



European Rural Parliament 2015

National Report from Scotland

Prepared by
Scottish Rural action

Introduction

Scotland's contribution to the European Rural Parliament's 'cascade of ideas' is based almost wholly on the nationwide process of consultation and the gathering ideas which we took in preparation for the Scottish Rural Parliament, held at Oban in November 2014. In this report we describe the approach we took to prepare for the event, and we offer a range of conclusions and recommendations which were approved at the Scottish Rural Parliament

Our vision for rural Scotland

The Scottish Rural Parliament offered the people who live and work in rural Scotland an opportunity to develop a shared vision of what rural Scotland can be and to agree what actions are required for that vision to be fulfilled.

Scotland is fortunate that 95% of its land is rural and this is widely acknowledged as a valuable national asset. However, it is important that those who live and work in rural Scotland are not disadvantaged by challenges arising from their location, and that rural life is sustainable socially, economically and environmentally in the long term and for future generations.

To this end, the Scottish Rural Parliament aimed to give a new voice to Scotland's many rural communities and interests, and to work with Scottish Government and others to achieve a confident and thriving rural Scotland that is fairer, healthier and more socially just for all.

Consultation Process

Throughout 2014 we consulted with rural communities about the key issues which affect them and helped them to identify solutions to those issues. We celebrated the many successes our communities have in tackling these issues through the Rural Innovators Award and the beauty of our country and people through the Celebrate Rural photography competition.

To consult with people in rural communities we carried out the following activities:

- **Key themes survey** – A short survey asking people in rural communities to identify the key challenges facing their communities that the Rural Parliament should examine. This was conducted online and face-to-face at the annual Royal Highland Show event. The results of the survey were a key factor in deciding the key themes of the Rural Parliament and in designing the agenda and content of the Rural Parliament. In total 1154 people took part in the survey online and at the Royal Highland Show.
- **Local events** – A series of events aimed primarily at explaining what the Rural Parliament is and encouraging attendance at the national event, and secondarily aimed at gaining some potential solutions to the challenges identified. The majority of local events were organised by our regional partners with additional events organised by smaller organisations within a

smaller locality. A Director or member of staff visited each of the events (in Shetland this was carried out by video link). Over 1000 people attended the local events.

- **Twitter debates** – A regular hour-long chat on Twitter using the hashtag ‘ruralhour’ looking at each of the key themes. Around 50 people took part in each of the debates. The debates were considered to be a valuable way of reaching people, encouraging followers and enabling debate. An analysis of the debates conducted by SRUC (available on request) identified some useful findings from the discussion, with the acknowledgement that at times the discussion was dominated by specific interest groups and could not be considered representative of all rural views.
- We explored the seven ‘top’ issues people voted for in the survey in more detail at the inaugural Scottish Rural Parliament national meeting in November 2014.

Our rural communities – a selection of case studies highlighting our achievements

Braemar. Although remote with just 400 inhabitants, Braemar is a vibrant village. Like all destinations that rely on tourism, the community must continually innovate and refresh what’s on offer. Work is ongoing on an action plan to improve services for both local people and for the many visitors to this tiny village surrounded by the challenges and opportunities of the majestic mountains of the Cairngorms National Park. Current projects include running a Creative Arts Festival, a community orchard, improving transport links, raising funds to restore Braemar Castle and progressing Scotland’s only World Highland Games Discovery Centre. The village has its own choir, country dance group and a traditional music group as well as pipers and highland dancers. Thanks to community pressure, Kindrochit Castle is undergoing extensive upgrading. Moving forward is made possible through a strong community spirit which sees so many people volunteering to support the many village activities, clubs and projects.



Badenoch. Badenoch Broadband and Communications CIC started when their local Laggan exchange suffered a fault which led to intermittent broadband for 6 weeks. Having realised that their



telephone exchange would not be upgraded to bring better broadband under the government scheme, they came to the conclusion that a long distance wireless system was the only feasible option. Over the next two years volunteers built and configured the first three masts which allowed all those in visual distance to connect to a faster more reliable broadband, this included those too far away from the exchange to experience broadband speeds for the first time. In the last 12 months three further masts have been constructed and they are continuing to extend their

network to include surrounding villages and soon hope to be offering ‘superfast’ connections that will be the fastest available in Badenoch. It goes to show what a community can do when it works together, any obstacle can be overcome.

Stramash. The Stramash project uses the outdoors as a vehicle for the personal, social, emotional, physical and



educational development of children and young people aged 2-20 years, while at the same time ensuring the stewardship of the outdoor environment. Stramash was established in 2009 and has since grown from a small local project into an organisation that employs 30 staff, over 10 active volunteers and has two bases- Oban and Fort William. It operates two pre-school nurseries and also have an excellent reputation in the field of outdoor learning for school age children, in addition, the organisation delivers the only outdoor children’s care apprenticeship scheme for young people in Scotland and is the largest provider of outdoor education apprenticeships in the country.

