

Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Rural Policy

Tuesday 30th October 2018

6-7.30pm

Scottish Parliament, Committee Room 4

Rural Economies and Innovation

Approved Minutes

Attendees

Surname	First Name	Organisation
Allison	Sarah	Scottish Association of Young Farmers
Anstruther	Toby	Blackaskie Estate
Atterton	Jane	SRUC
Baldwin	Simon	Destination66 (Speaker)
Birliiga-Sutherland	Ana	UoE/SRUC
Dickson	Katy	Scottish Land and States
Eggert	Julia	UoE/SRUC
Garvin	Jenn	UoE/SRUC
George	Sheila	WWF
Gibson	Felix	Whitespace UK
Glass	Jayne	CMU, UHI
Hamilton	Alistair	SRUC
Harper	Emma	MSP (co-convenor)
Hill	Nicola	Dumfries and Galloway LEADER programme
Houghton	Kate	RTPI (Speaker)
Ketteridge	Anne-Michelle	Forth Valley & Lomond LEADER
Kleinert	Eva	Scottish Government RESAS
Lacey	Andrew	SAC (SRUC)
Lesslie	Callum	SRUC
Logie	Derek	Rural Housing Service
MacCall	Denise	
Macdonald	Michele	Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability
Macdonald	Ian	Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability
Maclean	Catriona	Scottish Government
Macwhirter	Gillian	West Lothian Council
Marley	Shaun	Stirling Council
McBride-Serrano	Cristina	SRUC
McCracken	Davy	SRUC
McLaren	Ross	Scottish Churches Rural Group
McMillan	Sam	McMillan Consultancy

McMorran	Rob	SRUC
Milne	Alison	NCRA (Speaker)
Montgomerie	Penny	Scottish Association of Young Farmers
Murray	Scott	SRUC
Nasseri	David	SRUC
Nisbet	Duncan	Scottish Government
Packard	Ann	RSA Fellows and MCICH Network
Perez Certucha	Eugenio	SRUC
Piggot	Rob	Planning Aid for Scotland
Prior	Alistair	Scottish Government
Reid	Wendy	DTA Scotland
Ross	Neil	Highlands and Islands Enterprise Initiative
Salemink	Koen	University of Groeningen
Scott	John	MSP (co-convenor)
Scott	Douglas	Scottish Borders Council
Skerratt	Sarah	SRUC
Tennant	Rachel	Landscape Institute Scotland
Townsend	Leanne	JHI
Walls	David	Lothian Broadband Networks Limited
Wayne	Powell	SRUC
Webb	Beth	Soil Association
Zavala	Hasibi	SRUC

Apologies

Surname	First Name	Organisation
Brand	Anna	RSPB
Beale	Graeme	Scottish Government
Black	Stuart	Highland Council
Bowyer	Sarah	UHI
Carruthers	Jamie	Dormont Estate
Copus	Andrew	JHI
Dawes	Rebecca	Scottish Association of Young Farmers
De Bolle	Clare	Youth Borders
Dobbie	Karen	SEPA
Farrington	John	University of Aberdeen
Fitzpatrick	Tony	Glasgow University
Gass	David	Upper Quartile
Gotts	Daniel	Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)
Graham	Stephen	Highland Council
Grills	Wayne	British Association of Landscape Industries
Latto	Julia	Scottish Enterprise
MacSween	Ann	Historic Environment Scotland
Mitchell	John	Anderson Strathern
Munoz	Sarah-Anne	UHI
Murray	Lorna	Scottish Churches Rural Group

Noble	Christina	Here we are Project
Rennie	David	UHI
Ritchie	Ceri	SRUC
Smernicki	Jane	Agri-epicentre
Tabor	Pip	Southern Uplands Partnership
Watt	John	Scottish Land Fund
Williams	Brian	SRUC
Wilson	Michael	Stirling University

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

John Scott MSP (Group co-convener and meeting Chair) welcomed everyone to the first meeting of this CPG in 2018-19. He noted that the Secretariat had received apologies for the meeting which will be recorded in the minutes. He noted apologies from Colin Smyth MSP, one of the Group's co-convener.

John Scott MSP began the meeting by noting with regret the passing of Alex Fergusson MSP. Alex was one of the founding members and driving forces of this Group and a co-convener for many years.

