

QUICK GUIDE TO COMMON GOOD LAND USE FOR POTENTIAL COMMON GOOD LAND USERS



What is common good land use?

Land is one of our most fundamental resources and its management is therefore one of the key social and environmental justice issues of our times – whether for dealing with climate change, tackling poverty, or creating a more sustainable food system. In England alone, more than half the land is owned by just 1% of the population, making it challenging for everyone else to access the many health and social benefits it offers, from affordable housing, to growing your own food.

Fortunately, there is a growing movement of people trying to address these issues by imagining a different land system, one where land is owned and managed for shared public benefit rather than as a private commodity. At Shared Assets, we call this ‘common good land use’, which we define as land use or management that:

- Creates shared benefits
- Supports sustainable livelihoods
- Enriches the environment
- Produces the things people need
- Has an element of community control
- Is at the centre of a wider system change

Although common good land users often have huge ambition, optimism, and creativity, they could achieve much more if properly supported to overcome the challenges they face in accessing land and specialist advice, paying staff well, and connecting with like-minded groups.

COMMON GOOD LAND USE

A QUICK GUIDE FOR POTENTIAL COMMON GOOD LAND USERS



What do we know about Common Good Land Users?

Our 2019 research (<http://bit.ly/SOTSReport2019>) shows a field of small, diverse, complex organisations, including horticultural worker cooperatives, community-led woodland businesses, and ‘friends of’ parks groups. They are rooted in their communities, with strong social and environmental values. They are optimistic about their projects’ future, but many are financially precarious. The common good land use sector is:

- Generally managing small parcels of land (although some operate at a significant scale)
- Most often working on woodland, horticultural land, or parks/open space
- Highly dependent on freelance or part-time staff and volunteers
- Usually working with small budgets and surpluses
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Top Tips for Becoming a Common Good Land User

Be clear about your purpose

- Have a clear vision and way of describing what you’re doing, and why. This will help build the networks of allies and collaborators that so many common good land users rely on, and enable you to understand the type of land and tenure you need.
- Think deeply at the beginning about the structure your group will have and approach it will take (examining your own position and/or level of privilege in intersecting systems of oppression such as white supremacy or patriarchy, as part of this process), as this will influence the community members who feel welcome and able to join in with its work
- Build in time for reflection, planning and recovery – these projects need tenacity and things may not turn out exactly as you plan

Visit existing projects – and ask the hard questions

- Find other people who’ve done similar things – even if not in exactly the same field. Talking to others will give useful insight on what to do – and what not to do. Also, check out our quick guide for ‘Current Common Good Land Users’.
- Join an existing project – you may feel after some visits that this is a better use of your time and resources than the pressure of starting from scratch

Research the best land tenure and legal structure for your project

- Decide the type and length of tenure you need, depending on the type of work you want to do
- Ask others about the pros and cons of the legal structure they’ve chosen, and try to allow yourself flexibility to change your structure as your organisation develops

Resources

- For land data: <https://landexplorer.cc/>
- For inspiration: <https://makinglandwork.wordpress.com/>
- For tenure support: <http://www.sharedassets.org.uk/tenure-choices>
- For understanding intersectionality: <https://www.redpepper.org.uk/becoming-a-better-ally-how-to-understand-intersectionality/>

QUICK GUIDE TO COMMON GOOD LAND USE FOR CURRENT COMMON GOOD LAND USERS



What is common good land use?

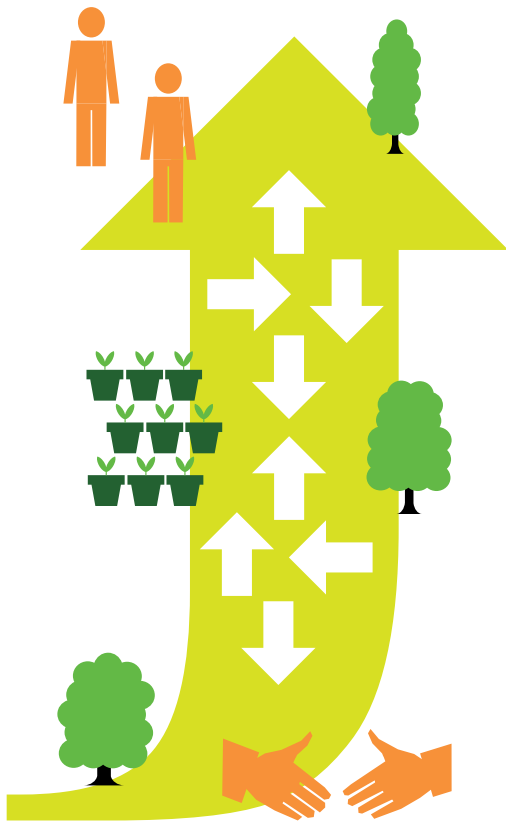
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Top Tips for Common Good Land Users

