FIRNS End of Project Reporting: Community Inclusion Standard

Completion Date: 31st March 2025

Lead: Deciding Matters

Funders: The project was supported by The Facility for Investment Ready Nature in Scotland, delivered by NatureScot in collaboration with The Scottish Government and in partnership with the National Lottery Heritage Fund

Funded partners: Fife Coast and Countryside Trust, Kana, Scottish Land Commission, Soil Association Certification, Realise Earth, University of Strathclyde

Signatories to MOU: CreditNature, Foundation Scotland, Future Forest Company Ltd, Green Finance Institute (GFI), Highlands Rewilding, IUCN Programme's UK Peatland Code, Nattergal, Soil Association Charity, SRUC, Trees for Life, Wilder Carbon Standard for Nature & Climate, Woodland Carbon Code and the UK Carbon Code of Conduct.
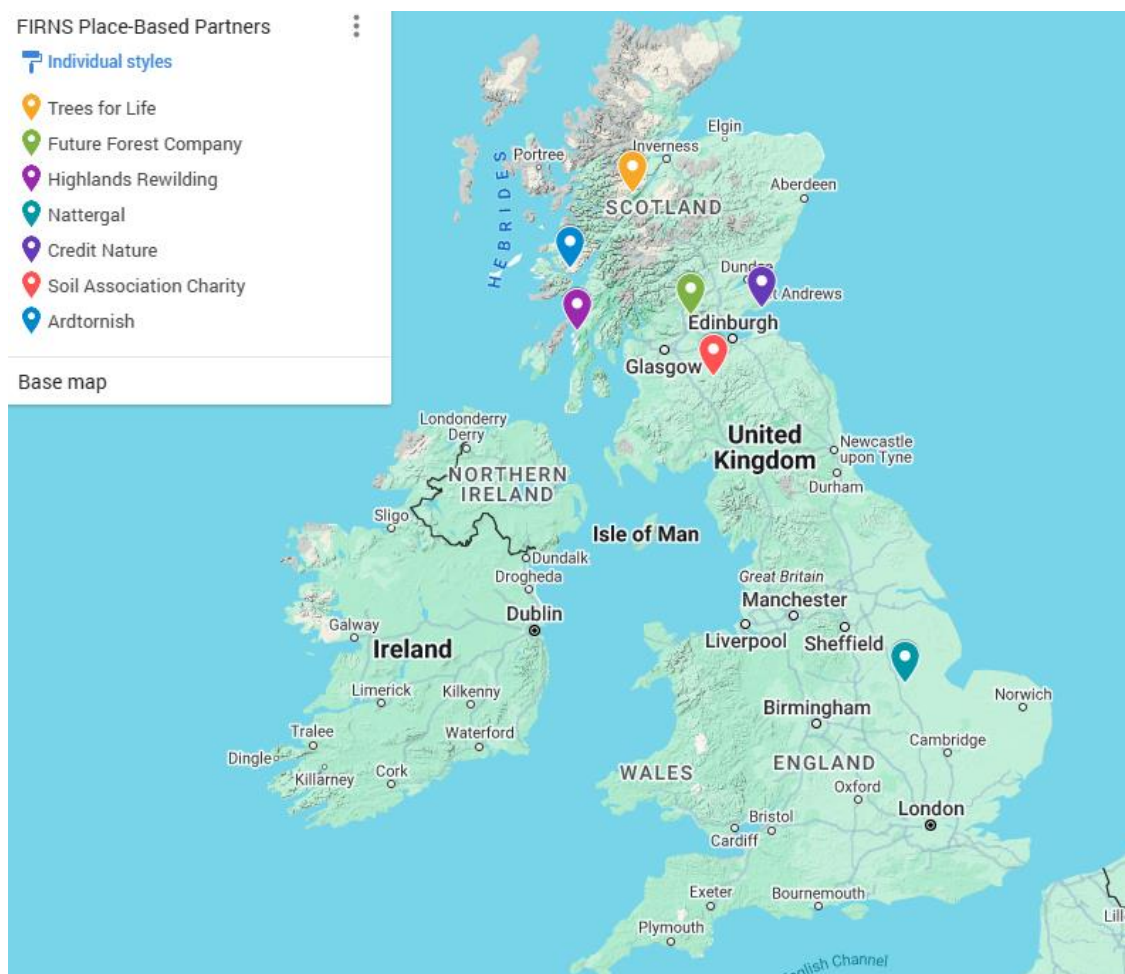
Map of Activity

Figure 1: Map of activities

Summary

This Community Inclusion Standard project ran from May 2024 to March 2025, following a six-month development phase project which ran from October 2023 to March 2024. The second stage of our FIRNS project, led by Deciding Matters, aimed to create and publish a UK-wide standard for community engagement and inclusion at the project level. This standard is intended to be adopted by UK nature credit schemes as a "plug-in certification" product.

We worked to host this open-source standard and achieve sector-wide endorsement and adoption through the Nature Finance Certification Alliance (NFCA), with support from the NFCA secretariat, Fife Coast and Countryside Trust (FCCT). This work drew on the expertise of several organisations, including the Soil Association Certification for verification and validation, the University of Strathclyde for a state-of-the-art literature review, and various carbon and nature credit codes.

We also collaborated with the British Standards Institute (BSI) to ensure that our "plug-in certification" offers the sector a practical solution for complying with the forthcoming BSI Flex 705 standard. This "standard of standards" for community engagement and inclusion is being developed as part of the BSI's Nature Investment Standards program, which is funded by the Scottish Government and DEFRA.

The standard is supported by a Best Practice Guide for project developers, including projects developed by communities rather than private companies, as demonstrated by one of our pilot projects, the Dreel Burn in Anstruther, Fife.