2. Group AGM – re-registration and election of office bearers

John Scott MSP noted that this meeting also forms the Group's AGM at which we are required to confirm the Group's office bearers. John Scott MSP noted that Colin Smyth MSP, Mark Ruskell MSP and himself were all prepared to stand again as co-convener. It was proposed that Emma Harper MSP would replace Graeme Dey MSP, who has recently been appointed as Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans, as a co-convener. All four of the MSP co-convener were approved by Alex Burnett MSP.

John Scott MSP thanked SRUC in their role as Secretariat. He proposed that SRUC continue in this role and this was seconded by Ann Packard and therefore approved.

3. Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting (June 2018)

John Scott MSP noted that the unapproved minutes from the June meeting were circulated by the Secretariat on 6th July 2018. They were proposed by Davy McCracken as an accurate record of the meeting and seconded by Peter Ross. The Secretariat will upload the approved minutes to the June meeting website.

4. Presentations, followed by discussion

John Scott MSP informed participants that there were three speakers each of whom had 8-10 minutes to speak before the floor would be open to discussion/questions.

- ***Alison Milne – Co-chair of the National Council of Rural Advisers***

Alison opened her presentation by briefly introducing the National Council of Rural Advisers and its purpose, and thanking the Group for the opportunity to speak. She noted that the NCRA had recently published its final report containing a number of recommendations.

She explained the process that the NCRA had gone through to collect its evidence. The Council had listened to the views of people across rural Scotland through workshops and other discussions, and that their final report/recommendations were guided by the enthusiasm and positivity they heard from people and the key principles of simplicity, authenticity and realism. Alison outlined how the process had left her feeling positive and enthusiastic about the potential for change, and mindful of the diversity, vibrancy and creativity that exists across rural Scotland. She noted that over the last 30 years there had been many visions, strategies, national conversations, etc. but we remain in a position where rural people can still all too readily identify the challenges that continue to be faced, including in terms of infrastructure, connectivity, etc. This is holding back the rural economy rather than enabling and supporting its transition and growth. The NCRA's message to the First Minister and Cabinet was simple: rural areas represent a huge opportunity for Scotland's economic future and we must not lose that opportunity. We also must build on the huge positivity, passion and enthusiasm across rural Scotland and not be held back by the potential complexity of implementation.

A recording was then played of Alison's presentation to the Cabinet and First Minister which highlighted the key messages from the NCRA's work, as explained above but also reflected on the obvious ambition and worth of the rural economy, the inextricable links between the country's natural assets and Scotland's brand image globally, and the importance of rural-urban links. She emphasised the need to measure the rural economy not just in GVA terms as this ignores so much, but in much broader terms which paint a real picture of value and contribution in economic, social, cultural and environmental, terms which may be hard to measure. She referred to one example of a gourmet burger van where the rural context 'gives the project soul'. There are huge opportunities to 'deliver life and soul into Scotland's economic future by embracing the assets that rural offers'. Part of the challenge is also to tell the real story and generate a greater understanding of the rural economy as this has been lost.

To achieve this vision of the contribution of rural areas requires effectively mainstreaming rural in all economic processes, and this is the NCRA's headline recommendation. But to achieve this transition will take time and requires a change in mindset and culture.

The implementation of the Rural Economy Framework is key and having the Rural Economy Action Group is important as the governing body to implement it. The key message is simple

though: that removing barriers to the rural economy will ensure that even greater benefits are delivered to the whole of Scotland.

- ***Kate Houghton - RTPI***

Kate started by thanking the Group for the invitation to speak. The RTPI is the leading body for spatial planning with 25,000 members worldwide, including many rural members. Its key role is to maintain professional standards for planners.

Kate welcomed the fact that planning is woven through the NCRA report and argued that there is potentially a strong role for planners in terms of rural mainstreaming. Mainstreaming implies a place-based approach – i.e. a flexible policy to respond to geographic differences, and which requires collaboration between place and sectoral strategies.

Kate noted that the Planning Bill is currently going through Stage 2 scrutiny. There will be secondary legislation and new policy and guidance. The RTPI is looking for 3 key things from that programme of reform:

- they are asking to see Chief Planning Officers (CPOs) present in every planning authority. Currently there is a vacuum of expertise about place in local government and this has implications in terms of service delivery. CPO should be the first point of contact about place. This change would help to shift planning from being a regulatory to being a proactive service focused on solutions to the different challenges across rural Scotland.
- Throughout its report the NCRA talks about mainstreaming and joining up national strategies. The National Planning Framework (NPF) is a key part of that. The RTPI also wants to see the NPF better aligned with other strategies too. So that all plans and strategies speak effectively to one another.
- Local place plans – these need to adequately project rural voices. They provide opportunities for communities at the microscale to say how they want their communities to change to inform local authority planning decisions and ultimately interact with the NPF. Local place plans in a rural setting are potentially particularly exciting due to the (usually stronger) sense of community and identity in rural places, for example around housing and increased collaboration with housing associations – Local Place Plans provide an opportunity to articulate the outcome for that collaboration.