Use your networks, but look beyond your silos

- Deepen local connections with others who share your values, but also more widely to include other local businesses, groups and organisations who may be able to provide support
- Nurture connections with communities with close ties to common spaces under threat, to help build a broader base of support for a project
- Use land as a tool to bring together different groups (e.g. food growers, nature conservationists and policy-makers) to discuss ways to work together on a specific site
- Consider the make-up of your group, and the ways in which your approach may be re-entrenching existing hierarchies within the land sector – then do the work to engage with alternative philosophies and models of land work, whilst not asking under-represented groups to contribute their labour for free to improve your practice

Consider cross-subsidising

- Ensure your business approach takes into account the multiple barriers to making a sustainable living from the land – many successful common good land use businesses have different elements which cross-subsidise each other (e.g. different contracts or products that pay more than others)

Think about how you make an impact

- Consider creative ways you can measure your impact and explain it clearly to potential funders. The impact of a well-managed local green space goes well beyond your particular project, but can be hard to quantify.
- Taking time to think about how your work adds value to other local organisations, and the role you play in local economic resilience, may help you find unlikely allies
- Consider embracing ‘community business’ credentials (e.g. by strengthening your business model and community accountability) to meet the challenges of scaling up

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QUICK GUIDE TO COMMON GOOD LAND USE FOR LANDOWNERS



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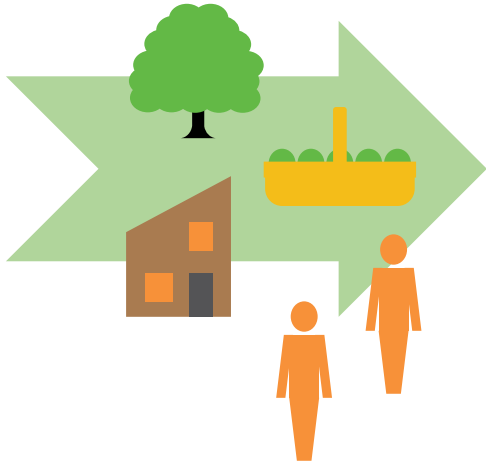
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Common good land users can make excellent partners to help you achieve objectives around wellbeing, environmental quality and social cohesion, or bring underused land back into management.

Top Tips for Working with Common Good Land Users

For public landowners

- Pay the legal costs of common good land users where possible in lease or land access negotiations, since these can be prohibitively expensive for small non-profit organisations. Unlike in commercial transactions, common good land users should also not be expected to pay your legal costs.
- Designate a 'champion' within the local/regional authority tasked with helping common good land users navigate these systems. This would go a long way towards creating successful partnerships, and save multifunctional common good land use organisations having to coordinate different parts of public bodies.

For private landowners

- Draw up a lease, licence or service level agreement which clearly sets out what each of you will do – this is crucial as it will help prevent projects falling apart and hard work being lost