This Stage 2 project allowed the project consortium to further develop a Best Practice Guide for Community Inclusion for projects that secure project finance through the UK Natural Capital Markets. Through collaboration between Deciding Matters and the Scottish Land Commission, our work was informed by seven place-based projects (six in Scotland, one in England):

1. Tayvallich Estate (Highlands Rewilding)
2. Dreel Burn (AIA and FCCT)
3. Dumyat (Future Forest Company)
4. Dundreggan (Trees for Life)
5. Whole Farm-Approach (Soil Association Charity)
6. Boothby (Nattergal) - English project
7. Ardtornish (Ardtornish Estate)

The suite of resources was also expanded to include specific guidance on developing community benefits, as defined by the Scottish Community Benefits Advisory Group. It now includes a training program on community benefits and community wealth building and a detailed route map for how community benefits from natural capital projects can be agreed upon by interested parties.

Our project partners, Foundation Scotland and Kana, played a key role in ensuring ongoing alignment between Scottish Government policy and our work on developing an industry tool that would be adopted and make the desired impact on the ability for communities to engage positively with the UK Natural Capital Market.

We ensured the standard was practical from the perspective of landowners and attractive from the perspective of buyers of ecosystem services and investors (asset managers). Our learnings were informed by Foundation Scotland's involvement in securing practical community benefits in the renewable energy and transmission sectors; Kana's natural capital markets survey of FTSE250 companies and in-depth workshops with the UK's top asset managers involved in natural capital markets; and regular consultation and sounding with the NFCA membership, at their monthly online

meet-ups, hosted by FCCT and Iconic Blockchain.

To address the Scottish bias, our work included integration with the published "Stakeholder Engagement Best Practice for Landscape-scale Nature Recovery Projects", developed in England by the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) at the University of Gloucestershire and the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery and Agile Initiative projects at Oxford University.

For Wales and Northern Ireland, we involved the green finance lead from Natural Resources Wales and Bruce Howard from Ecosystems Knowledge Network (EKN), who is leading work to establish natural capital markets in Wales and Northern Ireland. They both attended regular NFCA meetings, which kept them briefed on the project. Where appropriate, we also integrated with other relevant sector-specific guidance on community engagement, such as recent guidelines published by Confor: Confederation of Forest Industries (UK) Engagement with Local People and Communities Good Practice Guidance for Woodland Creation Proposals.

Our project partners, Scottish Forum on Natural Capital (SFNC), Green Finance Institute (GFI) and the EKN have also supported dissemination of our project throughout the past 12 months, including key education events we organised during the course of the project. This included the "Confidence in Nature Finance Roundtable" 2-day deep-networking event in Stirling, delivered by partner Realise Earth and our open consultation on the Best Practice Guide and "plug-in certification" product. SFNC supported us in hosting an open and transparent forum on the Scottish Nature Finance Pioneers network.

The project resulted in a published "plug-in certification" and accompanying Best Practice Guide and Routemap, released under Creative Commons license. The UK's Nature Finance Certification Alliance will host the standard allowing projects to undertake validation and verification from May 2025, and high levels of adoption are expected due to the open and participatory approach. It is anticipated that the standard will be adopted by the existing Codes, as the standard drafting group worked to ensure alignment between the existing codes and new standard. Each Code will be required to undertake their own development phase before adoption, which the CIS team will support. The CIS is also a key foundation of the BSI Flex 705 programme, and so adoption of the CIS will enable nature credit schemes and projects to align with the forthcoming 705 standard when it is launched.

Since the CIS won't be a credit scheme itself, there is no commercial revenue model available and no ability to raise investment. At the same time, this means a minimal cost to sustain the standard, especially as the NFCA has opted to release the standard under open-source creative commons licensing (CC BY-NC-ND). Kana's research has identified an alternative method for the NFCA to achieve a sustainable revenue stream by licensing a kitemark "badge" for projects that want to

demonstrate compliance with the CIS and the NFCA's wider set of four investment pillars. There will be a badge available for compliance with the CIS, and another for alignment with the NFCA.

The NFCA kitemark operates independently of any specific nature credit scheme. This allows the NFCA to use its kitemark outside of projects funded through nature markets. This is an area for further exploration by the NFCA secretariat over 2025/6.