Kate concluded by commenting that with planners everything is often very process-driven. The new NPF in 2019 will set the policy context but to get there we need to ensure that we have the processes and connections in place so that we can deliver on the ambitions that we are looking for.

- ***Simon Baldwin – Destination66***

Simon began by outlining the Scotland's Towns Partnership consultancy process to explore how towns can better use digital. He referred specifically to the Kirkcaldy Business District Project which was shaped by the wider programme on digital towns. Here sustainability is key but anchored within the community.

The projects are unique place by place and are owned by those who will benefit. They also run over 5 year terms providing access to money in the longer term. Digital Improvement Districts are thinned down versions of BIDs to deliver specifically digital aims.

The digital partnership involving Scotland's Towns Partnership, the Scottish Government and Fife Council were looking for a demonstration project to deliver proof of concept and Cupar is delivering that.

The work is also about thinking about how development digital infrastructure in a place can then support other policies and strategies – how can these be layered on top to better support a place – including a town such as Cupar and its surrounding rural areas.

The Understanding Scottish Places programme identified 470 communities across Scotland that were of interest, i.e. in need of support although the model is better suited to supporting some places than others.

Simon reiterated the NCRAs key conclusions and his support for them, including ensuring that rural is mainstreamed. He emphasised the need to build activities in relation to learning, research and monitoring and in listening to the people – engagement is critical at every level. He emphasised the need to link rural to the national outcomes and the importance placed on community-led opportunities and the involvement of business owners and managers in Cupar. He noted that 10 of the recommendations in the NCRA's blueprint are supported by the Cupar demonstration project.

- **Q&A and discussion**

- Jackie Brierton (GrowBiz): Jackie picked up on the mainstreaming issue and noted the recent launch of the National Economy Action Plan. The key work will be how rural economy considerations, in time, are fully integrated into that. She noted that there had not yet been a formal Government response to the NCRA report but that it was important to start in the direction of travel set out in the report sooner rather than later. She noted the long-standing difficulty in measuring the true impact of rural businesses, especially rural microbusinesses, which operate under the radar but are engaged in significant, creative and diverse activities. We need a new way of fully measuring and evaluating that activity; when we know more about what these businesses are doing and contributing, then they can be better supported. Levels of self-employment in rural areas are double those of urban areas. Self-employment is key to the success of the rural economy and that needs to be appropriately supported. Jackie also noted that these microenterprises do not have a unified strong voice to speak for them, unlike agricultural businesses, though there are some membership organisations and chambers of commerce, for example. There is no

easy answer to this and it may be most appropriate for a coalition or alliance of organisations to provide this voice.

