



Engagement Report



How to read this report

This report moves from:

- What we heard
- What it means
- How it applies to key assets
- What we are doing next

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Use these headings to navigate directly to sections of interest or read in sequence to follow the full story from feedback to action.



Why this matters

In Winter 2025 SWMID undertook a community survey to help guide its next phase of development.

A total of 107 responses were received, representing a highly engaged and deeply rooted cross-section of the South West Mull & Iona community.

The results show continued support for SWMID's core purpose — stewardship of land, enabling local opportunity, and acting as a long-term community anchor — alongside a clear call to consolidate activity, reduce organisational strain, and ensure that future work is grounded in realistic scale and financial sustainability.

84% of respondents have lived in or been connected to the area for more than six years, and 87% reported familiarity with SWMID's work.

This indicates that feedback reflects informed, place-based experience rather than distant opinion.

The message from the community is not to do less, but to focus on what matters most and ensure it can endure.

To understand what this means for SWMID's future direction, it is important first to understand who responded and how closely they are connected to the area.

“With limited assets, large commercial operations are impossible in the absence of funding.”

Respondent Profile

The strength of connection among respondents provides confidence that the feedback reflects lived experience of place rather than abstract opinion.

The dataset reflects a strongly embedded population:

- 84% connected to the area for over 6 years
- Nearly 50% connected for more than 20 years or lifelong
- 87% familiar with SWMID's work
- Gender responses evenly balanced
- Majority aged 45+, reflecting those most active in land, governance and volunteering

This profile provides confidence that findings represent informed community judgement.

What the Community Values

Across both quantitative and qualitative responses, there is strong affirmation of SWMID's founding role.

Respondents consistently identified value in:

- Long-term stewardship of land and environment
- Community ownership as a principle
- Local employment and resilience-building
- Practical opportunities rather than abstract development
- SWMID acting as a coordinating body rather than sole deliverer

Call for Focus and Sustainability

A dominant pattern across responses was concern about organisational stretch.

Participants encouraged SWMID to:

- Concentrate on fewer priorities
- Reduce exposure to high-risk commercial ventures
- Enable community-led activity rather than operating everything directly
- Build financial stability before expansion

“Avoid bankruptcy — build sustainable projects that lead to long-term jobs.”

This reflects a transition from an exploratory growth phase into organisational consolidation.

There is support for economic development — but at a locally appropriate scale.

Respondents favoured:

- Small-scale production and enterprise
- Skills development and training
- Incremental growth
- Use of existing assets before new acquisition

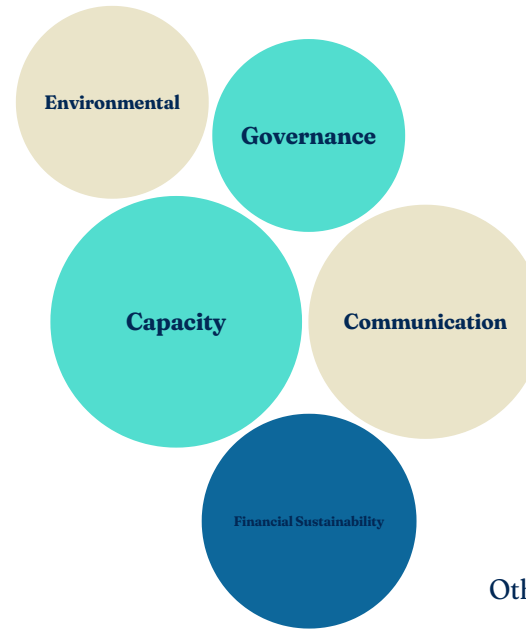
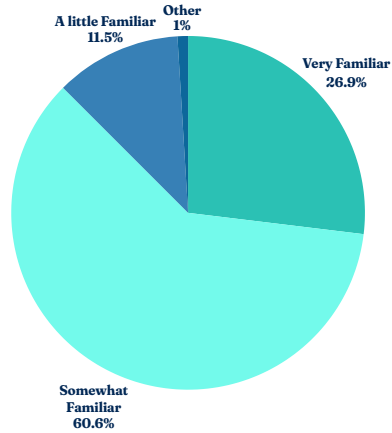
There was significantly less enthusiasm for complex commercial models requiring high organisational overhead.

Survey Snapshot

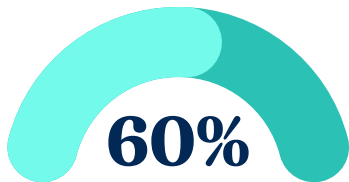
Alongside written responses, the survey also asked participants to reflect on SWMID's strategic direction and guiding principles.