Project Structure

Figure 2: Overview of the combined governance arrangements for our Phase 1 and 2 projects
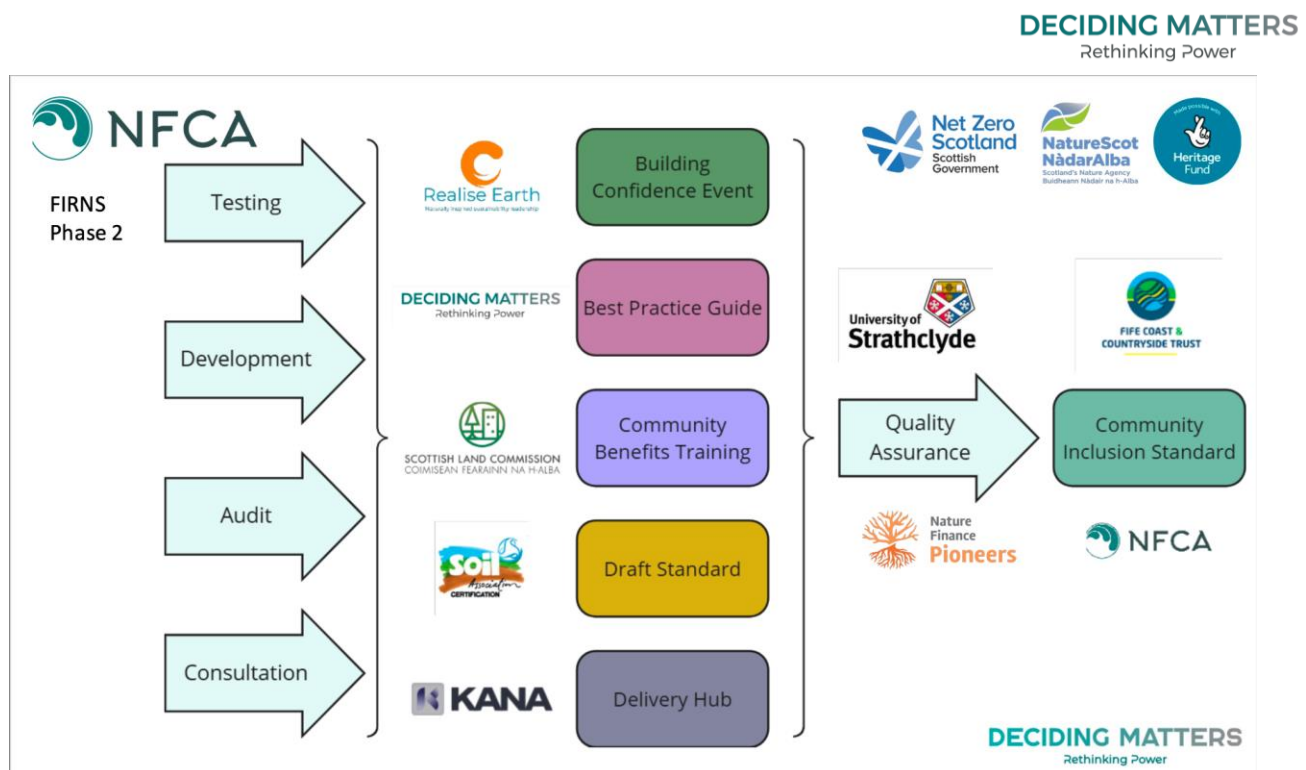
Figure 3: Overview of the Project Methodology, linked to funded partner contributions

Aims and Outcomes

Our Phase 2 project was organised into 4 distinct, yet integrated, work packages, linked to the FIRNS Outcomes we set out to address:

1. **Communications** (FCCT, Realise Earth, GFI, EKN, SNFC)

   - Create a transparent and inclusive governance structure.
   - Capture and disseminate lessons learned and best practices.

2. **Best Practice Guide and Advisory Service** (Deciding Matters, Scottish Land Commission, University of Strathclyde)

   - Support the restoration of nature and growth of natural capital backed by robust science-based methodologies.
   - Explore and demonstrate engagement with community interests in project design, and activities, supporting a just transition.
   - Develop effective mechanisms to share benefits with communities, supporting a just transition.

3. **Certification Process** (Soil Association Certification, Kana, FCCT, BSI, University of Strathclyde, SRUC, Woodland Carbon Code, Peatland Code, Wilder Carbon, UK Carbon Code of Conduct, Saltmarsh Code)

   - Increase confidence and capability to create market-ready/ investable projects and/or improve market development.

- Create long term opportunities for development of local delivery capacity and reinforcement of supply chains.

4. **Business Case** (Kana, FCCT, Foundation Scotland)
   - Enable or generate revenue and /or cost savings from ecosystem services in order to attract and repay private sector investment.
   - Develop a project/business and investment model which can be scaled and replicated.

Deciding Matters (with sub-contracted support from Iconic Blockchain) oversaw the four project workstreams, supported cohesion across the partner consortium, and handled all project management tasks, including finance and quarterly reporting.

All four work packages achieved successful outputs and outcomes, which, together, have made a notable impact on the current UK Natural Capital Market Infrastructure.

This is despite overcoming some major challenges around interfacing with an evolving BSI Nature Investment Standards framework and achieving the necessary balance between complying with Scottish Government policy thinking and achieving an adoptable and practical certification product.

At critical moments, we succeeded by having the tenacity and ambition to hold together all perspectives and needs, from the third sector (including community groups and eNGO's), public sector, and private sectors (including project developers and financiers).

However, both the Certification Process and Business Case work packages did not achieve their original level of ambition, due mostly in part to an unfortunate lack of capacity within the two major nature credit schemes (Woodland Carbon Code and Peatland Code) to fully engage in the project, as originally planned.

This means that while our "plug-in certification" product is now published, we anticipate it taking at least another year before we see the product implemented within the target nature credit schemes. It also means that our business case could only be developed to a lower level of 'investment readiness', with any major investment in standard adoption and anticipated impacts on credit prices and volumes, unachievable at this point in time.

Figure 4: Public consultation material for our "plug-in certification"

Communications

FIRNS Outcomes
- Create a transparent and inclusive governance structure.
- Capture and disseminate lessons learned and best practices.

This work package addressed the outcomes above through the following headline outputs:
1. Publicly available information on Best Practice Guide, Certification and Case Studies
2. Policy and market alignment
3. In-person event for key stakeholders in natural capital markets

We have openly communicated our accomplishments throughout the project. Our goal was to raise awareness and ensure future adoption of the standard by both nature credit schemes and project developers. We achieved this by engaging a wide range of stakeholders in the development process.

May-June 2024
The project was launched with 90-minute Zoom kick-off meetings for funded and unfunded partners, and a briefing for the FIRNS community of practice on May 15th. Phase one outputs (the draft best practice guide and University of Strathclyde's Literature Review) were published on the Nature Finance Certification Alliance website.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by funded and in-kind partners, including Deciding Matters, CreditNature, Fife Coast and Countryside Trust (FCCT), Foundation Scotland, Future Forest Company Ltd, Green Finance Institute (GFI), Highlands Rewilding, Kana, IUCN UK Peatland Programme's Peatland Code, Nattergal, Realise Earth, Scottish Land Commission (SLC), Soil Association Certification Ltd (SACL), Soil Association Charity, SRUC, Trees for Life, University of Strathclyde, Wilder Carbon Standard for Nature & Climate, and Woodland Carbon Code.