- Rob Mc Morran (SRUC): Rob noted the importance of access to land with respect to rural development and innovation – as is evident through many of the community buyouts and their success in encouraging new enterprise creation. Rob reported that SRUC is currently undertaking some work for Scottish Government on small land holdings. This has revealed the level of interest in Scotland from people wishing to establish such land holdings, not just to farm the holdings, but also to set up a range of small enterprises. Enabling such individuals to have access to land is critical in mobilising this kind of activity.
- Neil Ross (HIE): Neil noted the huge opportunity that crofts provide to encourage people to live in rural areas and to put them to purposeful use. Derelict crofts need to be brought back into use.
- Peter Ross (Dumfries and Galloway LEADER): noted that there are 4,200 registered farms in the D&G region with many small parcels of land, which is not necessarily the most efficient and effective arrangement.
- Alison Milne (NCRA): Reinforced the importance of giving people access to land in terms of them being able to realise their aspirations – which are phenomenal in rural Scotland, and include a huge range of activities, including mental health, young people, creating diverse employment, etc.
- John Scott MSP (Chair): John noted that the pace of change has never been greater or faster. He noted the widespread evidence of rural resilience and communities being willing and able to make something happen around them.
 - Alison Milne agreed commenting again on the vibrancy and magnitude of things happening across rural Scotland which were uncovered as part of the NCRA's evidence gathering. Alison also reiterated the need for the rural economy to be talked about much more positively rather than in terms of a deficit or being defensive about the challenges that are faced.
 - Simon Baldwin (Destination66): Commented that too many rural communities feel that they are screaming into a void with deaf ears at the end of the void. There is still too much of a focus on cities but initiatives like that in Cupar are able to demonstrate that, although they are small-scale, they are able to make a difference – including in terms of some of the NCRA's recent recommendations. It is vital to improve connectivity in order to improve inclusion, and bring positive benefits for mental health, social care, etc. These are not multi-million pound projects but they are ideas that are community-focused and their impact is big.
 - Alison Milne (NCRA): commented that, for a long time, the system has not addressed the fundamental challenges in rural areas. We have had visions, strategies, etc. but they have not addressed the deep-seated macroeconomic problems. There is still too much silo thinking and too many strategies which are not linked. If everyone accepts the principles that the NCRA has put forward, it will not take long for this to filter down into real action.
- Kate Houghton (RTPI): Kate noted that planning is undergoing a shift, but the language used is still not quite right. The planning system, and planners themselves, have a responsibility to support change to deliver infrastructure and to encourage civic participation. They can also play a role in linking the national and local levels. It

is about ensuring that the tools that are available are nurturing and that the language used is encouraging and positive for people wishing to bring about change in their locality.

- Peter Ross (Dumfries and Galloway LEADER): Peter noted the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere and its focus on place and landscape and how people can/do influence what happens around them. He noted that working with communities is a long term project and establishing cooperative relationships is critical. But communities run into silos everywhere meaning that only small steps can be taken.
- Wendy Reid (DTASS): Noted the importance of feeding these points into the current Local Democracy Matters process and into debates on local governance. Critical here is that local communities are empowered but people need to know how to get involved. Thinking about new ways of doing this is important.
- Ann Packard (RSA Fellows and MCICH Network): noted the importance of keeping young people to the benefit of rural economies, and thus the need for appropriate housing. It was noted that transport and skills had not been mentioned by anyone, including the higher transport costs in rural areas.
 - Alison Milne (NCRA): Noted that transport and skills issues did feature heavily in the NCRA events across Scotland, including the need for integrated transport, and this is reflected in the NCRA's final report. Alison reiterated that the NCRA's final report sought to present a framework and initial recommendations as the start of a conversation. But she recognised that silo thinking and acting hinders progress on this. The Rural Economy Action Plan work will need to seek to join together organisations, policy domains, etc. and identify needs and opportunities using a place-based approach.
 - Peter Ross (Dumfries and Galloway LEADER): Noted the 50 year plan that has been launched in Ireland which might contain valuable learning for Scotland.
- Iain Davidson (Scottish Government): Noted that the value of the rural economy has been lost from debates. In terms of education, there is a massive disconnect between rural and urban and this must be reduced. The understanding about the value of rural will come if education is improved. He also noted that providing access to land is not a panacea – people still need to operate a viable business.
- Denise MacColl (Logan Primary School): Work in East Ayrshire is focusing on making connections between rural schools, across local authority boundaries. Work is also ongoing to create a curriculum which is more appropriately tailored for rural areas.
- Jim Hume (National Rural Mental Health Forum): Noted that the Forum consists of 60 organisations working together to address mental ill health in rural Scotland, and working across policy domains.
- Penny Montgomerie (SAYFC): noted the particular challenges relating to young people and mental ill health; raising awareness of these issues is critical. She mentioned the 'Are Ewe OK?' campaign which was very well received and has run for longer than expected and is now being built on. She noted however that many different groups are now focusing on rural mental ill health issues and making it easier to talk about it, is in itself helping to provide a solution.