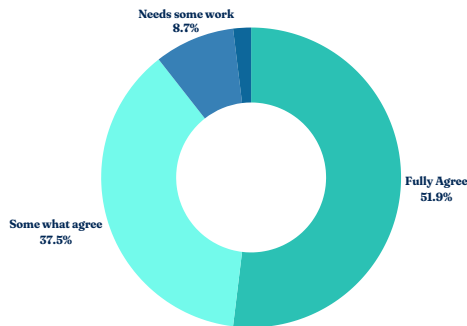
107 Responses



Other important mentions

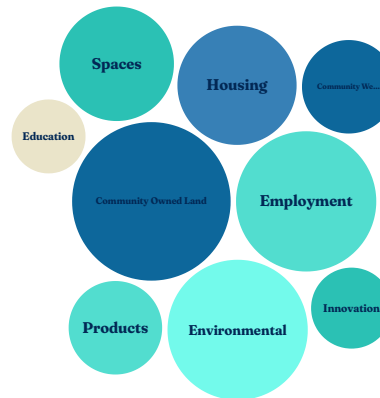


Agreed with the Vision



Mission

Strategic Direction



Sustainability - Long-term thinking for future generations

Community Leadership - Democratic, community-led development

Environmental Stewardship - Regenerative practices that enhance our environment

Collaboration - Partnership-based approaches to collective action that works with the community

Innovation - Embracing new approaches that serve community needs

Values as shown in the survey

What Matters most to the Community

When taken together, the data and comments point toward a consistent theme: the community values SWMID's role, but wants it delivered in a careful and grounded way.



People want SWMID to be careful, practical and rooted in place



Vision Mission and Values

The survey confirmed strong support for SWMID's proposed Vision, Mission and Values while indicating the need to express that purpose through a more focused and enabling model.

This feedback prompted a review of how SWMID describes its role, ensuring that its guiding statements reflect this shift from delivery-led activity toward stewardship and enabling.

Earlier emphasis often placed SWMID in a direct delivery role across multiple activities. The revised framework reflects a shift toward stewardship, collaboration and facilitation.

Previous emphasis:

- Direct delivery of projects and enterprises
- Growth driven by opportunity
- SWMID as primary operator

Proposed direction:

- Stewardship of assets as a long-term responsibility
- Sustainable use of resources before expansion
- Enabling locally led activity
- Working at an appropriate scale

Vision

A thriving and resilient South West Mull & Iona, where community-owned land and assets support local opportunity, environmental stewardship and a strong sense of place.

Mission

To manage community-owned assets responsibly, enable locally led economic and social activity, and act as a trusted anchor organisation supporting sustainable development.

Values

Stewardship • Sustainability • Community-Led Action • Practicality and Focus • Collaboration • Transparency

These refinements clarify how SWMID intends to deliver its purpose going forward.

Note on Terminology: Vision, Mission and Values

Vision describes the long-term change we aim to see in our community – the future we are working towards.

Mission defines our core role in contributing to that future – what we do and why.

Values set out the principles that guide how we work and make decisions.

Together, they provide a framework to ensure activity remains aligned with purpose, community expectations and long-term sustainability.

Focus Areas: Tirooran, Aird Fada, Columba Centre, Communications

The following sections look at how these themes apply to SWMID's principal assets and areas of activity.





Focus Area: Tirooran

Focus Area: Tiroran

Tiroran was one of the most consistently referenced assets in written responses, indicating its centrality to community identity.

The forest is perceived less as a commercial forestry unit and more as a shared inheritance.

“It’s about ensuring long-term community ownership.”

Statistical context strengthens this interpretation:

- The longest-resident respondents (20+ years connection) formed the largest response group (29%).
- This same cohort produced the majority of detailed written comments about Tiroran, suggesting the strongest identification with land stewardship comes from those with deepest local ties.

Respondents linked the forest to:

- Environmental responsibility
- Intergenerational legacy
- Local employment potential
- Education and skills

There was, however, clear desire for better financial clarity — not to commercialise the asset aggressively, but to understand how it can realistically contribute to sustainability.

This aligns directly with current work:

- Independent valuation underway
- TreeStory engagement with Scottish Forestry
- Exploration of climate-aligned management pathways

The community message is to manage Tiroran carefully, transparently, and for balanced value.