July-August 2024

The Hearts and Minds event, scheduled for November 6-7th in Stirling, has secured over 20 applicants at £295 per ticket, ensuring its viability. This success is due to engagement with the Scottish Nature Finance Pioneers platform and the Nature Finance Certification Alliance via the open and transparent Scottish Nature Finance Pioneers platform.

A key project development is the renaming of the 'NFCA Community Benefit Standard' to the 'NFCA Community Inclusion Standard.' This change better reflects the standard's objectives, emphasizing that all natural capital projects should prioritize community inclusion, even if measurable community benefits aren't always achievable.

The project supports transparency and trust by publishing their 'Scope and Product Definition Document' to the Community Benefits Network on the Scottish Nature Finance Pioneers Basecamp platform.

September-October 2024

The development of the 'NFCA Community Inclusion Standard' is progressing well, with good alignment across work packages. This progress includes BSI signing our project MOU on October 1st, and the release of the v0.2 alpha version of the Community Inclusion Standard Plug-in and Best Practice Guide for consultation with MOU signatories from October 31st to November 18th.

November-December 2024

The in-person Building Confidence in Nature Finance Roundtable event, held in Stirling on November 6-7th, was very well received by the 30 attendees. To expand the event's reach, a 90-minute open summary session was held online on November 20th at 1:30-3:00pm, with 75 attendees.
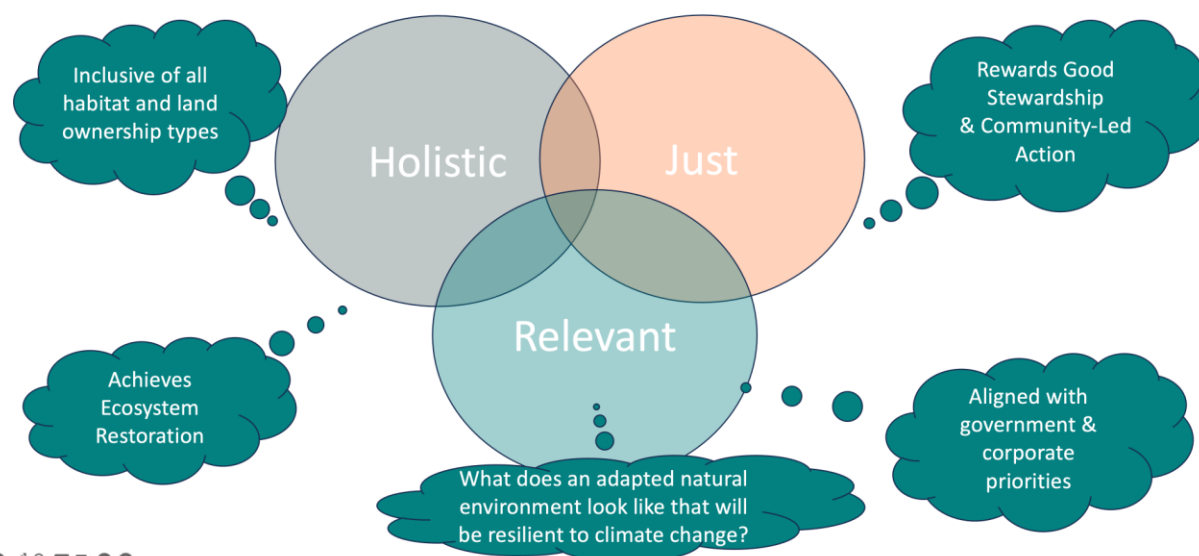
Figure 5: Common Vision for Nature Finance inspired by Stirling event and follow up conversations with participants and NFCA membership (FCCT)

The NFCA Community Inclusion Standard Plug-in and accompanying Best Practice Guide, written in plain English, are now available for public consultation from 4th December to 13th January. The consultation is seeking contributions from members of the Scottish Nature Finance Pioneers, Nature Finance Certification Alliance, Ecosystems Knowledge Network, and FIRNS Community of Practice.

The Woodland Carbon Code, Peatland Code, Wilder Carbon Standard for Nature and Climate, CreditNature (Ecosystem Restoration Code), Saltmarsh Code, and UK Carbon Code of Conduct were invited to engage with the consultation process and provided useful insights. The UK Confederation of Forest Industries (Confor) is also fully engaged, with a view to joining up with their good practice guide on community engagement for the forestry sector.

Furthermore, the latest version of the Saltmarsh Code has adopted our draft plug-in, and updates to the Peatland Code will reference future adoption.

Three members of our team, Rachel Nixseaman from Deciding Matters, Andy Grundy from Soil Association Certification, and Emma Cooper from the Scottish Land Commission, have been appointed to the advisory group for the British Standards Institute's BSI Flex 705 discovery phase. Additionally, Matthew Hannon from the University of Strathclyde has been appointed as Technical Author. This BSI Flex 705 project focuses on Nature Markets, Community Participation, and Community Benefits.

January - February 2025

The public consultation on the Community Inclusion Standard (CIS) closed this month, with over 15 constructive responses received. The main areas identified for further development and clarity were the tiering system and proportionality. An executive board paper was prepared and discussed at the Woodland Carbon Code to secure their ongoing commitment to reviewing the CIS plugin for adoption in their standard. Main areas of concern related to the intended application of the CIS UK-wide, given the dominant focus on Scottish case studies and only one case study in England. Feedback from asset managers and buyers continues to confirm that the standard must be UK-wide to be adoptable.

The Interface Meeting with the British Standards Institute in January confirmed a high alignment between the CIS and BSI Flex 705. The CIS will be a certifiable standard for projects to comply with, ideally housed within existing or future ecosystem service schemes or codes. BSI Flex 705 will be a standard for existing or future ecosystem service schemes or codes to comply with. Adoption of the CIS plugin by a scheme or code will be a valid option for compliance with BSI Flex 705.

