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To whom it may concern,

Ardochy Forest community buy-out

The proposed community land buy-out at Ardochy Forest by Glengarry Community Woodlands (GCW) is situated in Caol & Mallaig Ward, which I have been privileged to represent as Highland Councillor since 2014.

Glengarry has some of the more remote and hence fragile communities in the Highlands. The development of affordable housing, renewable energy and woodland crofts at Ardochy offers a rare opportunity to address some of the challenges facing the community.

I would highlight rural depopulation as the key strategic risk. The demographics of areas like Glengarry have shifted as, on the one hand, major employers have downsized, while on the other hand, housing for young families has become more challenging as properties are taken into the holiday rental market.

The falling and aging population means increased pressure on school rolls and often simply less people living locally who are able to take on public sector work, for example offering care or gritting roads. The key risk I see now is a self-reinforcing cycle of depopulation due to poor services.

Hence I strongly welcomed the Ardochy proposal when I was made aware of it and I commend GCW for their public consultation. I support the GCW goals of providing local affordable housing, along with opportunity for self-employment through woodland crofting and renewable energy to augment long term sustainability. I see these goals as a sensible and practical response to ensuring the long term future of a vibrant Glengarry community.

Yours faithfully

Cllr Ben Thompson