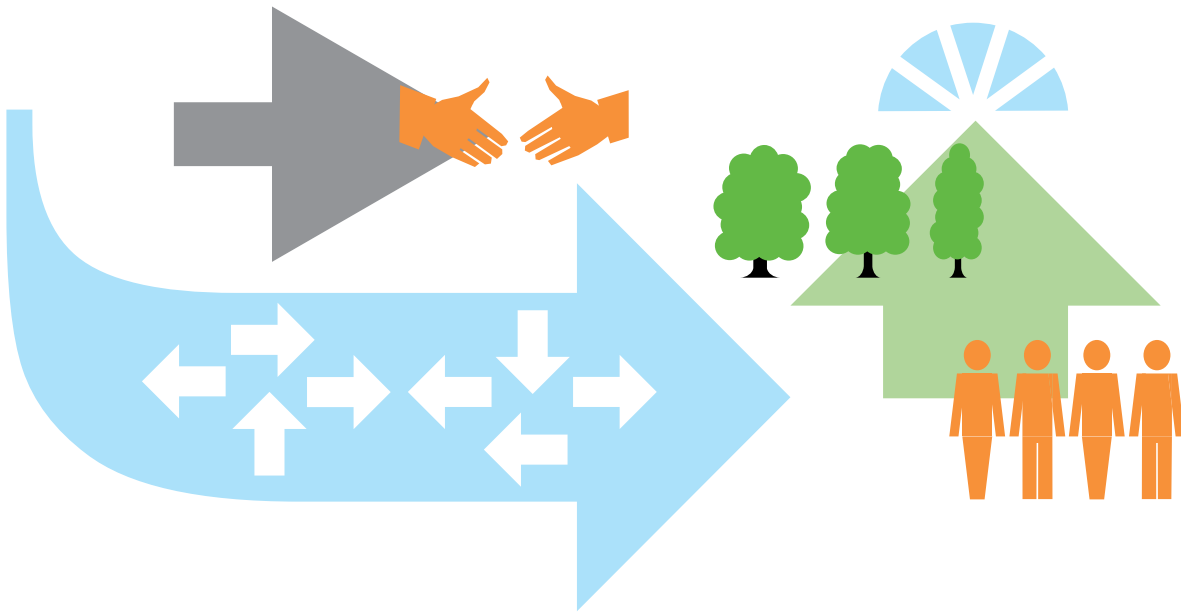
For both

- Make your interest in working with common good land users known widely, being clear about the land you can offer, and any use restrictions. People looking to use land for the common good often struggle to find a suitable piece of land/a sympathetic landowner – making them aware of specific opportunities to work with you can save you both time.
- Ensure a realistic balance of risk and responsibilities is reflected in the lease/tenure agreement you draw up, to offer groups sufficient freedom to operate in a way that gives them the best chance of sustainability and doesn't require them to take on onerous liabilities when they are not ready to do so

Resources

- For case studies: <https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/find-out-more/case-studies/>
- For support: <https://locality.org.uk/services-tools/support-for-councils-service-providers/> or <https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/find-out-more/landowners-and-professionals-2/>
- For tenure support: <http://www.sharedassets.org.uk/tenure-choices>

QUICK GUIDE TO COMMON GOOD LAND USE FOR FUNDERS AND POLICY MAKERS



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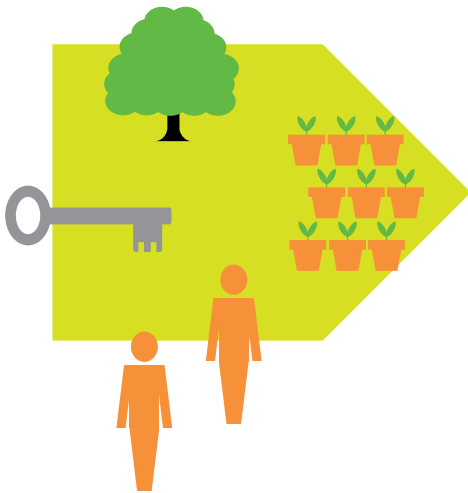
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Top Tips for Supporting Common Good Land Users

For policy makers

- Make transparent and detailed information on land ownership and characteristics readily available (e.g. by opening up Land Registry data on ownership)
- Undertake changes to the planning system which can be beneficial for common good land users:
 - Make ecologically sound land management and creation of social value material considerations
 - Give preferential treatment, such as free pre-application advice, to common good and community organisations
 - Consider a new set of 'use classes' for land-based activities
- In England:
 - Consider development in policy along the lines of the Welsh One Planet Development policy and the Future Generations Act
 - Strengthen community right to buy legislation and create a Land Fund, as Scotland has done, to support community land ownership

For funders

- Be led by common good land users' aims, and the support they say they require to fulfil their objectives over the long term. Aim to reduce the time organisations spend justifying or reframing their activities to answer project-based funding calls.
- Build on the networks and connections that already exist over creating new support programmes
 - Enable peer support, networking, and collaboration, and reduce the fierce competition for small pots of money
 - Provide generic community business support for early stage organisations, then more sector-specific support focused on scaling, financial sustainability and strengthening the delivery of wider social and economic impact
- Fund multi-year core costs (e.g. staffing, processes, specialist advice) to support growth and sustainability at the timescale needed for a land-based business
- Encourage people to pay themselves properly and fund those costs (e.g. of a Living Wage). Too often these organisations are held together by one or two very dedicated people – they should be paid properly for their time, if nothing else to ensure sustainability of the organisation when they move on.
- Provide funding and adapt resources to be specifically aimed at supporting people without a background in land work to get into the sector, informed by their needs

Resources

- For policy: <https://www.gov.scot/policies/land-reform/scottish-land-fund/>
- For planning: <http://bit.ly/PlanningForTheCommonGood>
- For inspiration: <https://makinglandwork.wordpress.com/>