March-April 2025

The CIS Plug-in has been encoded into Kana Hub and is ready for release under Creative Commons licensing (CC BY-NC-ND). The accompanying best practice guide, including the community benefits roadmap, will be presented at the upcoming NFCA members meeting on April 24th and published online by April 30th.

Lead partners on each of the workstreams will promote their specific outputs using their own channels (including LinkedIn, newsletters, working groups, etc).

Iconic Blockchain confirms a private donation into the NFCA and Community Inclusion Standard (CIS), ensuring the organisation and the CIS will continue to operate and develop over 2025/26.

Figure 6: Unpacking the Community Inclusion Best Practice Guide

Best Practice Guide and Advisory Service

FIRNS Outcomes

- Support the restoration of nature and growth of natural capital backed by robust science-based methodologies.
- Explore and demonstrate engagement with community interests in project design, and activities, supporting a just transition.
- Develop effective mechanisms to share benefits with communities, supporting a just transition.

This work package addressed the outcomes above through the following headline outputs:

1. Understand & learn from the community engagement processes being put into practice to inform further development of a UK-wide Best Practice Guide;
2. Embed knowledge of community benefits and community wealth building best practice based into the Best Practice Guide
3. Seek to put community benefits agreements in place, where appropriate.

The work package was led by Deciding Matters, who oversaw the project and continued to develop the Best Practice Guide, with support from Scottish Land Commission on a training programme and route map to achieve community benefits from natural capital projects.

The original plan budgeted for working with six case studies However, during the project, a seventh case study (Ardtornish) was incorporated. The finalised list of case studies is as follows:

1. Tayvallich Estate (Highlands Rewilding)
2. Dreel Burn (AIA and FCCT)
3. Dumyat (Future Forest Company)
4. Dundreggan (Trees for Life)
5. Whole Farm-Approach (Soil Association Charity)
6. Boothby (Nattergal) - English project
7. Ardtornish (Ardtornish Estate)

Deciding Matters began by holding interactive workshops with each of the originally identified six place-based sites. These workshops were open to direct contacts and relevant colleagues involved in community engagement. They explored the Best Practice Guide and each site's community activities to find areas for improvement.

The initial intent was for these workshops to be training sessions; however, after phase one, it was clear that interactive sessions and support were more appropriate. This was because, as co-designers of the Guide (a key workstream from phase one), the sites didn't need training but rather time to compare the Guide to their own activities and have access to support from Deciding Matters.

Through comparing the Guide to ongoing community activities, Deciding Matters identified several development needs. These included the need for reporting templates, examples of evidence to support ongoing monitoring, and a condensed, more accessible version of the Guide.
Working with these 7 projects, the Scottish Land Commission (with sub-contracted support from Aigas Associates) undertook the following activity:

- Design a training programme on community benefits and community wealth building for the different stakeholders based on SLC guidance and other resources.
- Draft a route map to show how community benefits from natural capital projects can be agreed amongst interested parties, again using SLC Guidance and other resources.
- Pilot the training programme and route map with participating projects.
- Refine the training and route map, based on experience with the pilot projects, to publishable standards

They provided regular updates to the Scottish Community Benefits Advisory group, and the CIS Project Steering Group throughout their work. There were slight variations from the initial proposal largely due to a slow start from the pilot projects meaning that rather than a linear evolution of the Route Map this had to be done in parallel with some of the stakeholder interviews resulting in multiple adjustments and iterations as more information was forthcoming. The route map, resources and training took more time to develop, probably due to this iterative process, but the

individual work with the pilots involved less time due to them being at different stages. Deciding Matters and Scottish Land Commission also participated in regular CIS 'plug-in certification' drafting group calls. This ensured that the Guide was developed using appropriate language, suitable signposting, and alignment with the certification product.

The Guide was shared with project partners as part of an internal consultation process to gather feedback before being shared with stakeholders. The feedback received aligned with that from place-based sites, with requests for further examples, specific actions, and condensed content.

The Guide was then developed based on this feedback and shared with the University of Strathclyde for Quality Assurance. The content was checked against phase one outputs and wider ongoing policy work to ensure alignment. Scottish Land Commission secured endorsement of their route map by the Scottish Community Benefits Advisory Group. Deciding Matters then hosted a final interactive workshop open to all place-based partners to gather final comments and feedback before final edits.

Through this iterative process, the Guide is a clear, robust, and accessible document that is useful for both experienced delivery teams and new project groups. In this way we have achieved outputs 1 and 2 (Best Practice Guide).

Output 3 (Community Benefits Agreements) proved more challenging than originally expected. Agreements for community benefits were discussed with all case studies, but only one, Dundreggan, was ready to discuss an MoU at this stage. But even there, the timescale of this project was only long enough to produce a first draft. The length of time it takes to negotiate an agreement, let alone put it in place, has been a key learning point of this project, especially where the idea of an agreement was new for the parties involved in the case studies.

Figure 7: Soil Association in-person meeting, Woodland Trust office Perth

Certification Process

FIRNS Outcomes

- Increase confidence and capability to create market-ready/ investable projects and/or improve market development.
- Create long term opportunities for development of local delivery capacity and reinforcement of supply chains.

This work package addressed the outcomes above through the following headline outputs:

1. Development of an open-source certification plug-in standard, informed and validated by three trial audits and public consultation.
2. The creation of Certification Developer and Trial project pages in the Kana Hub (see below)
3. Facilitation of Certification documents within Kana Hub (via Nature Script)
4. Engagement with existing code operators and project developers
5. Evaluation of requirements for governance and operation

Kana Earth is a green technology company that specializes in developing technical infrastructure to support Nature and Environmental Markets. Its core technology is divided into two main areas: Kana Hub and Kana Seed.

