* (INT\_027).
- 5.5. Feelings of **freedom and safety** are also valued as a special characteristic of the area encompassed by the Estate, linked to location, lifestyle, and scale of the communities. For those who have grown up locally, these are distinctive features of their childhood memories:
- "Just the freedom, honestly, just the freedom. Just being able to go camping on a night and up the hill there and not even think about...it is not that you are ever going to get lost up here, you just always knew where you were. If you are up that hill you knew where to go because you spent a lot of time outdoors, you didn't spend any time indoors, it was all outdoors"* (INT\_016).
- "[W]e benefited in it at our own time, we benefited hugely because, I mean, I had no issues with, if everybody was busy. I would walk out the door and take a great long walk along to Kirkton and round and do my thing and come back. We had freedom, a lot of freedom"* (INT\_025).
- 5.6. For some, freedom remains a special quality of the area, following on from the previous comment the same interviewee adds: *"So, my grandchildren are now, they have the freedoms. They have the freedom of the village and they can come up to granny's. They can come up to mine independently, go home, hang out with the neighbours' kids. Go and play at the pond, the burn or whatever, ride their bikes around, you know"* (INT\_025).
- 5.7. Even for adults, this **freedom is seen as something that makes the area of the Estate distinctive and special**: *"there's still that freedom, I suppose, that you have as a child, that you still have, still now. You know, if you live in the city, you just can't do the same stuff that you can do here, you know. Knock on people's doors, and go into their houses, and you know everyone. And not everyone likes that, obviously, but you know, if you live here, you're probably like that a bit, you know"* (INT\_011).

## 6. Sustainability, continuity and change

- 6.1. **Sustainability of communities linked to housing is a significant pre-occupation, informing social values linked to identity and place.** Many participants explained that people want to stay but that housing and work factors draw them away: *"[T]he village seems to hold onto people for generations once they get here. And its only really difficulty with employment or a move necessitated by promotion [...] that takes people away"* (INT\_025). The high demand for second homes and short-term let properties in places like Plockton has led to extravagant increases in house prices, putting many houses in the settlement out of reach for most young people growing up in the area. The

increase in the number of properties that are empty some of the year is also seen as a threat to those very aspects of community cohesion and spirit that are highly valued aspects of their heritage.

- 6.2. **The question of affordable housing in particular becomes caught up with rights-based values**, with the Trust seen as a large landowner with the potential to provide land for new homes. **Crofting is also linked to tensions around housing**, frequently cited as a route to inheriting or building a house, and a means to sustain new generations, but at the same time this is seen as a threat to crofting, a Catch 22 of sorts: *“Crofts were getting smaller and smaller. And obviously, housing is a huge issue. We need to have more houses, but [...] they’re private houses and then they can just be lost, you know. So, it’s like a bucket with a hole in it and you’re filling it up, you know. Unless you’re stemming the loss”* (INT\_012). People also pointed out that access to credit/mortgages depends on owning the land. So, deciding whether to de-croft is often a financial consideration, but one that risks losing crofting along with *“its influence on the landscape [...] its traditions and heritage”* (INT\_002).
- 6.3. Set against this context, many people expressed **concerns about the sustainability of crofting** with comments like, *“I am concerned about the lack of numbers of crofters, active crofters [...] It’s very fragile”* (INT\_013). One older crofter reflecting on the problem explained that: *“It is a lot of work. And I think that’s what probably makes it harder for it, for people to sustain it. I mean, I don’t know, maybe just because I was a bit obsessive about it. You know, I’ve always worked [in another job], but I’ve always managed two, sort of... But then you don’t have much free time”* (INT\_028). People reflected on how changing patterns of family and work life have brought challenges, observing that: *“even within the families where crofting has been part of the blood, it’s more and more difficult to get the younger ones to do it. Because they’re seeing what their parents have done and what their grandparents have done. And perhaps just aren’t buying into it in the same, well not buying in, but you know, being committed to it in the same way”* (INT\_012).
- 6.4. More broadly, **the fragility of crofting is also seen as a threat to the social sustainability of communities**, as illustrated by this interviewee: *“When you look at where the crofting counties are, and look at where rural populations are, it’s very, very tied to crofting [...] it helps to sustain communities. And if crofting becomes just a commodity, it becomes like any other bit of real estate, I think it’ll lose something. And then it won’t deliver the social benefits that crofting is delivering at the moment”* (INT\_012).
- 6.5. These benefits are linked by many to **valued communal and cooperative practices**. For some people these are still alive: *“[my neighbours] when they start working and doing silage or whatever, they get everyone involved. And they have their brother, a son, the neighbour has a tractor and a trailer, and they get them to move it around for them”* (INT\_013). While others stressed a decline: *“[it] is still there. It might not be within the same village, but it’s... Because, in a way, there’s not the same amount of people with the experience here to handle cattle or sheep, I suppose, if it comes to that”* (INT\_028).
- 6.6. Both crofters and non-crofters expressed views on how **crofting is changing** in response to wider societal shifts and local priorities. One participant commented that, *“I think the term crofting has changed a lot with what people do with their land now. But there’s still a real pride and a sense of coming from that for a lot of people that live up here or who have come from here. But there’s also people who’ve moved in who’ve got crofts and you can see them really busy working them”* (INT\_030).
- 6.7. For some this means that crofting is becoming **more of a lifestyle rather than a means to make a living**, because the size of crofts means that they *“can’t be farmed as a living therefore it has to be a lifestyle”* (INT\_022). Consequently, as one interviewee observed, working a croft means having an

