Developing the national CLLD network

Report of the 3rd national workshop
November 2025 (V2.1)

Executive summary

This report is provided by the CLLDNet Steering Group representing rural and island LAGs across Scotland. It is produced for the Steering Group by Urban Foresight.

The national workshop on 4th and 5th November 2025 brought together representatives from Scotland's rural and island Local Action Groups, Youth Local Action groups and community-led local development (CLLD) stakeholders. The aim was to explore collectively the vision, structure, and future operations of a new national network for rural and island CLLD in Scotland. The workshop formed a key part of the journey to design and develop a national support structure that strengthens rural and island Scotland's approach to CLLD .

Participants strongly supported the creation of a national network that provides structure, coherence, and advocacy while protecting local autonomy.

Across six facilitated discussion sessions, participants provided detailed insights into what high-performing LAGs look like; what sustainability requires; how governance should function; the capacity and capability challenges in the CLLD system; the role of international collaboration; and how communication and ways of working can be improved.

Clear patterns emerged across the six sessions. Participants consistently emphasised the importance of transparency, simple structures, meaningful inclusion, national coordination, shared learning, stronger relationships, and long-term funding stability. Participants also stressed the need for better visibility, strategic alignment, peer support, and youth participation to make CLLD stronger, more inclusive, and influential over the longer term. Annual funding cycles, capacity pressures and patchy communication were seen as major constraints.

The workshop outputs offer a coherent, community-driven evidence base for designing the national network's core functions and early priorities. Considerations are to:

1/ Establish a national coordination function (immediate priority)

2/ Implement simple, transparent, and phased governance for the network

3/ Build system-wide capacity and capability

4/ Strengthen communication as a core system function

5/ Embed youth voice in governance and network operations

6/ Support long-term planning and stability

7/ Develop a strategy for national and international collaboration and learning

8/ Co-create next steps with LAGs, YLAGs, and key stakeholders

Network development is set out in six actionable steps. These take learnings from the national network steering group the November and previous workshops. They will help create a network governance and operational structure that represents, advocates for, and stands up for rural and island Scotland.

Contents

1/ Introduction

A new community-led local development (CLLD) network is being initiated and developed for rural and island Scotland. This report documents the findings from the national workshop held in November and sets out recommendations for next steps.

Urban Foresight has been commissioned to support the development of a new national network to support CLLD across rural and island Scotland and, as part of this work, hosted a two-day national workshop in Glasgow on 4th and 5th November 2025.

This was a critical step in development. The workshop brought together members of Local Action Groups (LAGs), Youth Local Action Groups (YLAGs), CLLD Coordinators, and policy stakeholders to provide direct input into the design and future direction of the network.

The workshop aimed to generate collective insight to inform recommendations, decision-making and system-wide improvement.

Rural and island CLLD enables local people, businesses, and organisations to shape development in their own areas. It uses local knowledge to design practical responses to rural challenges that do not fit standard, top-down programmes. By bringing community, public, and private partners together, CLLD builds a collective local voice, targets resources where need is greatest, and supports integrated solutions across sectors. It also strengthens local capacity in governance and delivery, leaving long-term skills and relationships in place after individual projects finish.

The workshop was designed to build a shared understanding of challenges and opportunities for CLLD across rural and island Scotland and gather views on the structures, principles and practical mechanisms needed to support a strong national network.

This report presents a detailed synthesis of participant contributions, reflecting the breadth and depth of experience within and across this CLLD community. It forms an important evidence base for shaping the functions and structure that will enable the proposed network to meet ambitions for influence, advocacy, representation, and engagement.

This work is being funded by a development grant secured from Scottish Government.

2/ Context

The national workshop in November 2025 was the third of three workshops designed to help develop a national network for CLLD across rural and island Scotland.

This section outlines the previous work to push forward network development and summarises the current strategic and policy context.

Progress so far

March 2024

An initial workshop on 19th and 20th March 2024 aimed to:

→ Develop prospects for CLLD in the context of emerging and future rural and islands policy

→ Explore the various ways that CLLD could be implemented in the future

→ Agree how the CLLD community should support each other and effectively influence policy development and implementation.

June 2025

The second workshop of LAGs and national representatives on 12th June 2025 took forward these important discussions and was a significant step towards establishing potential network ambition.

It sought to:

→ Identify shared priorities and challenges in rural and island CLLD

→ Identify actions for advocacy and policy development

→ Agree priorities for the CLLD network work plan.

Content progressed earlier discussions and outputs from March 2024. It focused on the LAGs' aspirations for a credible, robust, and effective national network of LAG areas and established solid foundations on which to build objectives for strategic, operational, and structural details.

Contributions from government stakeholders raised awareness of existing and new policy affecting rural and island communities in 2025 and the future, raising participants' awareness of, and interest in, the genuine prospect of influencing national policy for better local outcomes.

In-person networking and peer-to-peer exchange between CLLD areas continued to build relationships and opportunities for knowledge sharing and collaboration.

November 2025

This third workshop intended to follow up agreed priorities and co-design the steps needed to create a credible and sustainable national network for CLLD in rural and island Scotland.

Supported by the 20 LAGs, seven YLAGs, and Scottish Government, it aimed to move quickly towards the creation of the CLLD network for rural and island Scotland, meeting already agreed national objectives to:

1/ Create a new CLLD network for rural and island Scotland comprising representatives of all involved in the delivery of CLLD approaches

2/ Create a coordinating support resource that will bring representatives together and coordinate agreed policy positions and communications for the CLLD network.

3/ Create clear lines of communication with the Scottish CLLD sector, facilitating two-way communication between the sector, those engaged in CLLD-related policy making, and sectoral representatives on national bodies.

4/ Establish opportunities to link CLLD activities more effectively with wider local and regional initiatives.

5/ Build the CLLD sector's capacity, knowledge, robustness, and sustainability.

Policy context

National context is a crucial component of network development. It influences network functions and form because it sets the strategic, policy, and operational landscape in which a future CLLD network will operate.

The context was set out at the third national workshop by Jody Fleck, Head of Rural Communities, Scottish Government.

CLLD

The workshop opened with a reminder of the core principles of CLLD; an approach where communities design and deliver local economic and social change through Local Action Groups (LAGs), supported by LAG Coordinators and Accountable Bodies.

This model empowers local partnerships, strengthens decision-making, and enables areas to tailor activity to their own needs. These principles remain at the heart of Scotland's ongoing commitment to locally driven rural and island improvement.

National policy landscape and Scottish Government priorities

Key national government priorities are central drivers of rural and island policy:

- Economic improvements

- Tackling child poverty

- Addressing the climate emergency, and

- Reforming public services

Core policy documents relevant to CLLD include the Rural Delivery Plan, the National Islands Plan, and the emerging Rural Support Plan. Wider work to strengthen localism and place-based approaches across Scotland is of increasing relevance.

There are questions and opportunities about how the CLLD model might evolve. The opportunity exists to strengthen local partnerships through collaboration, improve monitoring and evaluation, increase leverage of wider funding, and contribute more visibly to national outcomes.

Why this is important

The wider policy environment in Scotland will shape CLLD's future direction. Framing this context at the workshop start intended to ensure participants approached workshop sessions with clarity about strategic expectations and the policy context into which recommendations must fit.

The Scottish Rural Communities Policy Review

A Scottish Rural Communities Policy Review is ongoing. It is a Scottish Government-commissioned review (running from late 2024 to early 2026) of how key national support arrangements for rural and island communities are working, and how they should be reshaped for the future. It is being led by Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), working with partners such as Ipsos and the University of the Highlands and Islands.

Participants were briefed by Dr. Carey Doyle of SRUC on the review's purpose, scope, and proposed outputs. The review focuses on the three core elements of the current rural community support system: CLLD, Scottish Rural Action, and Scottish Rural Network.

The presentation highlighted four emerging theories of change, ongoing place-based research, and early insights relevant to CLLD including where duplication or inefficiencies currently exist.

The Review's timeline, reporting to Ministers through 2025, with publication expected by spring 2026, was set out to demonstrate how the workshop's outputs will directly inform, and be informed by, wider government work on rural community policy.

3/ Methodology

The workshop was designed to follow up agreed priorities and co-design the steps needed to create a strong, collaborative, and influential CLLD network for rural and island Scotland.

Workshop aims and objectives

The workshop aim was to support the development of a stronger, collaborative, and influential CLLD network for rural and island Scotland.

Its specific objectives were to:

1/ Co-design the future of the network, agreeing purpose, priorities, roles, and functions that reflect a collective understanding of how LAGs could evolve to represent their communities even better.

2/ Build relationships and create buy-in among LAGs to ensure strong network foundations, providing space to network, connect, and share ideas.

3/ Build a programme of development to enhance capacity, building organisational resilience and credible, robust policy advocacy.

4/ Initiate a unified perspective on how to build long-term financial sustainability.

Outputs

→ An agreed vision, objectives, and guiding principles

→ An agreed name and branding

→ An agreed approach to communications across the network to unite LAGs and facilitate knowledge exchange

→ An agreed governance approach

→ An agreed position / aspiration on international engagement

→ A draft outline capacity building programme

Intended outcomes

1/ A vision, mission statement, and objectives that reflect collective aspirations and future intentions for policy engagement and influence.

2/ Consensus on key principles of a highly functioning LAG that are needed support the vision, objectives, and network operation.

3/ An agreed approach to communications and capacity building that is collaborative and cooperative and improves ways of working and optimises opportunities.

Workshop design

The workshop was delivered over two half-days and was attended by representatives from LAGs, YLAGs and partner organisations. The delegate list is provided in Appendix A.