Tiroran Forest: What We Heard

Respondents were asked to consider different possible approaches to Tiroran, highlighting the balance between income generation, ownership and environmental stewardship.

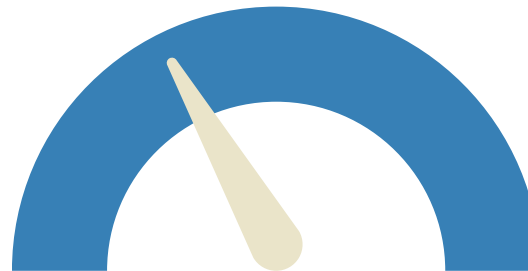
Preferred Approach to the Forest

Strong support for a blended approach
 Income generation alongside protection
 Clear need for expertise, advice and shared responsibility

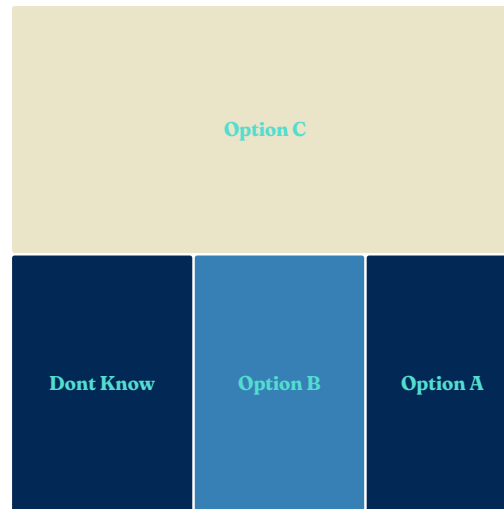
Option A: Harvest and Restock (Break-even)
 Harvest remaining timber on the eastern block
 Use income to fulfill all restocking obligations
 Keeps all 790 hectares in community ownership
 Requires a 5-year fallow period before replanting

Option B: Sell Eastern Block (up to £700k)
 Sell 323 hectares (eastern block) with timber and restock obligations
 Generate capital for other priorities
 Retain 466 hectares of community forest
 Buyer takes on restocking obligations

Option C: Blended Community & Biodiversity Approach
 Sell small plots to community members (with planning support)
 Use funds to restock and enhance biodiversity
 Invest in building up community amenity in the forest (paths, gathering spaces, learning areas)
 Support and enable micro-enterprises (tree nurseries, coppicing, woodland crafts, etc.)
 Prioritise long-term community ownership and environmental stewardship

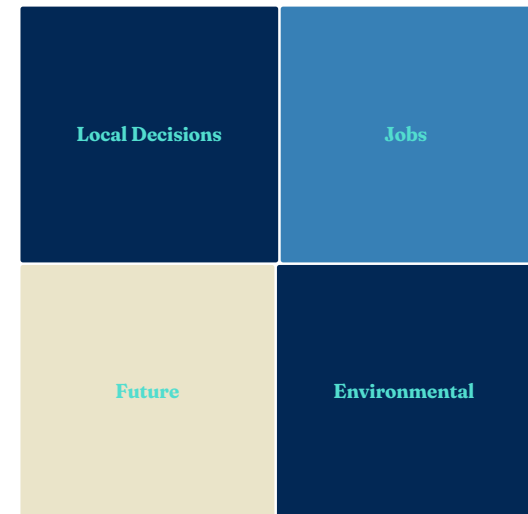


35% somewhat agree with selling part of Tiroran



“I want to see the forest protected, but also contributing to the community financially.”

Priorities for the future



Focus Area: Aird Fada



Focus Area: Aird Fada

Feedback on Aird Fada reflected similar questions of scale and sustainability, but with a stronger focus on operational risk.

The seaweed project generated more varied responses, reflecting its newer and more specialised nature.

While some respondents recognised innovation potential, others questioned organisational capacity to sustain it.

“With limited assets, large commercial operations are impossible...”

Unlike Tiroran, comments about seaweed were less values-driven and more operational in tone, focusing on risk, staffing and scalability.

This distinction reflects the statistical profile:

- The majority demographic (aged 45+) showed stronger alignment with land-based stewardship than with emerging niche enterprise sectors.
- Respondents familiar with SWMID’s wider workload were more likely to reference capacity concerns.

In response, SWMID has secured two-year development funding to:

- Remove immediate financial burden
- Test income models safely
- Provide opportunities for up to eight participants to trial ideas connected to Aird Fada (minimum 50% women)
- Shift from operator to facilitator of innovation

This moves the work into an evidence-gathering phase consistent with community caution.