- Kana Hub supports all aspects of project creation and delivery throughout the entire lifecycle of a project. It creates 21st-century data management efficiency and facilitates high integrity and high-quality deliverables for multiple users and stakeholders.
- Kana Seed provides the platform for Asset Managers and other Buyers to confidently invest in Natural Capital projects by providing portfolio management combined with risk analysis and drill-down overviews into the status of individual projects.

The platform utilises advanced AI and Intelligent Monitoring technologies to enable project status and tracking to be determined in sub-annual periods. Kana also provides state-of-the-art technologies for Registry management, combining financial market practices and expectations with high-integrity nature market requirements for maximum user satisfaction.

Partners Deciding Matters, Kana Earth, Soil Association Certification (SAC), and SRUC all participated in a working group for developing the draft Standard, including assessment criteria for validation and verification. The criteria were further refined through three trial audits undertaken by SAC for Dumyat (Future Forest Company), Tayvallich (Highlands Rewilding), and Dreel Burn (Anstruther Improvements Association and Fife Coast and Countryside Trust).

The design intention was that the Standard and its evaluation criteria would be adopted directly into the critical code compliance documentation of the Woodland Carbon Code, the Peatland Code, and Wilder Carbon Standard and would also be incorporated into the BSI flex 705 program as the evaluation standard for determining the delivery of Community Inclusion.

Unfortunately, despite early commitments by the codes to adopt the developing CIS into their compliance documentation, the adoption has yet to be delivered. There is discussion that the standard would be subsequently adopted in future version updates of the individual methodologies, but there is no current timeline for this, and it will extend beyond the timeframe of this project. Representatives from the Codes were invited regularly to project meetings and drafting group calls, but were unable to attend due to staffing capacity, however they did respond to the consultation with valuable insights. Feedback was positive overall, and there is clear alignment between the CIS and existing codes. Each of the Codes will have to undertake a development phase (usually 12 months) to adopt the CIS as an approved plug-in: it was initially hoped that the project consortium could support this process throughout the lifetime of this development phase, but limited capacity from the Codes teams meant this was unable to come to fruition.

As a result, Kana Earth has digitized the documentation and badging as a standalone activity, with the view that it will be incorporated at a later date, spearheaded by its adoption into BSI flex 705. Kana Earth has delivered the digitization of the assessment Project Design Document (PDD), which would be completed by a project developer and submitted to the independent verifier for

evaluation.

Once verification occurs, the project would be allocated a certification shield or badge, which would denote in the public directory of projects that it had passed CIS verification. This process will allow CIS to be seamlessly incorporated into the WCC, PC, and other codes as per the original intention of the plug-in concept but also allows the flexibility of the CIS to operate as a standalone standard. Developers will follow to create the PDD, which can then be submitted as a word document or as part of Kana's integrated verification process to an independent auditor for review and approval.

Kana also developed a page for the NFCA and an associated badge to denote that specific projects were associated with the NFCA and compliant with its objectives and outcomes. Each project associated with the Alliance and has completed a CIS Audit will receive a "Badge" in the Kana Hub public Directory of projects. The Directory can be filtered in various ways to allow a subset of relevant projects to be displayed with maximum ease.

Business Case

FIRNS Outcomes
- Enable or generate revenue and /or cost savings from ecosystem services in order to attract and repay private sector investment.
- Develop a project/business and investment model which can be scaled and replicated.

This work package addressed the outcomes above through the following headline outputs:
- Engagement with investors (asset managers) and buyers (UK listed companies)
- Development of robust business model based on best practice guide
- Scoping of the availability of investment required to launch the certification

Buyer-side Research
A survey by Kana Earth of FTSE 250 companies reveals that buyers are interested in projects that engage with the community, but they don't necessarily think that these projects will be more valuable or expensive.

However, they are concerned that projects don't disrupt existing communities and that they see positive community engagement as favourable. Although buyers are aware of the importance of carbon and biodiversity projects, they are worried about large-scale projects negatively affecting local communities.

To solve this issue, project transparency and suitability are crucial. Evidence of community engagement wouldn't increase the price point, as buyers are still motivated by their own carbon

and biodiversity exposures and where these can be bolstered by favourable ESG, positive PR, and positive corporate responsibility outcomes.

15. Which of the following would motivate your company to buy Biodiversity positive credits?
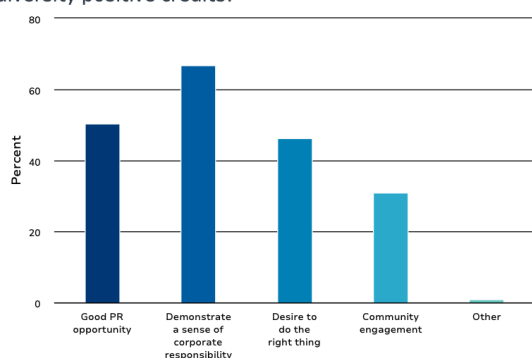

Figure 8: Research on FTSE250
30% of respondents indicated that evidence of community inclusion was a motivating factor in the purchase of biodiversity and carbon credits.

31. In the next five years, how important do you think it will be for organisations to have a visual way of illustrating that their products and services have been carbon offset e.g. some sort of green kitemark?
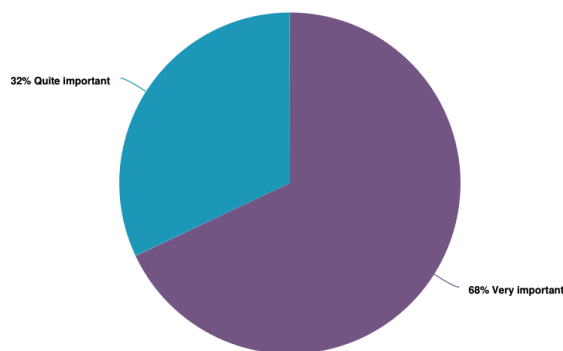

Figure 9: Research on FTSE250
Of particular note, 68% of respondents desired a kitemark "badge" to build trust and confidence that projects meet specific requirements and deliver specific outcomes.