- John Scott MSP (Chair): Asked how town and country can be more effectively linked?
- Alison Milne (NCRA): Commented that it is partly about re-educating urban communities on rural lifestyles and what happens in rural areas. But this is a two-way process so we need to develop better understanding in both areas about one another as we live in an interconnected society in a small country.
- Neil Ross (HIE): Commented that the issue of mental health in rural areas is interesting as many people are isolated, especially perhaps those working in the agriculture sector. It may be appropriate to work on encouraging stronger linkages between primary producers and those working further down the supply chain to reduce this sense of isolation and encourage people to work more effectively as part of a team (e.g. to focus on adding value). SAOS have done lots of work in this area, encouraging individuals and businesses to work together collaboratively. This can help to give people confidence to do new things; and there are models there which people can learn from.
- Jackie Brierton (GrowBiz): Jackie re-emphasised the importance of peer-to-peer support. GrowBiz offers such support and peer learning. They have organised 60 events in the last 3 months. Often this activity is focused on upskilling people and it can also help to reduce the isolation that rural business owners often feel. Jackie noted the particular example of the Perthshire Care Cooperative which is a collective of 24 microenterprises providing care and wellbeing services. The businesses saw the opportunities provided by new funding mechanisms for health and social care (through self-directed support); and the arrangement also helps to keep people in their homes/communities by making a range of services available. It is vital that local colleges play a role in providing appropriate training and skills development, which also helps to increase confidence.
- Ross McLaren (Scottish Rural Churches Group): Ross emphasised the importance of meetings and relationships. To change things, the success of human relationships are critically important. Everyone needs to display an openness to other people and to encourage others to be open towards them.
- Gillian Macwhirter (West Lothian Council): Gillian noted that she lives and works in West Lothian and is therefore very familiar with many different types of rural - including post-industrial communities. She argued that the narrative about place-based thinking is very important as many communities have complex histories and current challenges, including relating to social structures and deprivation. It is critical that communities themselves value the assets that they have in their places in order to see transformational change. People are also critical to this narrative too. Too often people become dependent on e.g. the local authority to have responsibility for something but individuals have responsibilities too to make changes. Everyone has to own changes within themselves to make them happen successfully, and support services then provide an infrastructure around this.
- Sarah Allison (SAYFC): It is great to see this level of debate around the NCRA report but it is critical that the youth voice is brought into this. What more can be done to keep young people in rural places? How can we tackle this challenge in a more progressive way? For example, how do we change a system which doesn't allow rural young people the opportunity to study all subjects in rural schools. How can we

fundamentally change the system to enable people to live in and enjoy rural Scotland?

- Toby Anstruther (Blackaskie Estate): It is right that we should seek to make rural Scotland attractive for young people to stay but it is important to allow people to be fluid. There is a big movement of people in their late 20s out of rural Fife but many people come back in their 40s and beyond. So it is also about encouraging people to come back to rural areas, and not dissuading them from leaving in the first place.
- John Scott MSP (Chair): Noted that perceptions of post-industrial communities are not always positive and often people come back as commuters and may have more limited positive impacts on the rural communities in which they live. For communities that are further away from urban centres it is also difficult.
- Toby Anstruther (Blackaskie Estate): Achieving a vibrant rural Scotland is not just about agriculture and fishing it is about understanding what else is there and how else you can work and live in rural areas. So outsiders coming in are important as well as retaining and attracting back those who are originally from rural communities.
- Sarah Skerratt (SRUC): Noted the Recharging Rural research that she led recently which revealed three key factors in helping young people to stay – providing a mix of affordable housing, affordable transport and meaningful jobs with progression routes. We need to ensure that we make it worthwhile for young people to stay in rural areas and to return; rather than them feeling forced to stay.
- Davy McCracken (SRUC): Noted the value of looking to other countries for learning, including Ireland. He noted an uplands issues conference that he had attended recently which focused on innovation and partnership, bringing together local and national government and other stakeholders and agencies. In Ireland a small amount of funding has been made available to uplands partnerships to think through cross-cutting issues almost irrespective of the policy and institutional infrastructure which exists.

5. Next meeting: Wednesday 28 November on ‘Delivering Public Goods’

John Scott MSP noted that the Group’s next meeting will take place on Wednesday 28 November and will focus on ‘Delivering Public Goods’. This will build on discussion at the Group’s June meeting which started to reflect on the importance of new technologies in monitoring the delivery of public goods.

Davy McCracken followed up on John’s comments reminding participants that the November meeting will be held in conjunction with the Land Use Conference at Dynamic Earth. There will be international speakers who are attending the conference who will talk about their experiences in their home countries at the CPG meeting. It is also still possible to register for the Conference.

John Scott MSP (Chair) thanked the speakers for provoking an interesting discussion and all participants for their contributions. He reflected on the value of the CPG meetings for disseminating knowledge, but also as fora for encouraging connections and interactions between people from across rural Scotland with often diverse interests.

6. AOB

No other items of business were declared and the meeting was closed.