Jura. The Isle of Jura is home to 5000 deer, but less than 200 people. With no direct car link to the mainland they rely heavily on the services on Islay and the weather-dependent ferry that gets them there. In 2012 Jura faced the reality of losing the island’s only shop. Part of village life for 130 years, the shop not only provided access to essential goods but was also a vital part of the social



fabric. Following overwhelming support from the community to save the shop, The Isle of Jura Development Trust led the project for a community buy-out. In March 2013, just 6 months after their Community Right to Buy application was accepted, they completed acquisition of the shop. 19 months on, and the shop is thriving. Volunteers pay a large part in running the business (well over 2,500 hours recorded), but they are proud to say that all the staff working in the shop are paid employees.

Gatehouse. Gatehouse Development Initiative (GDI) provides volunteering opportunities every week to work on a wide range of environment projects. The main objective of the Initiative is the promotion of the welfare of the community of Gatehouse of Fleet. The GDI has its own small wind turbine which it operates in conjunction with an organic farm and ice cream producer : power from the turbine has helped them to retain the local library by reducing energy costs. It has helped the Community Centre to become self-sufficient by installing photo voltaic panels, air source heat pumps and double glazing. It has also turned a redundant tourist information office into a year-round sustainable building for show-casing local crafts and providing affordable office space.



Messages from the Scottish Rural Parliament 2014

Hundreds of concerns, solutions and actions were discussed at the Scottish Rural Parliament in 2014. Many of these solutions are being taken forward and explored by rural communities and partner organisations at local, regional and national level. We outline below the key areas of concern and the actions that we will be taking on behalf of rural communities between our 2014 and 2016 Rural Parliaments.

Key conclusions of the Scottish Rural Parliament

1. Scotland needs new democratic structures decided, agreed upon and led by communities.
2. Rural communities should be empowered to take action for themselves.
3. Rural areas require their own set of outcome measures, monitoring arrangements and measures of deprivation.
4. Rural businesses need to be effectively supported to survive, grow and thrive.

- 5. Rural communities need to be well connected to services through integrated and affordable transport.
- 6. Broadband and mobile phone signal are essential services which should be available to all.

“Rural communities need to be more empowered, connected and sustainable” :

Empowered	Connected	Sustainable
Stronger local democratic structures	Access to superfast broadband and 4G mobile phone signal	A baseline of services allowing monitoring and intervention
A local visioning process	The Scottish Rural Parliament and other mechanisms connect people across rural	Employment, educations and business opportunities
Access to assets	Effective and affordable transport	A good quality of life
The ability to influence ‘big policy’		Opportunities to live sustainably

Reforming Local Democracy

Local decision-making processes and democracy emerged as a cross-cutting theme throughout 2014 in preparation for the inaugural Scottish Rural Parliament in November that year and was the strongest message arising from the event.

“Scotland needs new democratic structures that are decided, agreed and led by communities”

Scotland is one of the most centralised countries in Europe. Its local authorities are 45 times the geographical size of the European average. Communities do not always feel able to influence decision-making in their local area or at a national policy level. There was a strong message from the Scottish Rural Parliament that without making fundamental and probably structural changes in Scotland, the impact of our other activities would be significantly impeded.

“Radically transforming local democracy is not just an aspiration – it is absolutely vital”

Community Councils are intended to be the bridge between local authorities and communities. However there are some serious concerns about the effectiveness and representativeness of community councils in some parts of rural Scotland.

Objective 1: Rural communities are engaged in a productive national conversation about how local democracy can be revitalised, what the nature of democracy is and what structures and activities are best suited to deliver it.

We are seeking:

- Further grass-roots debate on local democratic reform which is coordinated and inclusive and which seeks to communicate and build on existing proposals, identifying the next steps for empowering communities and fostering local democratic collaboration.
- Active engagement by the Scottish Government in the growing movement for change around local democracy, including addressing concerns about community council powers and budgets, community planning partnerships and the transparency of local decision-making.
- Increased understanding and development of participatory democracy as an approach, building on the example and practice of the Scottish Rural Parliament

Objective 2: Concerns about community councils are addressed.

We are seeking:

- Scottish Government to respond to the concerns of rural communities about community councils.

Communities Leading

Enabling rural communities to choose their own priorities and solutions, and supporting them to work on these appropriate solutions, creates resilience and sustainability. A lot of issues can be addressed by communities and in order to do that they need to have the tools and capacity to do it. However, it is important to recognise that some communities are less able to access support and these should be particularly supported with the intention of reducing inequalities of access and leadership. Support for communities needs to be tailored to that community.