The workshop was designed to ensure:

→ Equal space for all participants to contribute

→ Focus on practical experiences and insights

→ A structured approach to capture themes, challenges and opportunities

→ Cross-pollination between LAGs and YLAGs

→ Diversity of geographical, demographic and organisational perspectives

Agenda

The two days were structured to revisit and agree the LAG representatives' common understanding of policy and how the network can influence at a strategic level, energise the debate about how to build capacity and capability, and agree how to build connections and extend networks.

Day 1, "Our ambitions for advocacy, influence, and local community action" was about consolidating collective understanding of rural policy priorities, refreshing on the wider strategic context for CLLD, and airing aspirations for the future.

Day 2, "Developing a stronger, collaborative, and influential CLD network" discussed and agreed practical suggestions for how to form the mechanics of moving the aspiration forward.

Full details of the agenda are provided in Appendix B.

To meet objectives effectively and co-create the intended outputs, six interactive sessions were devised to cover specific core themes to inform network development.

Interactive sessions

A: Characteristics of high-performing LAGs   **D:** Capacity and capability

B: Network sustainability   **E:** International collaboration

C: Governance structure   **F:** Ways of working and communication

Data collection and analysis

Participants were arranged into small (up to eight participants, online and in person) groups with discussions facilitated by Urban Foresight, Scottish Government, and Scottish Rural Network. The groups balanced LAG roles and geographies.

Detailed notes were taken during each session and photographs were taken of all sticky notes and written contributions. These findings were digitised and later synthesised into thematic findings. Where contributions were repeated across multiple groups, these were consolidated into shared themes. The analysis draws directly from participant contributions and does not impose external policy interpretation.

The methodology ensures that the findings presented in this report reflect the lived experience, priorities, and ambitions of the CLLD community.

Workshop experience

In-person responses

25

30

Online responses
3

Both responses
2

Total responses

Overall experience

Poor **3**% Fair **13**% Good **47**% Excellent **37**%

OVER 80%
rated their overall experience as good or excellent
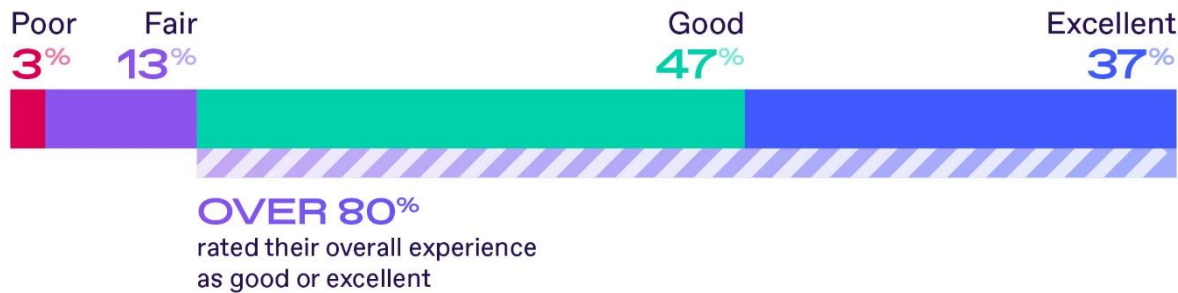
In-person responses rated good or excellent; Online experience considered fair or poor by some respondents, due to some issues in planning and operation - this will be reviewed thoroughly for learnings for future events.

Breakout sessions

Ineffective	Somewhat effective	Very effective
6%	47%	47%

Participants valued open discussion and cross-area collaboration.

Confidence in network's future

Not confident	Somewhat confident	Extremely confident
7%	55%	38%
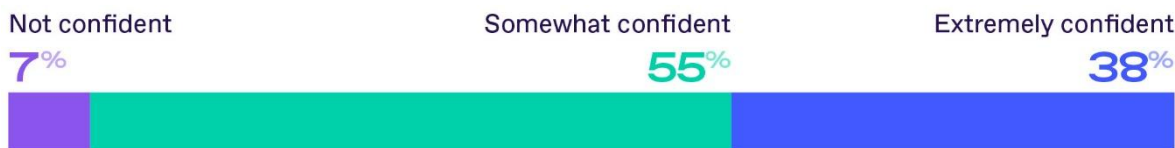
Most attendees felt positive about the CLLD Network's future but noted the need for clearer next steps and structure.

Workshop aspects (average ratings)

Organisation & logistics: Excellent 35%, Good 52%, Fair 13%, Poor 0%

Facilitation & flow: Excellent 38%, Good 45%, Fair 14%, Poor 3%

Opportunities to contribute: Excellent 59%, Good 31%, Fair 10%, Poor 0%

Venue: Excellent 57%, Good 36%, Fair 7%, Poor 0%

Networking opportunities: Excellent 43%, Good 43%, Fair 11%, Poor 3%

Legend: Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor
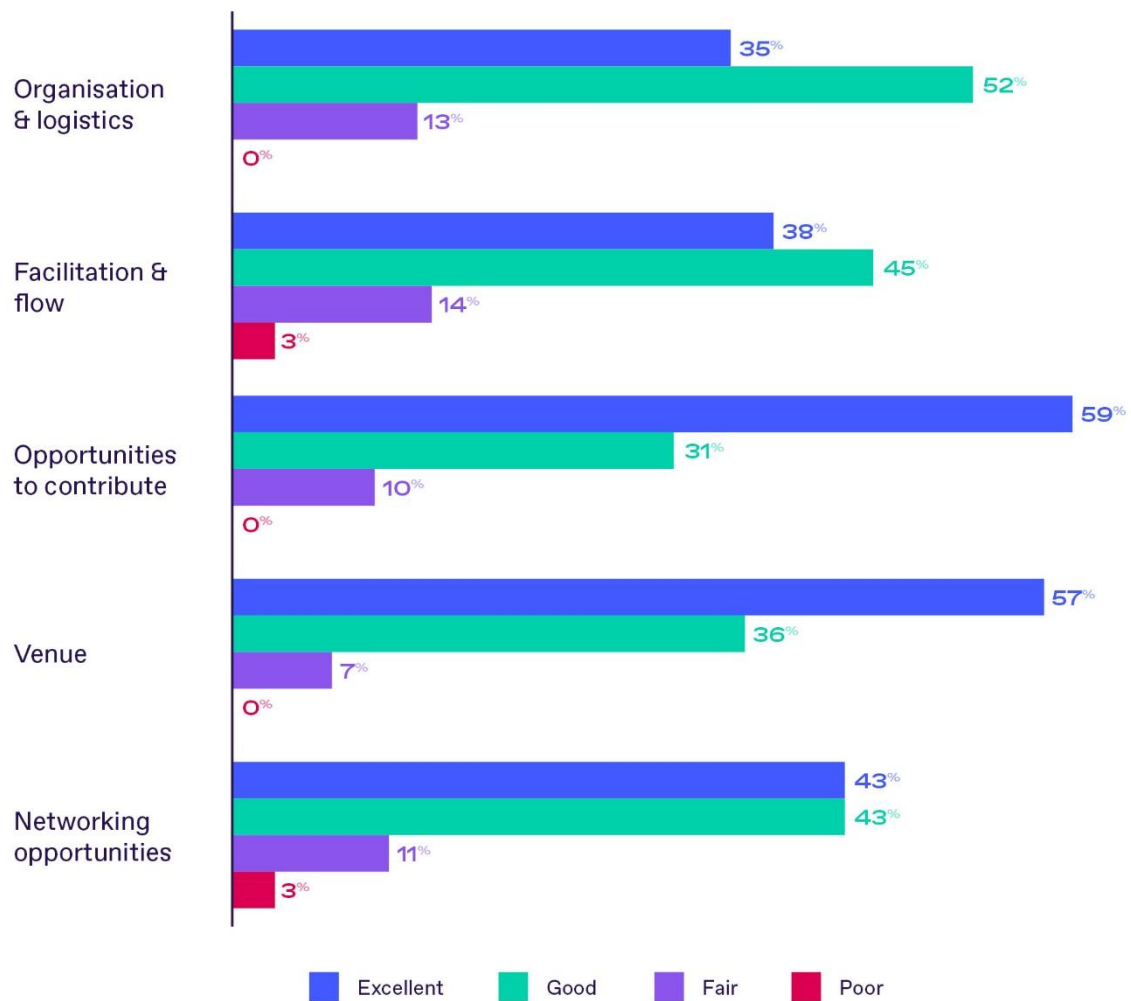
Key themes from comments

What worked well	Areas for improvement
→ High energy and enthusiasm for collaboration	→ The early mapping exercise lacked clarity
→ A good policy overview and national policy update	→ Some policy sessions felt too detailed
→ Effective facilitation and space for contributions	→ Requests for clearer strategic direction and continuity planning

Overall takeaway

The workshop successfully re-energised the network and demonstrated a strong appetite for collective working, with participants seeking clearer frameworks for sustaining collaboration and sharing learning nationally.

4/ Outputs from the interactive sessions

This section thematically summarises the outputs from the six interactive sessions from the national workshop.

Session A: Criteria for a high-performing rural or island LAG

Session A explored characteristics of high-performing LAGs and how a national network could support this.

Participants were asked to describe the characteristics of a high-performing Local Action Group (LAG). The discussion produced a rich and consistent set of views, reflecting both shared aspirations and current challenges across areas. The contributions demonstrate a clear collective understanding of what strong LAG performance looks like and what conditions are needed for this to be achieved.

Discussions covered:

1/ Core characteristics of high-performing LAGs

2/ How close LAGs feel to this aspiration

3/ What LAGs need from a central coordinating body

4/ Implications for the future national CLLD network.