Aird Fada: Community Views

Future of the Seaweed Farm

- Many support exploring sale or transfer
- Significant number want more information first
- Clear signal to pause, review and reduce risk



41%

Sell or Transfer Aird Fada Seaweed

Financial sustainability being the most important reason



69%

Important to sell to Scottish Buyer

“If Aird Fada isn’t sustainable, it’s right to be honest about that.”

Focus Area: Columba Centre



Focus Area: Columba Centre

Feedback on the Columba Centre was mixed but constructive, reflecting varied patterns of use rather than opposition. Unlike land-based assets, responses to built facilities focused less on ownership and more on how spaces can be used effectively.

“It’s a brilliant space... but almost too small to allow ambitious use.”

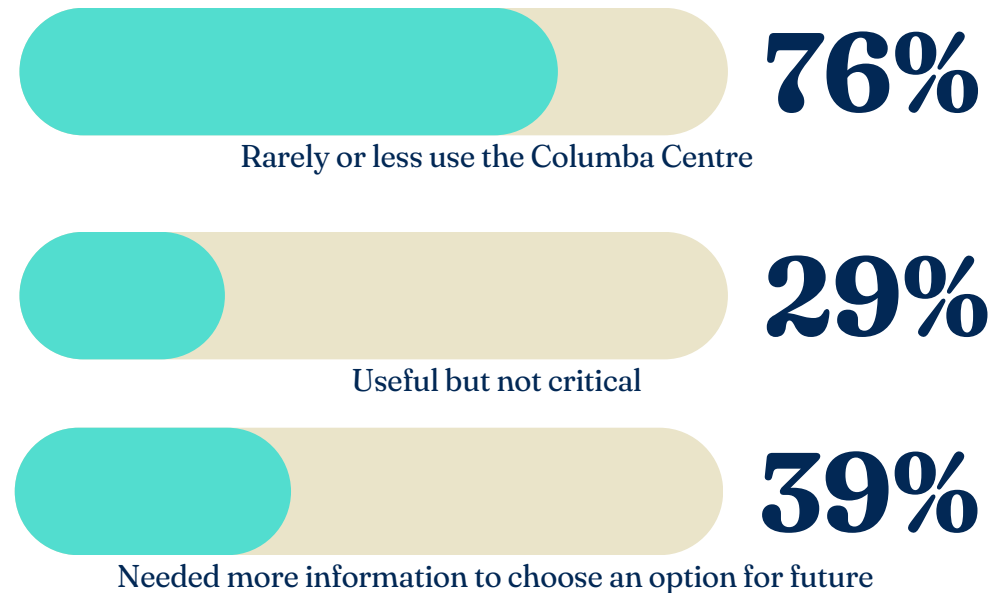
Statistically, this aligns with:

- A respondent base dominated by long-term residents whose engagement tends to centre on land and livelihood rather than facility-based programming.
- Fewer respondents referencing the building directly compared with Tiroran, suggesting it is seen as supportive infrastructure rather than a defining asset.

Comments pointed to questions of activation rather than ownership:

- How can it be used more regularly?
- Who is best placed to manage it?
- Can it support enterprise, training or shared services?

The data suggests optimisation rather than expansion — ensuring the Centre functions sustainably within SWMID’s broader enabling role.



Focus Area : Communications

Across all themes, one consistent message emerged: people want to stay informed and involved as decisions evolve.

The survey highlighted communication as an important area for development. While there is strong awareness of SWMID’s work among respondents, many expressed a desire for clearer, more regular updates and more visible opportunities to understand how decisions are made and how they can become involved.

As SWMID moves into a phase focused on consolidation and enabling participation, effective communication will be essential to maintaining trust, supporting transparency and encouraging shared ownership of future activity.

The intention is not to increase the volume of information, but to improve clarity, consistency and accessibility. Communication should help the community understand what SWMID is focusing on, why certain choices are being made, and where there are opportunities to contribute.