Rural communities should be empowered to take action for themselves.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill passed through the Scottish a few weeks ago and gives new powers to communities, both urban and rural. It will take some time for all of the opportunities to become available.

The Land Reform Bill will also provide new powers and opportunities to communities and the first draft has just been presented to the Scottish Parliament. It will be open for consultation before it is finalised and passes through Scottish Parliament.

Objective 1: Increased awareness and engagement amongst communities with the new opportunities available through the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill and the forthcoming Land Reform Bill.

We are seeking:

- Relevant organisations to take a coordinated approach to ensuring communities are aware of and have the capacity to access the opportunities available.
- Rural communities’ take-up the opportunities offered and share successes and challenges with each other.

Objective 2: Funding for community projects and initiatives is available to community organisations in advance of projects making expenditure.

We are seeking:

- A change of policy within the public sector to pay funding for community-led projects in advance of expenditure being made, wherever this is not dictated by EU or other externally controlled rules.
- Inclusion of concerns about the payment in arrears of EU grant funds to small projects within the report from the European Rural Parliament.

Objective 3: Communities are funded and supported to develop a vision for their local area.

We are seeking:

- Best practice guidance, funding and support are available to each community in developing their own vision for the future.

Measures and Monitoring

Rural areas require their own set of outcome measures, monitoring arrangements and measures of deprivation.

The impact of our work and that of others can only be effectively measured if the ways in which we measure change are suitable for rural areas. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, for example, is used to make decisions about funding for rural areas but does not always capture smaller pockets of deprivation within a wider area.

Objective: A range of rural outcome measures and monitoring arrangements are available and utilised to effectively evaluate the impact of legislation and other activities on rural communities.

We are seeking:

- A range of rural outcome measures and monitoring arrangements are available and utilised to effectively evaluate the impact of legislation and other activities on rural communities.

Business and Employment

This is a key issue for rural communities with some areas reporting unemployment in excess of 50% of the working population. Rates of under-employment, part-time working and out-migration of working age people are concerning and likely result in distorted unemployment figures.

Being able to work locally enhances rural economic and social resilience and strengthens the population base. Scotland’s rural economy is vital not only for sustainability of rural areas but to the country as a whole. Further business diversification needs to be encouraged, with support from planning. Broadband and transport links are essential.

Rural businesses need to be effectively supported to survive, grow and thrive.

The business support offer is tailored to the needs of different regions of Scotland. It is a concern of people in rural Scotland that the decision about which area receives which services may be outdated and no longer effective in meeting the needs of businesses.

Objective: Coordinated and accessible enterprise services are available which reflect the needs and the economy of different regions of rural Scotland.

We are seeking:

- A review of the current economic needs of different regions of Scotland, available wider support mapped across all partners and enterprise support services which reflect these needs.

Transport Infrastructure

Scotland’s rural communities often feel they are severely penalised through lack of a proper integrated transport infrastructure and affordability.

“It is almost impossible to get around D&G by public transport. Try getting the ferry at Cairnryan on a Sunday. You can get a bus to Stranraer, train to AYR and then bus back to Cairnryan. Madness.”

Rural communities are more reliant on private transport and expensive fuel costs, pay higher delivery charges, are unable to access essential services and our businesses and economy suffer as a result.

Rural communities need to be well connected to services through integrated and affordable transport.

Many public transport providers operate on a commercial basis and determine their own timetables and prices. However in rural areas transport operators are often subsidised and the local authority

has a say over their timetable. There are an increasing number of community transport operators who fill in the gaps and provide vital services for rural communities.

Depending on whether an operator is commercial or subsidised depends on how rural communities can best influence their decision-making. At the moment it is often not clear to communities how timetabling, pricing and integration decisions are made.

Objective 1: Improved communication between transport operators and with communities regarding transport developments and efforts to integrate timetables, with opportunities for communities to challenge changes to services.

We are seeking:

- Commercial transport operators publish details of how they engage with other transport providers and with the communities they serve when designing or amending services.
- Local authorities and bus service providers consult with communities when making changes to timetables.
- Guidance is published by Scottish Government to encourage stronger engagement between transport operators and Local Transport Authorities and the communities that they serve when changes to services are proposed.

Objective 2: Improved support for community transport initiatives.

We are seeking:

- The new integrated health and social care partnerships should embed transport in their planning and develop a strategic approach to working with community transport operators in order to provide effective non-emergency transport.
- Transport service commissioners should review transport contracting so that the quality of service provided has a higher weighting, include community benefit clauses where appropriate, and make the tender process proportionate for small community transport operators.
- The Scottish Government should consider how the Scotland-wide bus concessionary fare scheme can best be amended to ensure users of community transport services can benefit from their entitlement to concessions.