Outputs from the session provide a clear foundation for designing a network that is capable of strengthening performance across all LAGs.

1/ Core characteristics of high-performing LAGs

Across all groups there was strong agreement that high-performing LAGs demonstrate effective leadership, clear governance, diverse representation, strategic focus, strong community connection, and the ability to show meaningful impact.

Leadership, governance and decision-making

Participants emphasised the importance of strong leadership, typically expressed as a capable Chair and Vice-Chair supported by a proactive and strategic coordinator. High-performing LAGs were described as having clear governance arrangements, transparent processes, good induction for members, and clarity around roles and expectations. They are confident in their decision-making and are able to encourage constructive challenge and maintain consensus without suppressing open debate.

Representation, diversity, and community connection

A recurring theme was the need for LAGs to be broadly representative of the communities they serve. This includes a balance of public, third, and private sector voices, wider demographic diversity, and the involvement of under-represented groups, including young people. High-performing LAGs were described as embedded in their communities, visible, trusted, and motivated by a commitment to local priorities rather than personal or organisational interests.

Strategic focus and forward planning

Participants repeatedly stressed that strong LAGs operate strategically rather than reactively. They have a clear vision linked to local needs and supported by data. They plan beyond annual funding cycles and have the capacity to align multiple funding sources. They understand their contribution to wider local and national policy objectives and use this to shape funding decisions.

Funding stability, flexibility, and resourcing

Almost all groups highlighted the limitations of annual funding cycles. High-performing LAGs were described as those with sufficient stability and resources to plan confidently over multiple years, support activity, engage with communities, and take informed risks. Flexibility across revenue and capital was also seen as essential to meet local needs effectively.

Collaboration, learning, and networking

Strong LAGs were described as outward-looking and collaborative. Participants emphasised the importance of peer learning, knowledge exchange, shared practice, and engagement beyond their immediate area. High-performing LAGs build strong relationships with Scottish Government, other funders, and other LAGs. They contribute to collective advocacy for community-led local development.

Communication, transparency, and identity

Participants noted that high-performing LAGs communicate clearly and consistently, both internally and externally. They are transparent in how decisions are made, articulate their purpose effectively, and promote the value of CLLD within their local area. Many felt that a stronger national identity for CLLD would help amplify this further.

Impact, evaluation, and learning

There was strong consensus that high-performing LAGs understand and evidence the impact of their work. They make clear links between funded projects and strategic outcomes, learn from past delivery, and communicate achievements effectively. Participants felt that improved tools, shared methods and consistent approaches to monitoring and evaluation would support this further.

2/ How close do LAGs feel to this aspiration?

Participants were invited to reflect on their own LAG's current position. Views varied widely, from "around halfway there" to "close but with important gaps".

Common challenges included:

→ Reliance on a small number of individuals, especially Chairs

→ Gaps in representation, particularly private sector and younger voices

→ Limited time for strategic planning due to annual funding pressures

→ Insufficient induction and training for new members

→ Lack of visibility and engagement with elected members, local partners, and the wider public

→ Difficulty integrating YLAGs into core processes

→ Variations in confidence around risk-taking and policy engagement.

While many noted improvements in recent years, no LAG felt able to meet the full aspiration under current conditions. Nonetheless, there was a strong sense of commitment and progress, with many groups describing recent gains in governance, diversity, training, and strategic awareness.

3/ What LAGs need from a central coordinating body

Participants identified a clear set of expectations for a national CLLD coordinating body or network. These needs align strongly with the objectives of this commission and provide direct insight into how a future national network can add value.

High-priority needs

→ Regular, accessible policy briefings

→ National training and induction for LAG members and LAG Coordinators

→ A shared resource library including governance templates and good-practice materials

→ Structured cross-LAG networking, webinars, and thematic sessions

→ Support with monitoring, evaluation, and impact reporting

Systemic improvements

→ Multi-annual funding or earlier annual allocations

→ A national pot for travel costs, particularly for island participation

→ Consistent, centralised processes, and shared standards where appropriate

→ Opportunities to collaborate through joint projects or shared thematic work.

- → Stronger national communication, branding, and visibility for CLLD

- → Coordination of consultation responses and collective advocacy

- → Tools and information to support integration of YLAGs

- → Signposting to wider funding opportunities beyond Scottish Government.

4/ Implications for the future national CLLD network

Participants expressed a strong appetite for a national structure that can provide leadership, coherence and visibility for CLLD, while still protecting the autonomy and local knowledge that underpin the LEADER principles.

Specifically, the network should:

1/ Embed strong governance and shared standards

2/ Build collective capacity through training, guidance and resources

3/ Amplify impact through unified communications and advocacy

4/ Strengthen representation and diversity across the system

5/ Improve coherence and alignment with national policy

6/ Enable long-term strategic planning and multi-year thinking

7/ Foster collaboration across LAGs and external partners.

Session B: Achieving network sustainability

Session B explored how a future national CLLD network can operate sustainably over time.

Participants focused on three interconnected dimensions of sustainability: operational continuity, meaningful inclusion, and financial resilience. Across all discussions there was a strong recognition that sustainability requires deliberate planning, shared structures, and a clearer collective identity, supported by both practical tools and long-term resourcing.

1/ Operational sustainability

Participants emphasised the need for a stable and resilient network capable of maintaining continuity through leadership changes, funding fluctuations, and evolving policy contexts. Strong

governance, clear roles, and strategic planning were repeatedly described as essential foundations for sustainability.

Ensuring continuity and effective governance

To sustain operations over time, participants identified the importance of:

→ A clear strategy and action plan for the network

→ Strong governance structures, including defined roles, accountability, and a dedicated CLLDNet secretariat

→ Succession planning for both LAGs and the national network

→ A strong and empowered steering group to drive direction

→ An agreed, consistent framework for how CLLD operates nationally.

Participants also highlighted the value of:

→ A central resource library

→ Annual project catalogues or brochures

→ Shared tools that promote continuity even when key personnel change.

Improving coordination and shared working

Participants were clear that coordination will rely on shared systems, streamlined communication, and consistent ways of working. Suggested tools and structures included:

→ A national MS Teams channel or shared communication platform

→ Shared applications or portals for grants, communications, or resources

→ Working groups focused on specialist themes

→ A central online community hub and interactive map

→ Guidance on good practice and standardised templates.

Learning from other networks (e.g., Scottish Rural Action, European counterparts) was repeatedly noted as an opportunity to strengthen coordination and avoid duplication.

Identity, confidence and connection

Participants described the importance of building a recognisable national identity for the network to strengthen coordination and pride. This included:

→ Improved branding and marketing

→ Clear messaging about the value and role of CLLD

→ Public celebration of success (e.g., case studies, storytelling, certificates for LAGs)

→ Stronger connections across the network, supported by online and face-to-face opportunities.

Participants noted that a strong identity would help build credibility, advocacy power, and a shared sense of purpose.

2/ Meaningful inclusion

The session explored how the network can embed genuine inclusion of young people, marginalised communities, and protected groups. Participants consistently emphasised that inclusion is not symbolic, it must influence decisions, strengthen the network, and reflect the values of CLLD.

Approaches to meaningful participation

Key principles identified included:

→ Listening actively and respectfully to lived experience

→ Providing capacity, support, and resources to enable participation

→ Ensuring steering group membership reflects the diversity of CLLD communities

→ Building clear succession pathways from YLAG to LAG

→ Deliberately recruiting from under-represented groups and removing barriers to involvement

→ Proactively reaching out and promoting opportunities rather than waiting for people to self-select.

Examples of meaningful inclusion included lived experience panels, youth-led planning, community action plan engagement, and learning exchanges across LAGs.

Creating a network people are proud to be part of

Participants described pride as stemming from:

→ Tangible, measurable outcomes

→ A recognisable brand and clear message

→ Visible success stories and shared achievements

→ Minimal bureaucracy and clear, effective communication

→ Active advocacy for rural and island communities

→ Opportunities to contribute meaningfully, see impact, and grow leadership (including through YLAGs).

A network that is confident, visible, and impactful was seen as one that people would want to champion.

3/ Financial sustainability

Participants recognised that true sustainability requires stable, long-term funding arrangements that allow the network to plan confidently and invest in its own development. They discussed approaches for sustaining the network both with and without multi-year funding.

Operating without multi-year funding

Participants acknowledged the challenges but identified strategies such as:

→ Dynamic, risk-aware planning aligned with long-term vision

→ Developing two to five-year plans, even with only annual funding allocations

→ Building a project pipeline to maintain momentum

→ Mapping funding gaps and collaborating across departments

→ Encouraging LAGs to use a portion of their allocation to support the network

→ Advocating strongly for earlier allocations and a more predictable cycle.

A recurring suggestion was the need to establish some Scottish Government resource allocation to sustain the operation of a viable CLLD network.

Alternative and partnership-based funding models

Participants proposed a range of low-cost, partnership-oriented strategies, including:

→ Collaborating with other funders to reduce costs and share capacity

→ Using community benefits and match funding more effectively

→ Drawing on LAG member expertise for specialist support

→ Attracting external funding streams through joint bids

→ Exploring "community credits" or other community-driven mechanisms

→ Using the CLLD model to distribute or leverage other funding sources.

Participants highlighted the potential for the network to sustain itself by providing value to wider partners, not solely relying on Scottish Government.

The role of digital tools in sustainability

Participants viewed digital infrastructure as essential to sustaining the network, particularly in reducing travel costs, supporting island inclusion, and maintaining engagement across Scotland.