alternative source of income: *“there’s always that crossover between the crofting community and people who are here perhaps professionally. A lot of them are dual actually [...] You’ll have a nurse and a teacher or something, and they have a croft house, and they have cows”* (INT\_025).

6.8. **Responses to change reflect tradition, identity and authority.** What is perceived as continuity or change varies, as do ideas about what makes a person a crofter. For some, to call yourself a crofter you need to have livestock, specifically cows. For others **diversification** is positioned as compatible with crofting, if it is done in the right way: *“You have to diversify, you know. But you have to diversify in a way that it’s not going to spoil the crofting”* (INT\_020). Another person reflected, *“I have never really considered it as diversification but yes, I mean that’s true, that’s what we’re doing, we’re using the croft, [we’re] using the space that it gives us to pursue a business”*; nonetheless, this interviewee emphasised a powerful sense of continuity: *“crofting is integral through the whole of that evolution of whatever has happened in my life for the last twenty-five years, since I got the croft”* (INT\_032).

6.9. Some of the **younger generation** feel that *“in order to keep crofting in communities, you’re going to have to move with the times, and try and collaborate with people with new ideas”* (INT\_027). Simultaneously, some resentment is expressed at perceived resistance to change:

*“they want to retain the land, the crofting, the kind of, yeah, the system of the crofting, which is cut the silage, and feed cows, and as a sort of model of how crofting used to be done everywhere. And it’s good for the wildlife, and so on. And some of that is great, but at the same time [...] there’s a resentment of the crofting system off the back of that. [...] I mean, you want to retain stuff, but you also need to move on, otherwise you’re not going to get young people living here, staying, or having opportunities, because it’s just too difficult”* (INT\_011).

6.10. **What should be retained, what can or needs to change, and who decides are questions embedded in community identity and wider social dynamics.** As one person expressed: *“one of the things that is really upsetting is when people come in and they go, oh well we need to change that because there is no point in doing that, why are you still doing that, why are you...and you are just like, well you have to understand that there is cultural significance to maybe why we do things that you don’t understand”* (INT\_031).

6.11. Alongside social sustainability, people also **value crofting for its contribution to environmental sustainability and care for the land.** However, schemes such as the Trust’s late harvest scheme, which aim to encourage crofters to engage in practices that support species rich meadows and other forms of biodiversity, intersect with complex values. Although they are received positively by some, others feel that they make the hay less nutritious and are *“encouraging lazy crofting. Definitely. Ruining good ground our forbearers worked hard to clear and get going”* (INT\_020). Different forms of knowledge, priorities and claims to authority (and autonomy) are apparent in discussions on the balance between different types of landcover and use, with some people feeling that conservation measures undermine the viability of crofting.

6.12. Above all **tensions surround the recognition, or not, of diverse forms of care**, some of which have been transmitted across generations:

*“I don’t think there was recognition for those people that took care of the land and took care of the environment who were really skilled in terms of being able to read nature, understand how things worked and that whole cycle of nature and things like crop rotation [...]...and I think that’s probably something that the Trust can do is bringing that cultural awareness to the younger generations around the fact that you live in this beautiful place, it’s because people have taken care of it. They’ve nurtured it, they have an association with it that isn’t...it’s not a forced association. It’s not false, it is actually almost hidden within you that this place is worth protecting”* (INT\_031).

## Annex VII: References and Comparators

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### **Background to the methods and approach:**

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### **Comparator Trust properties with social values assessments:**

- Isle of Iona (<https://doi.org/10.34722/63q3-jk21>) is a useful comparator because it is a landscape scale property in the Inner Hebrides with tenanted crofts and farms. Parts of the worked landscape are managed to conserve biodiversity/habitat. The long history of crofting/farming on Iona has shaped the landscape and is connected to feelings of identity, belonging and moral ownership/stewardship. In addition to the permanent resident population, several religious communities/groups have bases on the island, and tens of thousands of visitors arrive every year (some of which are repeat visitors who have been coming to Iona for decades). The density of overlapping communities and connections associated with Iona generates a multiplicity of values.