Digital Connectivity

Excellent 4G mobile phone signal and superfast broadband are essential services and yet many people in rural communities do not receive even basic mobile signal or broadband. It is one of the most limiting factors affecting businesses, communities and individuals in rural areas and is a likely cause of the out-migration of working age people and businesses.

Broadband and mobile phone signal provision are essential services which should be available to all.

Access to superfast broadband and 4G mobile phone signal would make it easier for rural businesses to compete more effectively on a national and international scale, providing jobs and ensuring the sustainability of rural communities. As technology develops it can provide people in rural communities with essential and desirable services, improving quality of life. The importance of being able to connect with friends, family and information cannot be overestimated.

“Lack of good broadband means businesses will not move into the area, and the slow speeds reduce the potential output in one day which is magnified over the course of a year. Need more businesses to produce employment, to have more people to use the local facilities to make the high street thrive.”

There are projects underway to improve both broadband and mobile phone signal. Broadband is dealt with by the Scottish Government and mobile phone signal is dealt with by the UK Government.

Broadband

The Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband Programme aims to provide fibre broadband infrastructure to areas where commercial infrastructure providers have chosen not to develop. Combined with current commercial roll-out plans, 95% of premises in Scotland should have access to fibre broadband by the end of 2017 and 85% by the end of 2015.

Community Broadband Scotland has been set-up to focus on providing broadband solutions in the areas that are least likely to benefit from the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband rollouts.

People in rural communities are concerned by the pace of the roll-out of broadband, that some households and businesses may not get any improvement and that until BT confirm where they will not be operating communities cannot access alternative solutions.

Mobile signal

The Mobile Infrastructure Project has been allocated £150million by the UK Government to deliver mobile phone signal to rural areas where there is currently no signal. The project is responsible for responsible for “a full-scale roll-out including mobile network planning and design, sourcing and acquiring sites, building the infrastructure (including masts), installing the Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) equipment and operating the sites – after the equipment has been commissioned by the MNOs.” (<http://www.arqiva.com/views/our-views/mip-better-connecting-rural-britain/>)

However people in rural communities are concerned about the slow pace of progress – the project is currently two years behind schedule – and that there are no plans to provide 100% coverage or to improve 4G coverage.

Objective 1: Mobile phone signal in rural areas is significantly improved over the next 5 years.

We are seeking:

- The Mobile Infrastructure Project is reviewed and the effectiveness of this project for rural Scotland is maximised.

Objective 2: Broadband of sufficient speeds reaches all rural communities as quickly as possible.

We are seeking:

- Greater transparency from BT over the delivery rates of broadband to rural areas and in particular clarity over the areas broadband does not reach.
- A Universal Service Obligation for broadband which specifies a minimum speed.

Our asks of the European Rural Parliament

We conducted a light-touch consultation for the ERP 2015 via email with our Advisory Forum members (a network of national organisations with a stake in rural issues) and on Twitter in addition to the consultations carried for our Rural Parliament. Considering all evidence collected our key asks of the ERP are:

Share best practice between countries so that we may learn from each other.

There is a wealth of knowledge and progress which can be shared between countries to help us all move forward in tackling rural issues as quickly and efficiently as possible. Please consider and action the best ways in which we can do this effectively. We are particularly interested in sharing knowledge about issues relating to health and social care, population changes, broadband and mobile signal, transport, local democracy and decision-making, housing and economic development.

Campaign for and with us on the following issues:

- Common Agricultural Policy: broader rural development or environment measures which we can see delivering wider public benefits.
- Common Fisheries Policy: Given the nature of fish stocks as a common, and moveable resource, a European solution, especially to mid and deep-water species, is essential.
- Broadband and mobile signal: These are essential services and should be treated as such. We need good broadband speeds and 4G mobile signal even in our most remote communities. Current UK and Scottish plans for these services are inadequate.
- Transport: We need access to affordable, efficient transport systems across Europe for both people and products. Investment in this is essential.
- EU funding: Funding should be accessible and not overly bureaucratic for organisations, especially smaller ones, to access, monitor and claim. Funds should be paid as projects commence and not in arrears. Funds should be protected so that allocations of funding for rural areas are guaranteed to reach the communities they are intended for without reductions made by national or local governments.
- Education: More opportunities for education at all ages should be available in rural communities. Rural schools and colleges should be protected.
- SRDP funding: In-built encouragement for multi-use land strategies and partnerships between a wide-range of land users would be greatly welcomed.
- De minimis: A review of the legislation to ensure that the approach taken is sensible, fit-for-purpose and is not a barrier to those rural communities who are seeking to provide essential services (inc broadband, mobile and transport) for themselves.
- Housing: Affordable housing is essential for the survival of rural communities. Holiday and second homes increase the prices of housing and exclude people who want to live in the community full-time.

Scottish Rural Action is a company registered in Scotland with company number: 461352.