Key suggestions included:

- → Regular short online meetings

- → Maintaining monthly Microsoft Teams calls

- → Online forums or shared portals for documents and discussion

- → Digital management tools for grant processes

- → Hybrid approaches combining digital connection with an annual in-person gathering

- → Consistent use of simple communication platforms, such as those used by YLAGs.

Participants emphasised the importance of balance: digital tools can increase efficiency and reduce costs, but face-to-face relationships remain important for trust, collaboration and joint learning.

4/ "If money were no object"

To inform the long-term vision, participants were asked to imagine an ideal, fully resourced future network. Their responses highlighted what matters most.

High-ambition ideas

- → A professional national campaign (e.g., "John Lewis–style" storytelling) to showcase CLLD

- → Multi-year contracts for staff

- → A well-resourced national coordination team

- → Full-time CLLD network coordinators for different regions

- → Comprehensive activity capacity

- → Significant investment in local research and evidence

- → A clear and formalised connection between the network and government

Low-cost versions

- → Prioritising storytelling and visible communication

- → Strengthening coordination through online platforms

- → Improving advocacy by pooling evidence and case studies

- → Sharing capacity across LAGs and drawing on volunteer expertise

- → Maintaining momentum through clear milestones and collective outputs

Even with limited budgets, participants expressed strong commitment to building a credible, respected, and impactful national network.

5/ Summary of implications for the development of the CLLD network

Session B illustrates that sustainability must be designed into the network from the start. This means:

1/ Establishing strong governance and succession structures

2/ Building a unified identity and shared messaging

3/ Embedding inclusion meaningfully at all levels

4/ Creating systems and tools that support continuity and reduce duplication

5/ Strengthening the network's advocacy role and evidence base

6/ Developing a realistic, flexible approach to funding and resourcing

7/ Using digital tools to improve efficiency while maintaining human connection.

Participants see sustainability not just as the network's ability to survive, but as its ability to remain influential, inclusive, and impactful over time.

Session C: Creating the governance structure

Session C focused on what governance model should underpin a future national CLLD network. Participants drew on their experience of trusted organisations and networks, highlighting the governance principles, structures, and safeguards needed to ensure credibility, legitimacy, and effective operation. Contributions showed strong alignment on the values and behaviours a governance system must embody, alongside varied, yet constructive, views on the optimal formal structure.

1/ Principles of good governance

Across all groups, participants consistently identified a core set of principles that credible organisations share. These values were seen as non-negotiable for the future CLLD network.

Trust, transparency and accountability

Participants repeatedly emphasised the need for:

→ Transparency about how decisions are made and communicated

→ Clear reporting, progress tracking, and openness about performance

→ Visibility of governance processes, including published procedures

→ Honesty, integrity, and accountability at every level

→ Clear, accessible information about roles, responsibilities, and decision pathways.

These principles were described as central to building confidence among LAGs, government, and communities.

Clarity of purpose and shared vision

A future network must have:

- → A clear vision, purpose and remit
- → Understandable aims and a transparent work programme
- → A shared set of ethics and values underpinning decisions
- → A unifying narrative about CLLD's role in Scotland.

Participants stressed that clarity of purpose enhances credibility and supports alignment across a diverse membership.

Representation and inclusiveness

Participants identified strong representation as a hallmark of trusted organisations:

- → Balanced representation across public, private, third sector, and community voices
- → Diversity in thinking, background, and demographics
- → Space for differing views, recognising that LAGs are not all the same
- → Involvement of YLAGs, youth participation, and clear succession pathways
- → Members who are engaged, proactive, and reflective of their communities.

The CAB Network and TSI Scotland Network were highlighted as examples where every member has an equal voice regardless of size.

Leadership and capability

Effective governance requires:

- → Dedicated, skilled leadership (Chair, Coordinator, or Chief Executive role)
- → Capacity for horizon scanning, influencing, and strategic coordination
- → Staff or contracted support to maintain continuity and communication
- → Strong relationships between the governing body and operational staff
- → High standards of financial accountability and audit.

Participants stressed that leadership must be visible, communicative, and responsive.

2/ Preferred governance features and structures

Participants explored a broad range of potential structures, with a mix of formal and flexible ideas. While there was no single preferred model, the following features attracted strong support.

Simple and understandable structures

There was clear preference for:

→   A structure that is simple and not over-engineered

→   Processes that are easy to understand

→   A manageable board size, reflecting 20 LAGs without creating unwieldy bureaucracy

→   Clear lines of responsibility and communication.

Participants repeatedly said: "Keep it simple."

Steering group and working groups model

A widely supported structure involved:

→   A national steering group representing all areas or regions

→   Open, thematic working groups (e.g., islands, policy, youth, governance, monitoring and evaluation)

→   Majority decision-making with quorum

→   LAGs nominating dedicated representatives (not necessarily Chairs)

→   Regular meetings supported by online communication and voting.

This model was seen as flexible, scalable, and aligned with the network's values.

Membership model

Participants showed interest in:

→   A formal membership organisation

→   Clear eligibility, processes for joining, and expectations of members

→   A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the network and LAGs

→   A possible MoU with the Scottish Government.

Membership was viewed as a way to guarantee representation, commitment, and legitimacy, without overly formalising the structure too early.

Legal status

Views differed on whether the network should become a legal entity, such as a SCIO, Company Limited by Guarantee, CIC, or remain informal with an MoU.

Concerns included:

→ Additional obligations could deter volunteers

→ Administrative burden including accounts, registration, and compliance

→ Risk of centralisation or "government control"

→ Capacity required to sustain a legal body.

The general view was that legal status may be beneficial eventually, but not necessarily at inception. A phased approach, with a three-year development plan, was widely suggested.

Secretariat or coordination function

Strong consensus existed for:

→ Dedicated staff (or contracted support)

→ A network secretariat to coordinate meetings, provide guidance, manage communication, produce resources, and support chairs

→ A "go-to" contact for LAGs and YLAGs.

This was seen as essential for credibility, continuity, and reducing the burden on volunteers.

3/ Key processes and mechanisms

Participants proposed several practical mechanisms to ensure fairness, clarity, and effective functioning.

Decision making

→ Majority decision making with transparent records

→ Equal voting rights across LAGs

→ Published procedures for consultations and responses

→ Time-bound requests for input from LAGs

→ Allowing LAGs to submit both a network view and an individual LAG view to decision-makers when needed.

Communication and engagement

→ Two-way communication between the new network, LAGs, and YLAGs

→ Regional meetings feeding into national cycles

→ Clear, accessible, and timely communication

→ Online voting or surveys when decisions need wider input

→ Regular updates, blogs, case studies, and celebratory communications.

Standards, quality and support

Participants recommended:

→ Guidance library: templates, induction materials, and best practice

→ Minimum standards or "baseline governance expectations"

→ Live documents for quality assurance

→ Structured training for LAG members

→ Clear process for when things go wrong (conflict, succession, or non-engagement).

4/ Risks and safeguards

Participants discussed risks that a governance system must guard against and suggested safeguards to mitigate them.

Risks identified

→ Reliance on single individuals leading to burnout

→ Poor succession planning

→ Lack of diversity or youth representation

→ Patchy knowledge in volunteer-led areas

→ Some LAGs not joining or participating

→ Legal structure becoming burdensome or overly bureaucratic

→ Over-centralisation leading to top-down control

→ Lack of clear remit or communication

→ Risk of accidental exclusion ("too many voices")

→ Weak links between LAGs and YLAGs

→ Low visibility of CLLD reducing legitimacy.

Proposed safeguards

→ Clear accountabilities and checks

→ Transparent reporting

→ Training and education for LAG and YLAG members

→ LAG recruitment and commitment embedded in funding agreements

→ Representational balance across sectors and geographies

→ A simple but strong MoU

→ Dedicated staff to maintain continuity

→ Clear succession pathways, especially for youth

→ Encouraging awareness, visibility, and local storytelling.

5/ Summary of implications for designing the CLLD Network's governance structures

Session C shows that participants favour a governance model that is:

1. **Values-led.** Grounded in transparency, trust, representation and accountability

2. **Simple but structured.** Avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy while ensuring clarity

3. **Membership-based.** Giving all LAGs equal voice and clear expectations

4. **Phased and flexible.** Allowing evolution over time, including potential future legal status

5. **Supported by dedicated coordination.** Providing continuity, communication and resources

6. **Representative and inclusive.** Embedding diversity, youth participation and broad expertise

7. **Decision-focused.** Clear decision-making, consultation mechanisms and majority processes

8. **Safeguarded.** Checks, training and succession planning to mitigate risk.

Participants clearly articulated that governance should enable, not hinder, the network's mission. A credible governance structure is one that reflects CLLD principles, ensures fairness and transparency, strengthens collaboration across Scotland, and provides a confident foundation for a national network that is respected, effective, and sustainable.

Session D: Building capacity and capability

Session D explored the capacity and capability challenges affecting LAGs and YLAGs, the skills required to strengthen the system, and the support participants believe a national CLLD network should provide. The discussion highlighted significant pressures on time, resources, and visibility, alongside a strong appetite for shared learning, clearer structures, and improved support.

1/ Gaps and challenges

Participants identified a wide range of challenges that limit the capacity and effectiveness of LAGs and YLAGs. These challenges fell into several clear themes.

Time, capacity, and volunteer pressure

A dominant theme was the lack of time available to deliver core functions:

- → LAG members and potential members struggle to commit sufficient time

- → Coordinators spend too much time managing short annual funding cycles

- → Limited time for research, animation, outreach, feeder projects and strategic planning

- → Over-reliance on volunteers leading to fatigue and difficulty maintaining momentum

- → Lack of administration time to complete required processes.