Value		Percent	Responses
Very important		68.0%	68
Quite important		32.0%	32
			Totals: 100

Valuation Model

Kana, on behalf of 7 leading Asset Managers, is creating a Valuation model to deliver a consistent, systemic, explainable, and defendable approach to the valuation of Natural Capital Investment portfolios. This is essential to build confidence to invest in projects, particularly in an emergent and illiquid market environment where project lifecycles can last for decades.

Kana explored including Community benefits into the Natural Capital Valuation Model, and as a result, Community Co Benefits are now an input component in that valuation model. The Model is currently in its Beta phase, with a commercial roll out as a part of the Kana Seed platform planned

for Q3 2025.

The research by Kana significantly supported the recommendations made by Finance Earth during Phase 1 of this project, which were based on a few qualitative interviews. These recommendations suggested that the business model for the Community Inclusion Standard (CIS) should remain centred around its deployment within a recognized and accredited nature credit scheme.

Since the CIS won't be a credit scheme itself, there is no commercial revenue model available and no ability to raise investment. At the same time, this means a minimal cost to sustain the standard, especially as the NFCA has opted to release the standard under open-source creative commons licensing (CC BY-NC-ND). Kana's research has identified an alternative method for the NFCA to achieve a sustainable revenue stream by licensing a kitemark "badge" for projects that want to demonstrate compliance with the CIS and the NFCA's wider set of four investment pillars.

The NFCA kitemark operates independently of any specific nature credit scheme. This allows the NFCA to use its kitemark outside of projects funded through nature markets. This is an area for further exploration by the NFCA secretariat over 2025/6.
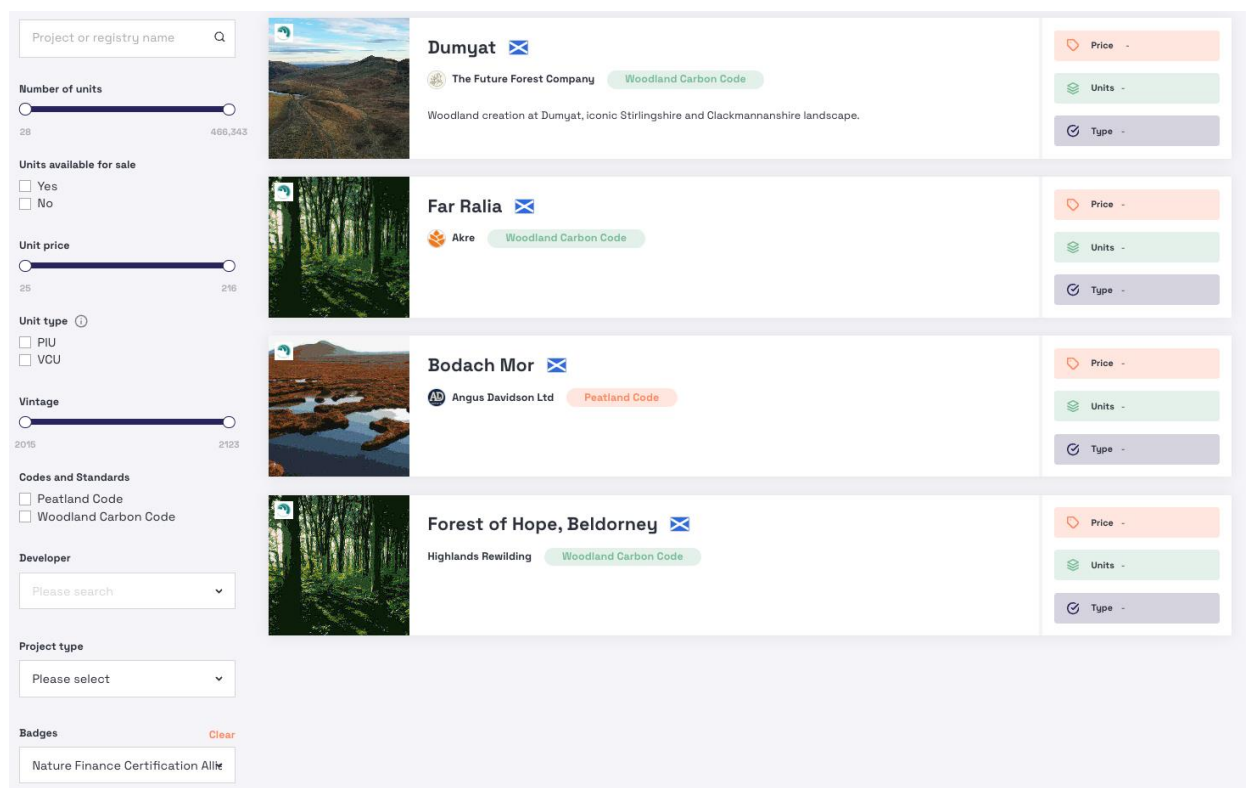

Figure 10: NFCA kitemark "badge" coded into the Kana Platform

Challenges

Input from existing codes

It had been anticipated during planning that the Woodland Carbon Code and Peatland Code would feed into the process in a meaningful way, providing regular feedback to ensure alignment between the CIS, the Guide, and the existing codes. Due to capacity constraints, the Codes were unable to dedicate time to the project beyond light-touch feedback during the final stages. This has meant that the Guide and the CIS will still need to be processed as part of a 12 month development plan to be able to effectively "plug-in" to either of the codes.

Changing needs from application to delivery stages

The phase two application was drafted while phase one was still underway, and so some anticipated needs and delivery requirements had to be adapted as phase two got underway. This included the pivot from training sessions to workshops, and Scottish Land Commission tendering for a subcontractor rather than hiring new staff to deliver the work developing the Routemap.

