

Skirling Community Development Trust

Land Acquisition Feasibility Study & Business Plan

Summary

Skirling is a conservation village and community council area in the Scottish Borders, situated 4km north-east of Biggar, with a population of 191. Skirling Community Development Trust (SCDT) is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, incorporated and registered on 1 October 2024. SCDT was set up to facilitate and support the delivery of the priority projects set out under the Skirling Community Action Plan 2024-2029, and to hold any land or assets on behalf of the village for the benefit of the local community.

The Community Action Plan was developed by local residents and sets out the actions needed to ensure Skirling continues to develop and thrive as a vibrant and sustainable community. A number of these, including a play-park, community growing, composting, enhancing amenity and developing community renewables, require access to suitable land.

Three separate landowners in Skirling have expressed interest in transferring ownership of certain areas of land to the Skirling Community Development Trust. Collectively these comprise a total of ten parcels of land in and around Skirling village, whilst a further seven parcels have been identified as potential areas for community activity. SCDT commissioned a feasibility study and business plan to assess the viability and potential options for developing these and any other land around the village to achieve a range of long term environmental and community benefits.

The first stage report included a detailed description of the various parcels of land, an outline of the community's objectives and an options analysis, assessing the potential of the various parcels of land to deliver the range of environmental, recreational, economic, educational and heritage benefits sought by SCDT and the wider community. It also discussed the viability of acquisition and noted the costs and potential funding and income sources for acquisition, post-acquisition development projects and on-going maintenance and management.

The first stage report also formed the basis for a community consultation, which ran from 18 April to 11 May 2026. A questionnaire was circulated to all households in the community area, together with a six page summary document which included a brief introduction to the land acquisition project and feasibility study, summaries by site and project, the plan and artist's impression of the play-park, and a map showing the various parcels of land discussed. The SCDT Annual General Meeting was held in the Village Hall on 25 April and included a presentation on the feasibility study and a "question and answer" session.

Respondents were invited to indicate whether they supported a project, to assign it a priority, and to give any additional comments. 53 responses were received, representing ~28% of the total population of 191. The various projects elicited a wide range of views: most were supported, although the extent of this support was much stronger for some than others.

SCDT's Trustees agreed which projects should be progressed and which would not be taken forward, based on the feasibility study, the discussion at the Trust's General Meeting, and the results of the community consultation. It was recognised that in several cases there are outstanding issues to address e.g. with respect to the suitability and viability of possible

sites and responsibility and resources for longer term maintenance. They also excluded one of the parcels from further consideration as it is now understood to be unavailable.

Projects to be progressed:

- *Safeguarding Amenity*: this project covers the protection, conservation and maintenance of land parcels beside the main road below and through the village.
- *Planting of Fruit Trees and Shrubs*: this project would take place primarily on a roadside verge owned by Scottish Borders Council.
- *Pavements*: there was little support for new pavements in the lower part of the village, but several respondents noted the lack of pavements and associated safety concerns at the Galalaw end of the village. The Trust agreed that this merited further consideration and would be taken forward in consultation with the Community Council.
- *Castlestones Path*: this project involves the creation of a new section of path on the eastern side of the A72 at Castlestones corner to facilitate a safer circular route through Gallows Knowe Wood from the village, for which two possible options had been identified in the feasibility study.
- *Play-park*: there has already been considerable design and development work on this project, but concerns were raised about the proposed site during the consultation and the Trustees recognised that further engagement and discussion was required before proceeding.
- *Community Composting and Growing*: respondents voted in favour of these projects, which could provide volunteering and employment opportunities, but assigned a low priority to them, and further work is needed to clarify the scale and scope of these projects.
- *Skirling Mill Wildlife Area and Recreation Area*: this project could encompass a wide range of different activities at the Skirling Mill Field, including pond(s), woodland creation, planting of flowering and fruiting species, wildflower areas etc. Paths, benches and picnic tables could be installed, along with interpretation, a simple unserviced shelter and a compost toilet. The lack of road access to the site is a significant constraint and the details of what this project will cover, and how it will be implemented, are still to be discussed and agreed, and will to some extent be dependent on the outcome of a baseline survey of the site.

Projects not to be taken forward included electric vehicle charging, new car-parking provision and the development of tourist facilities at the Skirling Mill Field, all of which a majority of respondents voted against. The Trust recognised that there was community support for the acquisition of Gallows Knowe Wood, but noted that the current landowners have no plans to change its current use and concluded that this project is beyond the remit of the current five year business plan, although it could be pursued at some point in the future.

This final report focuses on SCDT's preferred development projects. For some projects, including community growing and composting and the development of the Skirling Mill Field, where no decisions about the type or location of a preferred project have yet been made by the Trust, indicative costings have been produced for specific options for illustrative purposes.

The report contains a provisional business plan with detailed income and expenditure figures for five years, and outlines the likely income and expenditure for the following twenty years. Most projects are grant-funded, with ongoing costs such as insurance and maintenance met by income from membership fees, events and sales.

The engagement of a part-time development officer to manage projects and the establishment of a volunteer group are essential to success and sustainability of SCDT's proposals. The development and financial plans envisage all the projects starting within three years, but community capacity, in terms of both trustee/staff time and volunteer resource, may be a significant constraint, limiting the number of projects that the Trust can deliver simultaneously; it may be necessary for SCDT to prioritise, and take projects forward over a longer timescale.