Participants noted that "time" was a recurring and fundamental barrier across nearly all aspects of delivery.

Funding constraints

Participants repeatedly highlighted:

- → Annual funding cycles limiting long-term planning

- → Insufficient funding to meet local needs

- → A need for multi-year budgets (minimum 3–4 years)

- → Funding timescales that prevent pipeline development and strategic thinking

- → High travel costs for island LAGs, reducing equality of participation.

The short-term nature of funding was described as one of the "biggest challenges" affecting capacity and capability.

Awareness, visibility, and recruitment

Lack of awareness of LAGs within communities was a major concern:

- → Communities often do not understand what LAGs do

→ Recruitment of both LAG and YLAG members is difficult

→ Limited visibility reduces volunteer interest

→ Hard-to-reach communities remain under-represented

→ Lack of coordinated national promotion.

This contributes to challenges with community representation, diversity, and securing specialised skills.

Support for YLAGs

Participants identified several issues specific to YLAGs:

→ Lack of national YLAG development support

→ Limited communication opportunities between YLAGs across Scotland

→ Unclear pathways for influencing policy

→ Insufficient integration between LAGs and YLAGs.

YLAGs require clearer structures, better resources, and stronger connections to the wider network.

Communication, coordination, and clarity

Participants repeatedly mentioned:

→ Limited awareness of what other LAGs / YLAGs are doing

→ Lack of clarity on policy, roles, and Board responsibilities

→ Need for a unified national strategy with shared values and freedom for local interpretation

→ Confusion around how community priorities are defined and by whom

→ Patchy communication between LAGs and YLAGs.

Participants stressed the need for improved coordination and shared learning to avoid duplication.

Specialist skills and knowledge gaps

Challenges include:

→ Limited access to specialist skills (e.g., environmental, policy, evaluation, project management)

→ Difficulty accessing or sharing specialist support between LAGs without overworking individuals

→ Gaps in understanding subsidy control, community wealth building, rural policy, and renewables funding

→ Need for improved skills in diplomacy, advocacy, communication, and constructive dialogue.

Geography and inequalities

Participants highlighted:

→ Additional barriers for island and remote areas due to cost, distance, and travel requirements

→ Need for fairer treatment of island LAGs in relation to travel, capital project costs, and access to national opportunities.

2/ Skills needed across the system

Participants identified a wide skillset required to build capability. These included both technical and interpersonal skills.

Technical skills

Specific technical skills identified included:

→ Due diligence and application assessment

→ Rural policy understanding

→ Policy interpretation and consultation response

→ Governance and evaluation

→ Project management

→ Systems thinking and strategic planning

→ Environmental and sector-specific expertise

→ Knowledge of subsidy control and funding mechanisms.

Communication and engagement skills

Participants emphasised skills in:

→ Communication and "tone of voice"

→ Diplomacy and civil discourse

→ Advocacy and persuading funders or partners

→ Confidence building for members and young people

→ Marketing, promotion, and storytelling.

Knowledge and awareness

Skills required include:

→ Understanding CLLD principles and variation between areas

→ Awareness of trends across Scotland, the UK and Europe

→ Local knowledge balanced with local authority process awareness

→ Ability to link local delivery with national priorities (e.g., poverty, net zero).

Youth and community-specific skills

Participants highlighted:

→ Skills to support youth participation and climate action

→ Ability to understand and work with community definitions, priorities, and representation

→ Skills to navigate diverse needs, experiences, and sectors within communities.

Induction, training and development

Many participants stressed the need for:

→ Annual induction days

→ Clear training modules

→ Onboarding resources for new LAG and YLAG members

→ Shared tools, case studies, and learning resources

→ Capacity-building around board roles and responsibilities.

3/ Support participants would value from a national network

Contributions revealed a strong and consistent appetite for structured, practical support.

Core support needs

Participants identified several core areas where support would add significant value:

→ A central resource sharing library

→ Shared case studies and examples of good practice

→ Clear guidance documents, induction packs, and CPD modules

→ Sector-specific expertise shared across LAGs

→ Visibility of all 20 LAGs: their processes, activities, and local needs

→ Templates, process tidying and opportunities to learn from other LAGs' systems

→ Support with policy interpretation, advocacy, and influencing

→ Access to datasets and needs assessments

→ A national monitoring and evaluation framework

→ Facilitation support or access to external consultants.

Training and development

High-priority requests included:

→ Training for recruitment, induction, and retention

→ Support for LAGs to raise concerns, escalate issues, and share successes

→ Support with policy engagement and attendance at parliamentary meetings

→ Training in diplomacy, communication, and voice-building

→ Support with specialist areas such as renewables, community wealth building, and subsidy control.

Support for YLAG development

Participants emphasised:

→ Invitations for YLAGs to attend LAG meetings and visits

→ Support for youth policy engagement and storytelling

→ Stronger links between LAG and YLAG priorities

→ National networking and shared learning opportunities for YLAGs.

Peer learning and cross-LAG collaboration

Participants value:

→ Peer-to-peer learning

→ Study visits

→ Opportunities to visit different areas

→ Shared resource pools

→ Knowledge exchange around recruitment, governance, and community engagement.

Funding and resource support

Suggested areas included:

→ Additional activity funding

→ More admin capacity

→ Support with funding applications

→ National support for island travel costs

→ Support for lobbying for additional funds

→ Help accessing European networks such as ELARD[1].

4/ Summary of implications for building capacity and capability

Session D points to a system that is committed, ambitious and skilled, but constrained by time, funding, awareness and coordination. To address these challenges, a national CLLD network should:

1/ Provide structured training and induction for LAG and YLAG members

2/ Build and maintain a shared resource library and support peer learning

3/ Strengthen visibility, recruitment, and national promotion of CLLD and YLAGs

4/ Improve communication, coordination and knowledge-sharing across all 20 LAGs

5/ Support policy interpretation, advocacy, and strategic alignment

6/ Provide practical tools and specialist expertise

7/ Strengthen youth participation and integration between LAGs and YLAGs

8/ Advocate for multi-year funding and address geographic inequalities

9/ Create structures that reduce pressure on volunteers and increase administrative support

10/ Enable long-term planning and the development of project pipelines.

[1] ELARD membership was being pursued as a result of the workshop held in June 2025; an application was actively at the time of the November workshop.

Collectively, these actions would help LAGs operate more strategically, engage more widely, and build the skills and confidence required to deliver meaningful community-led local development across Scotland.

Session E: International collaboration and cooperation

Session E examined what international collaboration means for CLLD in Scotland, why it matters, and how a national CLLD network might support it. Participants brought extensive experience from LEADER and other international partnerships, highlighting the transformative value of global learning while emphasising the practical barriers and the need for clear strategy, resources and political commitment.

1/ Why international collaboration matters

Across discussions, participants expressed strong support for international collaboration, provided it is purposeful, strategic, and adequately resourced. They emphasised the significant benefits gained historically through LEADER exchanges and the ongoing potential for learning, influence and innovation.

Learning, insight and inspiration

Participants repeatedly highlighted that international collaboration:

- → Enables learning from real projects, especially through in-person visits

- → Demonstrates impact more vividly than desk-based research

- → Inspires new ideas and stimulates innovation

- → Provides access to an "encyclopaedia of possible solutions"

- → Helps identify trends and ideas relevant to rural Scotland (e.g., Nordic student loan incentives for rural retention)

- → Broadens horizons for both LAGs and YLAGs.

International collaboration was described as a powerful driver of creativity, motivation, and renewed energy across LAGs.

Strengthening voice, influence and reputation

Participants saw international collaboration as a strategic tool for:

- → Strengthening advocacy and lobbying (with Scotland, the UK nations, and Europe)

- → Building positive relationships with European counterparts and international organisations

- → Demonstrating Scotland's leadership in community-led development

→ Helping influence Scottish Government by showing what could be gained, or lost, through investment in CLLD

→ Positioning CLLDNet as part of a global movement.

The reputational benefits were viewed as significant, including increased attractiveness of LAG membership.

Benefits for young people (YLAGs)

Youth LAGs (YLAGs) were described as "one of Scotland's success stories post-LEADER." International collaboration:

→ Strengthens youth voice

→ Provides leadership and learning opportunities

→ Helps inspire and recruit new members

→ Builds peer support across borders

→ Demonstrates positive pathways for youth engagement.

Participants noted strong examples of youth models from Finland and elsewhere that directly influenced YLAG development.

Community, identity and shared purpose

Additional benefits included:

→ Building community confidence and enthusiasm

→ Helping rural and island areas feel "part of something bigger"

→ Strengthening accountability and shared purpose

→ Supporting cross-cultural understanding and new ways of working

→ Encouraging LAG pride and visibility.

For many, international collaboration was described as essential to maintaining the spirit of CLLD.

2/ What should international collaboration include?

Participants identified several types of collaboration, noting that "international" exists on a spectrum: UK-wide, Europe-wide with LEADER countries, and Europe-wide beyond the EU.

Learning and peer exchange

→ Study visits (two-way)

- → Conferences, including online

- → Leadership exchanges

- → Policy learning

- → Peer networks.

Joint working and cooperation

- → Collaborative projects

- → Shared knowledge platforms

- → Match-funding initiatives

- → Horizon scanning to inform Scottish policy.

Participants also noted the importance of inter-LAG cooperation within Scotland and the UK, sometimes a precursor to international collaboration.

Visibility and practical tools

Essential components included:

- → Up-to-date LAG profiles and contact information

- → Templates for collaboration invitations and communications

- → Active lists of potential project partners

- → Clear routes for raising issues and sharing outcomes

- → Infographics and communication materials to demonstrate impact.