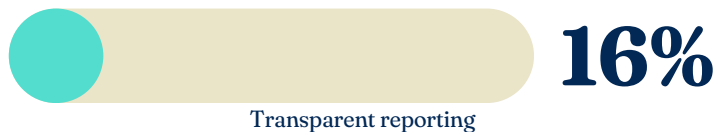
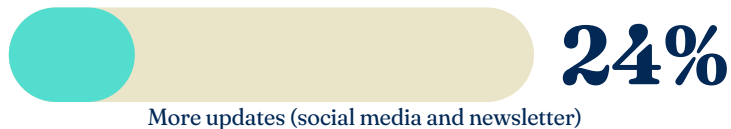
Key priorities for communications going forward include:

- Providing regular, plain-language updates on projects, decisions and progress
- Making clearer links between community feedback and actions being taken
- Sharing realistic timelines and expectations, particularly where work is exploratory or evidence-led
- Creating opportunities for two-way communication through meetings, working groups and informal engagement
- Ensuring information is accessible across different channels, recognising varied preferences for how people stay informed.

This approach supports SWMID’s broader transition toward a stewardship and enabling role, where openness and dialogue are central to sustaining community confidence and participation.

Improving communication is therefore seen not as a separate function, but as an integral part of how SWMID will operate in its next stage — ensuring that the organisation remains accountable, connected and responsive to the community it serves.

Communications



“Even when decisions are hard, openness makes a big difference.”



Community Energy and Housing

The survey and subsequent review highlighted that while community energy and housing remain important long-term considerations for South West Mull & Iona, they are not currently identified as immediate priorities for SWMID delivery. Respondents recognised the relevance of these themes to the future sustainability of the area — particularly in relation to resilience, affordability and retaining population — but there was also a clear message that SWMID should avoid taking on additional complex programmes until its existing assets and operations are on a more secure footing.

As a result, SWMID's approach at this stage is to remain engaged in discussion, partnership-building and information gathering around both housing and energy, without committing to direct development activity. This allows the organisation to support community conversations, respond to opportunities where appropriate, and maintain awareness of emerging needs, while ensuring focus remains on consolidation and sustainability of current work.

This position does not remove community energy or housing from future consideration; rather, it recognises that meaningful progress in these areas requires significant capacity, specialist expertise and long-term investment.

They will therefore be revisited as potential areas of involvement once SWMID is better positioned to support them effectively, either through partnership models or enabling roles.

Alignment with Action

Since the survey was undertaken, SWMID has already begun aligning activity with these findings.

The survey findings closely align with work already progressing:

- Seaweed development now externally funded for two years
- Asset valuations commissioned to support evidence-led decisions
- Forestry discussions underway with Scottish Forestry
- National Lottery application submitted for Bunesan Community Garden
- £25,000 each secured for Tiroran/Bendoran infrastructure design exploration

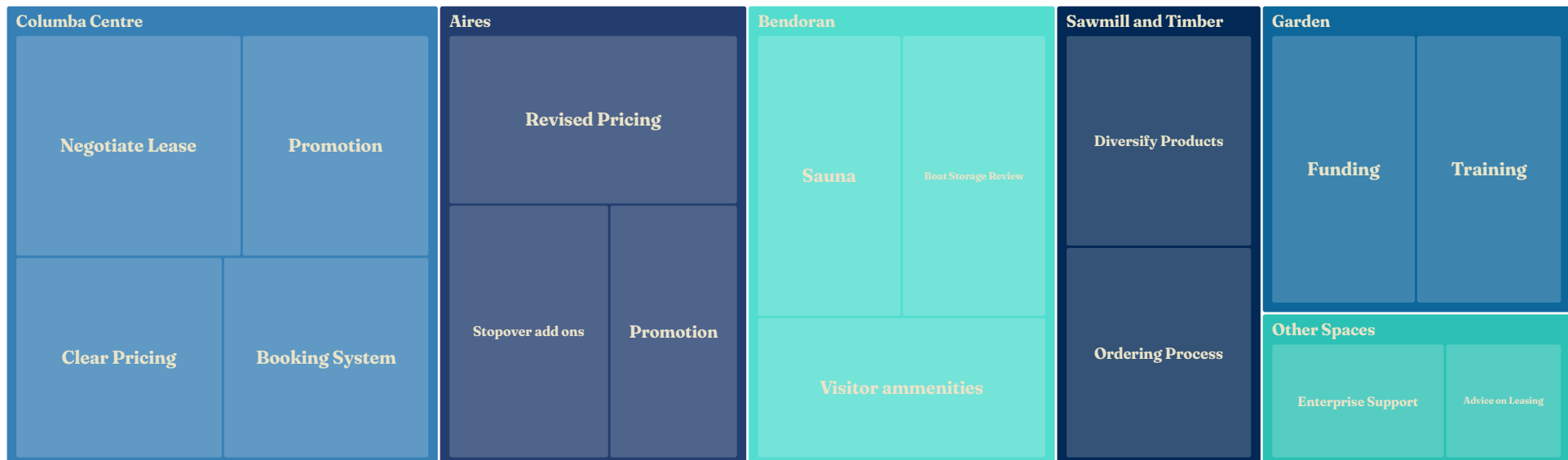
These actions reflect a shift toward consolidation, testing and informed planning.