BSI workstreams delayed

The consortium is heavily involved in the BSI Flex programme and had considered that outputs from phase two might be handed over directly to BSI, anticipating the need for ongoing copyrighting discussions to protect IP and ensure a smooth handover process. The BSI Flex programme has seen delays which has meant that the CIS, Guide and Routemap currently sit as independent tools. Matt Hannon is lead author for the BSI Flex 705 as well as overseeing Quality Assurance for this phase two programme, and is working to ensure alignment between the two as the Flex programme develops.

Only projects which follow accredited methodologies under established codes can be included in the Kana Hub

Projects that follow methodologies and are registered as a participant under an accredited code i.e. Woodland Carbon Code, Peatland Code, Wilder Standard can be allocated a badge. Several projects such as Tayvallich - Highlands Rewilding and Dreel Burn - Credit Nature could not be allocated a badge as they are projects that are not registered with a recognised and accredited code or standard.

Additional Benefits

BSI Flex 705
The Guide has been used as part of a suite of evidence for the development of the Flex 705, influencing UK Standards.

Online Resources
Once signed off, the Guide will be available online as a tool with downloadable and printable resources, helping nature-based projects begin planning effective community engagement processes.

Kana Valuation Model
The Kana Valuation Model now considers inclusion of community benefits, using the principles and methodologies laid out in the CIS project outputs.

Community Benefits Training
Scottish Land Commission has established a training programme which will be utilised by the new community benefits team (a joint staffing venture from Scottish Land Commission and Community Land Scotland). This training programme is an accompanying tool to sit alongside the Community Benefits Routemap.

Maintenance Plans

New Community Benefits Roles
Scottish Land Commission and Community Land Scotland have recruited a new team who will work together to support communities across Scotland to unlock community benefits. Deciding Matters will regularly engage with these teams and embed any new learning into the Guide, updating online tools.

Deciding Matters/NFCA partnership
Deciding Matters will host the Guide on our website, with a copy also available via NFCA. Deciding Matters will continue to collaborate with NFCA to share learning and best practice, which will be reflected in the resources.

Kana Hub
Kana Hub will host the PDDs and the online pages for the standard. Maintenance of the Content and any changes to the forms remains under the responsibility of the Standard itself hosted by the NFCA until such time as individual codes adopt the programme officially.

NFCA CIS Adoption

NFCA will monitor and measure the numbers of projects who adopt the CIS, working through validation and verification. They will continue to engage with the Codes to support any development activities, and will record where the CIS is able to sit as a plug-in alongside existing standards. NFCA and Kana will work together to identify impacts on financing which result from adoption of the CIS.

Further Works

BSI Flex Programme

Rachel is an Advisory Group Member for the BSI Flex 705 programme and will embed learning from the FIRNS programme into this work. BSI Flex 705 is due to be shared for consultation in late 2025, with a final completion date likely for early 2026.

Codes Development

It is anticipated that each of the existing Codes will undertake a development phase to incorporate the CIS as a plug-in. This will depend on staffing capacity, although the CIS consortium partners will continue to provide support where possible.

FIRNS Funding Acknowledgement

FIRNS funding has been acknowledged on all outputs and will be included on any published web pages. All outputs will be available via the NFCA website: https://www.natcert.earth/tag/community-inclusion-standard/

ANNEX 1 – Stakeholders Consulted

Consultation responders:

- Bidwells
- Community Benefit Advisory Group
- Community Woodlands Association
- Fauna & Flora
- Federated Hermes
- Fisheries Management Scotland
- Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery
- Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park
- National Finance Certification Alliance
- National Parks Partnership
- NatureScot
- PINC Partnership
- RSPB
- Scottish Forum on Natural Capital
- Scottish Land and Estates

Dreel Burn	Representative Credit Nature
	Representative Anstruther Improvements Association
	Staff Member Anstruther Improvements Association
	Representative Fife Coast & Countryside Trust
	Representative Rethink Carbon
Dumyat	Senior Forest Manager, Future Forest Company
	Conservation Manager. Future Forest Company
	Representative Menstrie Community Council
	Operations Lead - The Conservation Volunteers
	Volunteer - Butterfly Conservation
	Additional Staff Members * 5, Future Forest Company
Dundreggan	Conservation Manager, Trees for Life
	Representative Glenmoriston Improvement Group (now incorporated within Glenmoriston Millennium Hall Community Association)
	Representative West Glenmoriston Community Company * 2
	Outreach Officer, Trees for Life
Small Farms Project	Farming and Land Use Advisor, Soil Association
	Outreach Manager (Woodland Creation), Woodland Trust Scotland
	Carbon Manager, Woodland Trust Scotland
	Outreach Advisor (Woodland Creation) * 2, Woodland Trust Scotland
Boothby Wildland	Site & Communities Co-ordinator, Nattergal
	Project Manager (Landscape Recovery), Nattergal
	Volunteer * 3
	Neighbour
	Member of Local Champions Group * 2
	Head of Operations, Nattergal
Ardtornish	Estate Manager, Ardtornish Estate
	Representatives of Morvern Community Development Company * 2
	Representative of Morvern Community Council
	Representative of Morvern Community Woodland * 3
	Representative of Morven Community trust
	Representatives of Edinburgh University Forest and Peatland Initiative * 3
	Representative of CAOLAS
	Representative Morvern Futures

Table 1: Stakeholders consulted by AIG Associates on behalf of the Scottish Land Commission

Also input from Highland Rewilding (Tayvallich), Savills, members of CBAG (including: Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Community Land Scotland, Scottish Forestry, Forestry and Land Scotland, Scottish Government, South of Scotland Enterprise, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park), Soil Association, Deciding Matters and others via SLC.

Table 2: Stakeholder organisations engaged through in-person event

Table 3: Stakeholder organisations engaged through NFCA members. Both through the monthly meet-ups for all members and unilateral conversations with the NFCA Secretariat - FCCT.