3/ What is needed to make international collaboration possible?

Participants agreed that international collaboration is highly valuable but not currently achievable at scale without deliberate investment, structure and political will.

Funding and resources

Participants stressed:

- → The need for a dedicated budget pot for collaboration (separate from core LAG funds)

- → Multi-year funding to support planning cycles (international work often takes several years)

- → Support for island travel and the higher costs associated with remote areas

→ Funding for administration, coordination and project development

→ Potential co-funding with organisations that benefit from collaboration.

International work was described as "hard work" and "resource-intensive".

People, time, and coordination

Capacity constraints were a major barrier. Participants recommended:

→ A named role within the network to lead international collaboration

→ Adequate time for staff and volunteers to participate

→ Dedicated coordination of findings and dissemination

→ Support for YLAG participation

→ Clear expectations and managed workloads.

Without time, collaboration risks becoming superficial.

Strategic framework and leadership

A strong message was that international collaboration must be **strategic**, not ad hoc:

→ A medium- to long-term collaboration strategy (aligned with the Rural Support Plan)

→ Clarified purpose: Why? What for? How? When?

→ Clear political engagement strategy

→ Cross-party support for long-term direction

→ Identification of niche themes where Scotland can contribute or lead (e.g., food heritage, youth participation, rural innovation).

Participants emphasised the importance of sorting out national coherence first ("we need to sort ourselves out before looking outwards").

Infrastructure and connections

Participants discussed:

→ Rebuilding relationships post-LEADER

→ Using ELARD and other international networks as key platforms

→ Using existing rural partnerships (e.g., ERP)

→ Exploring twinning and place-based links

→ Developing an online collaboration hub for contacts, resources, and opportunities.

These structures would increase access, visibility and readiness to collaborate.

4/ Short-term priorities and long-term ambitions

Short-term priorities

Participants identified several immediate actions:

- → Develop a national list of contacts, partnerships, and opportunities

- → Create place profiles, templates and communication materials

- → Establish clear LAG communication channels

- → Share co-operation information with Scottish Government and LAGs

- → Begin with online collaboration opportunities

- → Lobby for dedicated collaboration funding

- → Ensure the national website includes updated LAG biographies and contact details.

These were described as "quick wins".

Longer-term vision

Participants articulated an ambitious long-term vision, including:

- → A 10-year international collaboration programme

- → Collaboration at every level: LAG–LAG, UK-wide, European, global

- → Earmarked funds for international work

- → Joint products, case studies and shared learning outputs

- → Hosting international conferences and exchanges

- → Building Scotland's reputation as a leader in community-led development

- → Alternative funding streams and political influence

- → Innovation in rural solutions and shared policy impacts.

This vision aligns strongly with CLLD principles of bottom-up learning, community wealth building and shared leadership.

5/ Summary of implications for the future CLLD network

Session E highlights the importance of embedding international collaboration into the future network's design. To achieve this, the network should:

1/   Develop a clear international collaboration strategy, aligned with national policy cycles

2/   Secure a dedicated collaboration budget and explore co-funding opportunities

3/   Ensure strong coordination, with a named role responsible for international work

4/   Support structured learning, through study visits, exchanges, and conferences

5/   Strengthen UK and European relationships, particularly through ELARD

6/   Create accessible platforms for partner matching, resources, and communication

7/   Invest in youth participation in international opportunities

8/   Build visibility and reputation, showcasing Scotland's strengths internationally

9/   Start with achievable early wins, while building towards long-term ambition.

Participants emphasised that international collaboration is not optional, it is a significant contributor to stronger LAGs, more confident communities, and a more influential national network.

Session F: Ways of working and inter-LAG communication

Session F explored how LAGs and YLAGs currently communicate, why communication matters, and what structures, tools and approaches a future CLLD network should develop to strengthen collective working. Participants were clear that communication is fundamental to the network's impact: it supports learning, reduces isolation, strengthens identity, improves consistency, and prevents each LAG from reinventing solutions in isolation.

1/ Why communication matters

Participants expressed a strong, consistent view that better communication is essential for an effective national network. The reasons fell into several clear themes.

Learning, problem-solving and support

Participants described the value of communication as:

→   Preventing isolation and enabling peer support

→   Sharing ideas, troubleshooting and learning from others' experiences

→ Avoiding duplication and "reinventing the wheel"

→ Getting advice on technical issues, processes, scoring sheets, and YLAG set-up

→ Understanding what works in different areas

→ Identifying pitfalls and solutions

→ Helping build confidence, especially for new members and coordinators.

Communication helps LAGs stay dynamic and avoid stagnation.

Collaboration and collective action

Participants saw communication as crucial for:

→ Developing cooperation projects

→ Connecting LAGs and YLAGs with new partners

→ Building sectoral knowledge and relationships

→ Generating joint responses to policy consultations

→ Creating a stronger collective voice nationally

→ Building a "family feeling" across LAGs.

Communication supports a united network that can advocate more effectively.

Transparency, awareness and visibility

Participants highlighted the need to:

→ Understand what other LAGs are working on ("no one knows right now")

→ Have a clear picture of challenges and successes across Scotland

→ Share project updates, funding decisions, and application cycles

→ Highlight innovation and good practice

→ Celebrate achievements and inspire new ideas.

Communication raises visibility both within the network and with communities and government.

Youth participation and succession

YLAG-related needs included:

→ Understanding successful youth structures in other areas

→ Connecting young people across Scotland

→ Supporting YLAG succession pathways

> → Ensuring youth are engaged in communication channels that work for them.

Participants emphasised that communication between YLAGs and LAGs needs to be deliberate and supported.

Accountability and strategic alignment

Communication also plays a role in:

> → Explaining decisions and interpretations of government policy

> → Building evidence for strategic thinking

> → Ensuring a united approach to CLLD

> → Helping LAGs understand priorities, emerging issues, and national policy directions

This ensures the network can remain coherent, credible and aligned.

2/ What should better communication enable?

From the raw contributions, several clear expectations emerged about what improved communication should achieve:

> → Stronger relationships – across LAGs, across YLAGs and between LAGs and government

> → A better functioning national system – with clarity, shared standards and coordinated policy engagement

> → Practical support – templates, case studies, shared documents, and common tools

> → Increased collaboration – including joint projects and thematic networks

> → More consistent messaging – through coordinated national communications

> → A clearer national identity – promoting CLLD across Scotland.

Participants agreed that communication is not a "nice to have" but a core mechanism for network impact.

3/ How communication could improve

Participants proposed an extensive set of ideas to strengthen communication. These are grouped below into clear themes.

Communication platforms and tools

Participants suggested:

> → A national website with local pages, links, case studies and contacts

> → A resource hub (compared to Yammer) with shared documents, templates and Q&A

- → An online discussion forum or live chat

- → A database of LAG members, staff and YLAGs

- → A central CLLDNet point of contact or "office"

- → A searchable body of evidence or situation repository

- → Clear routes for raising queries and getting timely support.

Some YLAGs already use WhatsApp; participants felt there is currently no informal or casual communication channel across the wider network.

Meetings and events

Participants expressed strong support for:

- → Monthly online meetings

- → Biannual national face-to-face gatherings

- → Chairs' meetings (better coordinated)

- → Study visits and exchange visits between LAG areas

- → Themed discussions to share emerging challenges

- → Celebratory events (though views varied on awards due to existing pressures)

- → Annual or biannual national conferences.

Face-to-face contact was seen as crucial for trust and peer support, though participants recognised digital tools are essential given geography and cost.

Newsletters and updates

Participants recommended:

- → A monthly (or quarterly) network newsletter

- → "Case study of the month"

- → Policy briefing notes (short, clear and digestible)

- → Updates on LAG activity, youth engagement, and collaboration opportunities

- → Awareness of when projects open / close for applications

- → Horizon scanning summaries from the network.

Participants emphasised that timing matters; some periods (e.g. December) are ideal for communications.

National coordination and staff roles

Participants made clear that communication depends on resourced coordination. Resources include:

→ Staff with experience in influencing policy

→ Staff with dedicated communication responsibilities

→ A central team that can disseminate information, maintain contact lists, and scan policy developments

→ Sustained relationships with government including through regular online and in-person meetings.

This would ensure consistency and avoid overburdening volunteers.

Shared resources and knowledge

High-value shared resources include:

→ Scoring sheets, application structures, templates, and guidance

→ Examples of how other LAGs operate

→ Training materials and induction packages

→ Case studies and good news stories

→ Shared process procedures (e.g., applications, monitoring, and evaluation)

→ A national monitoring and evaluation tool used consistently across all LAGs.

Participants also wanted:

→ Animation ideas

→ A thematic learning programme

→ Peer-to-peer support for new coordinators or a "buddying system".

Relationships with Government and external networks

Participants noted:

→ The need for twice-yearly face-to-face meetings with Scottish Government

→ Online meetings in between as standard practice

→ Clear processes for sharing consultation responses

→ Active links to ELARD, Scottish Rural and Islands Parliament (SRIP), Scottish Rural and Islands Youth Parliament (SRIYP), and the European Rural Parliament

→ Opportunities for policy coherence and collective action.

Communication must strengthen, not dilute, the Chairs' group, which some participants worried might be overshadowed by CLLDNet.

4/ Priorities for the future

When asked to identify the most and least important communications priorities, participants produced a clear hierarchy.

Most important and short-term

→ Information on events in Scotland relevant to LAGs

→ Policy updates relevant to CLLD

→ Regular updates on LAG activities

→ Frameworks to request advice from other LAGs

→ Case studies and success stories

→ Collaboration project opportunities

→ Templates and shared resources.