The survey indicates SWMID is entering a maturation phase.

Early years focused on acquisition and experimentation.

The next phase focuses on refinement, sustainability and enabling others.

This is a common transition in community land organisations moving from establishment to long-term stewardship.



Alignment with Action: Working Groups

As SWMID moves into a more focused and enabling phase, working groups will play an increasingly important role as a practical way for community members to shape and support activity. Rather than acting as standing committees, working groups are intended to be task-oriented, time-bound and aligned to clearly defined pieces of work.

This approach responds directly to survey feedback encouraging SWMID to enable participation and shared responsibility rather than attempting to deliver everything internally.

Working groups will therefore function as a bridge between community interest and organisational capacity, providing a space where people can contribute skills, ideas and local knowledge to specific projects or themes.

Their role will include:

- Helping shape proposals and test ideas at an early stage
- Bringing local insight to development of assets and activities
- Supporting practical delivery where appropriate
- Acting as a channel for communication between SWMID and the wider community
- Encouraging wider participation without increasing organisational overhead

This model allows SWMID to remain focused while still creating meaningful opportunities for involvement. It reflects a shift from “SWMID doing” to “SWMID enabling others to do.”

Community members who wish to contribute to particular areas of work will be invited to take part in relevant working groups as they are established, ensuring that local energy and expertise continue to inform how projects evolve.

In this way, working groups become an active mechanism for aligning community participation with SWMID’s strategic direction — supporting delivery that is collaborative, proportionate and grounded in local capacity.

Delivering this next phase will rely not only on SWMID staff and Board, but on continued participation from across the community.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This survey has provided an important opportunity to pause, listen and reflect at a point of transition for South West Mull & Iona Development. The level of response, and the depth of connection demonstrated by those who took part, confirm that there remains strong interest in and commitment to the organisation's future. The feedback offers both reassurance and challenge: reassurance that SWMID's founding purpose continues to be supported, and challenge to ensure that this purpose is delivered in a way that is focused, sustainable and proportionate to the scale of the community it serves.

The findings indicate that the organisation is moving from an earlier phase of acquisition, exploration and project initiation into one of consolidation and long-term stewardship. This is a natural stage in the life of many community land organisations, where the emphasis shifts from doing more to ensuring that what has been built is cared for, understood and able to endure. The community has signalled clearly that success should now be measured not by the number of initiatives undertaken, but by the strength, sustainability and usefulness of those that remain.

In response, SWMID will develop a rolling three-year Action Plan that translates the direction set out in this report into practical priorities, timelines and resource planning. This Action Plan will focus on strengthening the organisation's financial resilience, making effective use of existing assets, enabling locally led activity, and building partnerships that support delivery without creating unsustainable organisational burden. It will also provide a framework against which progress can be reviewed and adjusted as circumstances evolve.

Importantly, this report does not represent a final set of decisions about specific projects or assets. A number of key strands of work — including asset valuations, forestry discussions, funded development phases and feasibility studies — are still underway. As further information emerges, SWMID will continue to engage with the community to ensure that decisions are informed by both evidence and local knowledge. Consultation will therefore remain an ongoing process, aligned to key decision points rather than treated as a single event.

The intention is to move forward in a way that is transparent, iterative and grounded in shared understanding. Where proposals are developed, they will be communicated clearly, with opportunities for discussion before significant commitments are made. This approach reflects the organisation's role as a steward of community-owned assets and recognises that long-term sustainability depends on maintaining confidence, participation and collective ownership of direction.

SWMID's next phase will therefore be characterised by careful planning, evidence-led decision-making and continued collaboration. By focusing on what is sustainable, enabling others to contribute, and maintaining open dialogue, the organisation aims to build a model that is resilient enough to support the community not only now, but for generations to come. This report marks a checkpoint in that journey — setting out what has been heard, what is being learned, and how SWMID intends to move forward with clarity, responsibility and shared purpose.

This report has brought together community insight, organisational reflection and current work to define a shared direction for the next phase of SWMID.



SWMID

**SOUTH WEST MULL &
IONA DEVELOPMENT**