Medium importance but frequent

→ Scottish Government policy roundups

→ Information needed for operational alignment

→ Short, targeted briefings.

Long-term

→ Strong youth engagement in communication channels

→ Clear routes for collaboration requests

→ Study visits and exchanges

→ National marketing and storytelling

→ Highlighting emerging priorities and collective advocacy.

Lower priority

(Some participants identified these as lower priority initially due to capacity constraints.)

→ Online conferences from outside Scotland

→ International study visit feedback

→ Submitting case studies externally

→ Events solely focused on external networking.

5/ Summary of implications for the future CLLD network

Session F demonstrates that communication is not simply a technical function; it is the backbone of collective working in CLLD. To support effective ways of working, the future network should:

1. Develop a national online platform, including a resource hub, contact database, case study library, and discussion forum

2. Coordinate regular communication, including newsletters, briefings, and policy updates

3. Facilitate regular meetings and exchanges, both online and in-person, to build relationships and support learning

4. Provide clear, consistent, accessible information about processes, policy interpretation, and operational guidance

5. Support peer-to-peer learning, including buddying, thematic groups, and shared documents

6. Strengthen youth communication pathways, ensuring meaningful links between YLAGs and LAGs

7. Create a coordinated national communication strategy, improving the visibility of CLLD across Scotland

8. Resource a dedicated coordination function, with staff responsible for comms, policy links and support

9. Ensure sustained engagement with government, providing consistent two-way communication

10. Establish clear priorities, starting with Scottish events, policy updates and collaboration opportunities before expanding into more ambitious international communications.

Participants noted that effective communication, done well and consistently, will be foundational for building trust, strengthening relationships, and enabling the network to function as a unified, strategic, future-ready system.

5/ Cross-cutting themes

Shared imperatives from the interactive sessions

Strong and consistent themes emerged across the six sessions. While each session explored a different dimension of the future CLLD network, participants repeatedly returned to the same structural issues, capacity pressures, and aspirations for the CLLD "system". Together, these themes demonstrate a high level of alignment across LAGs and YLAGs and provide a coherent evidence base for national design decisions.

1/ Need for national coordination and clarity

Almost every session highlighted the limitations of a fragmented or inconsistent national approach. Participants stressed the need for a central body that provides structure, coherence, shared standards, and consistent communication. They want policy interpretation, guidance, and a "single source of truth" so that each LAG is not having to interpret requirements alone.

2/ Governance that is clear, simple and transparent

Participants repeatedly emphasised that governance at both LAG and national level must be:

→ Easy to understand

→ Transparent in decision-making

→ Balanced in representation

→ Values-driven.

They warned against overly complex structures that create barriers or confusion. Trust, clarity of purpose and consistent procedures were identified as essential.

3/ Persistent capacity and capability pressures

Capacity constraints were raised in every session. Participants described:

→ Volunteer burnout

→ Reliance on small numbers of individuals

→ Pressure created by annual funding cycles

→ Limited time for strategic work

→ Recruitment challenges.

These capacity pressures impact governance, sustainability, communications, youth engagement, and international activity. Participants were clear that without systemic support, capacity issues will continue to limit progress.

4/ Critical role of youth voice

YLAG contributions appeared across governance, sustainability, international engagement and communications. Participants recognised youth voice as central to a credible CLLD system. However, support for YLAGs is inconsistent, and young people often lack the structures, resources and continuity required for meaningful involvement. Participants want youth participation embedded, not tokenistic.

5/ Communication as the backbone of the system

Strong communication was described as essential to consistency, identity, collaboration, and learning. Participants identified gaps in:

- → National updates
- → Shared resources
- → Peer-to-peer communication
- → Visibility of the wider CLLD story.

Repeatedly, participants said that better communication would reduce isolation, support alignment, and strengthen impact.

6/ Need for a stronger national identity for CLLD

Participants felt CLLD lacks a clear voice and identity nationally. They want a network that can champion CLLD, articulate its value, raise its profile with decision-makers, and help the public understand its purpose and achievements.

7/ Aspirations for long-term planning and stability

Across sessions, from sustainability to governance to capacity, participants stressed that annual funding cycles undermine strategic planning. They want a system that supports multi-year thinking, continuity, and the ability to build relationships, take informed risks, and invest in development.

8/ Appetite for collaboration and shared learning

Whether in governance, capacity, or international work, participants demonstrated strong appetite for:

- → Peer learning
- → Shared practice
- → Collective problem-solving
- → Thematic groups
- → Joint projects.

They want structured spaces to work together and learn from each other, supported by national coordination.

Implications for the future national CLLD network

The cross-cutting themes point clearly to the functions, structures and behaviours that the national network will need to adopt. The workshop evidence shows that the network will only be effective if it responds directly to the system-wide challenges raised across all sessions.

1/ The network should provide consistent national coordination

Participants expect the national network to:

→ Interpret policy

→ Provide guidance

→ Ensure consistency

→ Offer shared standards

→ Support alignment across Scotland.

This implies a central coordinating function with clear leadership, good communication, and the capacity to maintain shared resources and practice.

2/ Governance must be simple, transparent and values-driven

The network must adopt governance structures that are:

→ Easy to navigate

→ Transparent in roles and decision-making

→ Balanced in representation

→ Reflective of the CLLD and LEADER principles.

Early complexity would undermine trust. A phased development model may be the most credible approach, with governance maturing as the network grows.

3/ Capacity building must be a core function

Given the systemic pressures identified, the network will need to:

→ Provide training and induction for LAG and YLAG members

→ Develop toolkits and templates

→ Share resources and good practice

→ Offer specialist support where required

→ Reduce duplication and administrative burden.

Without this support, capacity challenges will continue to restrict progress locally.

4/ Youth voice should be embedded, not added on

YLAG contributions highlighted the potential for strong youth participation. The network should:

→ Ensure youth representation in governance

→ Provide dedicated support for YLAG development

→ Enable national spaces for youth voice

→ Integrate youth perspectives into strategy and decision-making.

This is essential for credibility and the long-term sustainability of the CLLD model.

5/ Communication must be a dedicated, resourced function

Participants want communication that is:

→ Frequent

→ Consistent

→ Clear

→ Accessible

→ Coordinated.

The network must deliver this through newsletters, briefings, shared platforms, meetings and agreed style and standards. Communication cannot be left as an informal or peripheral function.

6/ The network should build a strong, recognisable national identity

To raise the profile of CLLD, the network must articulate:

→ What CLLD is

→ What it achieves

→ Why it matters.

A national identity will support political awareness, funding stability, and stakeholder engagement.

7/ Support for long-term planning is essential

Even if funding remains annual, the network can help LAGs plan more strategically.

This could be achieved by:

→   Providing multi-year templates and planning tools

→   Delivering early information

→   Coordinating shared priorities.

This will support resilience and reduce the reactive nature of current delivery.

6/ Next steps

The workshop outputs offer a coherent, community-driven evidence base for designing the national network's core functions and early priorities.

Considerations

1/ Establish a national coordination function (immediate priority)

2/ Implement simple, transparent, and phased governance for the network

3/ Build system-wide capacity and capability

4/ Strengthen communication as a core system function

5/ Embed youth voice in governance and network operations

6/ Support long-term planning and stability

7/ Develop a strategy for national and international collaboration and learning

8/ Co-create next steps with LAGs, YLAGs, and key stakeholders

Actions

The next steps this financial year are to for the national network steering group to work with LAGs to take the learnings from the November and previous workshops and:

→ Develop an agreed vision, objectives, and guiding principles

→ Agree the network's identify i.e., name and branding

→ Produce a communications plan that sets out an approach to communications across the network which unites LAGs and facilitates knowledge exchange

→ Establish an appropriate governance approach and structure

→ Form a position / aspiration on international engagement

→ Prepare a draft outline capacity building programme.

The national CLLD network steering group will ensure the continued engagement of all LAGs in this development process which supports a future application to Scottish Government for the resource required to formally establish the network.

Appendices

Appendix A: Workshop agenda

Day 1   Lunch and refreshments available from 12:15

**Our ambitions for advocacy, influence, and local community action
13:00 start**

Session	Lead	Details	Duration
Welcome and housekeeping	David Cameron	Developing the national CLLD network	15 mins
Introductions	Stuart Oliver, Urban Foresight	Individual introductions	20 mins
The policy scene	Jody Fleck, Scottish Government	The policy story so far Back to basics Scottish Government priorities and emerging policies	15 mins
Setting the context	Stuart Oliver, Urban Foresight	Priorities Moving forward and making the vision a reality Establishing the network	15 mins
The "art of the possible"	Dinah Jackson, Urban Foresight	What could the future look like? Urban Foresight will report back from the YLAG focus group discussions followed by Q&A	15 mins
SRUC policy review	Carey Doyle, SRUC	A brief update on SRUC's work followed by Q&A	30 mins
Refreshment break			
What does a high-performing LAG look like? (Breakout session A)	Facilitators	What are the criteria for a high-performing rural or island LAG? Aim of session: To identify characteristics of high-performing LAGs and draw out principles to inform the network's governance and vision. Facilitated breakout session: The ideal world view: Independent reflections on the principles needed for a high performing LAG and how far away your LAG might be from this aspiration What would your LAG need from the national network for you to	30 mins

		achieve the strongest possible performing position?	
Achieving network sustainability (**Breakout session B**)	Facilitators	What do we mean by the term 'sustainable'? Aim of session: To identify what financial and operational models would support long-term sustainability of the network, feeding into governance design and vision development. Facilitated breakout session: Financial sustainability: What are the alternatives to multi-year funding? How could we work towards achieving ambitions with only the annualised budget? Operational sustainability: How do we ensure robust and credible operations that include: Inclusion and diversity, Political sustainability, with independence and a position of true advocacy	30 mins
Review and wrap back	Stuart Oliver, Urban Foresight	Reflections and setting the scene for Day 2	15 mins
Final word	David Cameron, CLLDNet steering group co-chair		5 mins
Close at 17:00			

Detailed agenda – Day 2

Day 2 Developing a stronger, collaborative, and influential CLLD network **Refreshments available; 09:00 start**			
Welcome back	Scott Petrie, CLLDNet steering group co-chair	Reflections and grounding Questions	15 mins
Creating the governance structure (**Breakout session C**)	Facilitators	Building on Day 1's discussions, this session will take us closer to agreeing the guiding principles and objectives needed for effective network governance.	40 mins

		Aims of session: To explore and capture views on how representation, membership, and decision-making should operate within the CLLD network, ensuring transparency, fairness, and balance across LAGs, partners, and other stakeholders. Facilitated breakout session: Participants will discuss how the CLLD network's governance should operate in practice, focusing on representation, accountability, and decision-making. Groups will explore how all LAGs and partners can have a fair voice while ensuring effective and transparent decision-making.	
Building capacity and capability (**Breakout session D**)	Facilitators	Taking focus group and Day 1's discussions, we will refine opportunities for development of LAG members and staff to form a draft programme that builds capacity to support a high-performing and effective network. Aim of session: To explore capacity-building needs that will underpin delivery of the network's emerging vision and priorities. Facilitated breakout session: What are the pressing LAG capacity needs and how can these be addressed to through skills development and increased knowledge.	40 mins
Refreshment break			
International collaboration and cooperation (**Breakout session E**)	Facilitators	Collaboration and cooperation to boost capacity Aim of session: An agreed position/aspiration on international engagement Facilitated breakout session: What do we mean by 'collaboration' and 'cooperation'? What can collaboration and cooperation achieve? What does success look like and how do we achieve it?	30 mins
Ways of working and inter-LAG communication (**Sess Breakout session F**)	Facilitators	How do we want the network to communicate inter- and intra-LAG?	30 mins

		Aim of session: An agreed approach to communications across the network to unite LAGs and facilitate knowledge exchange Facilitated interactive session: Communication approach to network operations, network promotion, and raising awareness	
Wrap up, priorities, and next steps	Stuart Oliver, Urban Foresight	Reflections (from facilitators and participants) Next Steps and Actions	30 mins
Close	David Cameron, CLLDNet steering group co-chair	Closing remarks Next steps	15 mins
End 13:00 with lunch			

Appendix B: Delegate list

Name	Organisation / LAG name
Alastair Kennedy	Moray LAG
Alison Barclay	Orkney
Allan MacLauglan	West Lothian
Amanda Burgauer	Lanarkshire LAG
Anne-Michelle Ketteridge	FVL LAG
Artemis Pana	Scottish Rural Action
Anette Priest	Shetland
Bridget Trussell	Cairngorms
Carolyn McGill	Forth Valley & Lomond CLLD
Catharine Idle	Fife LAG/Fife Rural Development Fund
Colin Buchanan	Argyll and Bute LAG
David Smythe	Perth and Kinross CLLD LAG
David Cameron	Cairngorms Trust
Diarmid Harris	GRI LAG
Elle Lappin	Forth Valley and Lomond Youth Local Action Group
Fiona Cameron	Highland
Fiona Stirling	Highlands and Islands Enterprise/Shetland LAG
Frances Gunn	Highland
Graham Hewitson	Angus Rural Partnership
Hannah Downey	Scottish Government
Hannah Gillies	Argyll and Bute LAG
Iona Kellas	Cairngorms YLAG
Jackie Maclaren	tsiMORAY - Moray Local Action Group
Jayne Adamson	Tyne & Esk
Jennifer Macdonald	ARIA
Jim Watson	ARIA Ayrshire
Jody Fleck	Scottish Government
John Loder	Aberdeenshire LAG
Jordan Wilkinson	Argyll & Bute Council
Julia Whitaker	GRI LAG (Greater Renfrewshire & Inverclyde Local Action Group)

Karen Derrick	Cairngorms LAG Trust
Kat Purser	West Lothian
Kenny	South Lanarkshire Council, Lanarkshire LAG
Keren Ferguson	Renfrewshire Council / Greater Renfrewshire & Inverclyde LAG
Kerrie Hoggan	CVS Falkirk & District/ Kelvin Valley & Falkirk LAG
Kevin Brown	ARIA & CLLD STEERING GROUP
Kevin Grant	Argyll and Bute Council
Laura Martin	Perth & Kinross Council
Lorna Hawthorn	Argyll and Bute
Matt Bruce	Outer Hebrides CLLD
Mia Lalanne	Scottish Rural Action
Michaela Scott	Forth Valley and Lomond Youth Local Action Group
Mira Byrne	Outer Hebrides CLLD
Moira Beverley	Aberdeenshire
Rebecca Atkinson-Lord	An Tobar and Mull Theatre / Argyle and Bute
Roger Clegg	Cairngorms Trust
Rory McLeod	FVL LAG
Scott Petrie	Angus Rural Partnership
Sharon Rice-Jones	Rural Perth & Kinross LAG
	Perth & Kinross Council / Rural PK LAG
	Perth & Kinross Council
Stuart Alison	Orkney
Sue Wyllie	Forth Valley & Lomond LAG

Appendix C: Branding feedback

Overview

At the national workshop in November, participants were given the opportunity to help shape the new visual identity for Scotland's national CLLD network. Using two initial concept styles, we gathered people's likes, dislikes and ideas, and combined this insight with wider workshop outputs to form a clearer picture of what the network should communicate. This has now been used to create a refined design brief, which Urban Foresight's design team is using to develop visual identity options for the new national network.

Two logo concepts were presented for discussion at the national workshop:

- **Design 1:** Purple and yellow, featuring a Gaelic name.

- **Design 2:** Purple and green/blue palette without Gaelic.

Feedback from delegates provided clear direction on preferred elements, language considerations, colour choices, and the need for stronger representation of people and community in the visual identity.

Key themes

- **Colour palette:**
  The purple, green, and blue palette (Design 2) was widely preferred. It was described as fresh, balanced, and representative of the landscape. Only one participant expressed a negative reaction to these colours.

- **Inclusion of 'Scotland':**
  Strong consensus that the organisation's name or strapline must include *Scotland*, particularly if the network is to align with ELARD membership and national recognition.

- **Clarity of title and strapline:**
  Delegates supported names or acronyms that clearly communicate *what the organisation does* (e.g. supporting community-led action or rural development).

- **Symbolic elements:**
  Some participants liked the tree, map, and water imagery and saw potential to build on these to express growth, range, and flow.

- **Gaelic naming:**
  Reactions to whether the use of Gaelic were mixed, with no overall consensus. Dual branding or a Gaelic "strap line" could be considered.

- **Lack of people/community representation:**
  This was the most consistent theme across all feedback. Participants felt both logos failed to represent *community, collaboration, or people*, which are seen as the core values of CLLD.

- **Logo meaning unclear:**
  Several delegates said the current iconography did not communicate what the organisation does. Without explanation, the tree/map hybrid lacked clear meaning or connection to the CLLD mission.

- **Comparisons and confusion:**
  Some noted visual similarities to existing brands (e.g. Highland Council, Conservative Party) and questioned how the logos would work in monochrome or small-scale use.

- **Naming clarity:**
  Confusion around acronyms such as LAG or CLD (given "CLD" is an existing field) was raised as a concern. Participants favoured a short, meaningful title tied to *rural development* or *community action.*

Summary

Overall, delegates want a modern, inclusive, and distinctly Scottish identity that:

- Clearly includes "Scotland" in the name or strapline

- Uses the purple–green–blue colour palette

- Places people and community at the heart of the design

- Communicates *connection, collaboration, and collective action.*

There is an opportunity to refine the current concepts by simplifying the symbolism, incorporating human or community elements, and aligning the brand narrative more closely with the core values of *local action, partnership, and inclusivity*.

A brand not a logo

When developing the identity for a new national network, it's important to recognise that a brand is far more than a logo. A logo is simply the visual entry point, a symbol that helps people recognise the organisation. But a brand is the full system of how the network presents itself, communicates, and behaves. It includes the language we use, the values we emphasise, the way we speak to communities and partners, and the experience people have whenever they encounter the network.

The feedback gathered at the national workshop made it clear that people care deeply about what the new network represents and how it reflects community-led development across Scotland. Many participants preferred certain colours, imagery, or naming directions; others had different views. Trying to accommodate every individual preference within a single logo is neither possible nor productive. Instead, the goal is to create a coherent visual identity that communicates the right message, evokes the right associations, and supports the values of community, collaboration, and Scottish identity.

A strong brand is brought to life not only through colours, symbols, or shapes, but through how the network communicates in every respect, its tone of voice, its accessibility, its clarity, its inclusivity, and its consistency across all channels.

The feedback given at the workshop will be used to inform the logo and the name, both of which will be collectively agreed through additional design work and further dialogue with LAGs.

The logo is one part of a wider branding system designed to reflect the core purpose of Scotland's CLLD network: connecting people, supporting local action, and enabling communities to shape their own futures.

This iterative, collaborative approach ensures the network builds an identity that is adopted by LAGs nationally because it is meaningful, credible, and flexible enough to represent all regions, while remaining simple and recognisable to the people it serves.

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