

Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Rural Policy

Wednesday 27th March 2013

5.30 – 7.30pm, Scottish Parliament Committee Room 5

Minutes (approved)

Present

Name	Organisation
David Cameron	Community Land Scotland (Speaker)
Sandra Holmes	HIE (Speaker)
Peter Couchman	Plunkett Foundation (Speaker)
Eric Samuel	Big Lottery Fund (Speaker)
Jim Hume	MSP, Co-convenor (Chair)
Claire Baker	MSP, Co-convenor
Alex Fergusson	MSP, Co-convenor
Graeme Dey	MSP, Co-convenor
David Stewart	MSP
Jenny Brotchie	Carnegie Trust UK
Alison Elliot	Chair, Land Reform Review Group
Alan Laidlaw	Crown Estate Scotland
Ian Macdonald	Chair of the Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability
Bruce McConachie	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Alasdair McKinlay	Scottish Government
Rebekah Widdowfield	Scottish Government
Heather Holmes	Scottish Government
Ross McLaren	Scottish Churches Rural Group
Tom Moore	University of St Andrews
Madhu Satsangi	University of Stirling
Linda Gillespie	Community Ownership Support Service, DTAS
Bob Frost	Forestry Commission Scotland
Colette Backwell	Scottish Food and Drink Federation
Daniel Gotts	SNH
Norman MacAskill	SCVO
Fiona Mackenzie	UHI
Andrew Midgley	Scottish Land and Estates
Peter Misselbrook	Tods Murray LLP
Pete Ritchie	Whitmuir Organics Limited

Douglas Scott	Scottish Borders Council
Sheila McWhirter	East Lothian Council
David Whiteford	North Highland Initiative
Mike Madden	Halmyre Community Company
Mike Hunter	Halmyre Community Company
Martin Meteyard	Whitmuir Community Farm Ltd
James Graham	SAOS
Vanessa Halhead	Rural Parliament Adviser
Andrew Prendergast	Plunkett Scotland
Patricia Neeson	
Paul Phare	Energy4all
Arlene Cullum	Argyll and Bute Council
Andrew Brough	Buccleuch Estates
Sarah Skerratt	SRUC
Alistair Hamilton	SRUC
Mike Woolvin	SRUC
Artur Steiner	SRUC
Siân Ringrose	SRUC
Iain Bolland	SRUC (PhD Student)
Jane Atterton	SRUC

Apologies

Name	Organisation
Annabelle Ewing	MSP
David Gass	Upper Quartile
Graham Kay	Scottish Government
Ian Lindley	Chair, Berwickshire Housing Association
Stephen Pathirana	Scottish Government
Tony Fitzpatrick	Glasgow University/Crichton Institute
Karen Dobbie	SEPA
John Farrington	Aberdeen University
Lorna Philip	Aberdeen University
David Green	Cairngorms National Park
Patrick Hughes	SAC Consulting
Jim Hunter	Land Reform Review Group
Rob McMorran	UHI
Andrew Paddison	SRUC
John Oldham	SRUC
Marianna Markantoni	SRUC
Steven Thomson	SRUC

Davy McCracken	SRUC
Jane Smernicki	SRUC
Sarah Hunter-Argyle	SRUC
John Watt	High Life Highland
Jonathan Wordsworth	Archaeology Scotland
Tanya Castell	Soirbheas Ltd
Mark Shucksmith	Newcastle University
Carol Hill	Glasgow University/Crichton Institute
Julian Pace	Scottish Enterprise

1. Welcome and Apologies

Jim Hume MSP (chair) welcomed all participants to the meeting. Jane Atterton read out the list of apologies received (see list above).

2. Approval of minutes from the February 2013 meeting

Jim Hume MSP noted that the minutes of the February meeting on supply chains need to be approved. Jane Atterton noted that several copies had been distributed around the room for participants.

Ian Macdonald proposed the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting and Maggie Gordon seconded. The minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

Jane Atterton noted that the unapproved minutes are posted on the CPG website (http://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120331/group_meetings_2012-13) shortly after each meeting. A Rural Policy Centre briefing based on the discussion on supply chains has been published (http://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120333/food_matters/911/food_supply_chains_discussion_at_the_cross_party_group_in_the_scottish_parliament_on_rural_policy).

Jim Hume MSP noted that a response had been received from Margaret Burgess (Minister for Housing and Welfare) to the letter sent on behalf of the CPG following the December meeting on Rural Housing. Jane Atterton read out the key points from the Minister's Letter, which outlines programmes, funding, etc. that the Scottish Government already has in place to deliver affordable housing, including in rural locations, and the Government's awareness of the particular challenges of delivering rural affordable housing. The letter notes the current review of Scottish Planning Policy and ongoing discussions around a Rural Rent to Buy Scheme, for example. The Minister concludes by welcoming the CPG's report and notes her continued support for the particular issues experienced by rural and remote areas across Scotland.

Ian Macdonald asked the chair if the meeting could go on beyond the 7.30pm finish time if participants wished discussion to continue. It was noted that this would be possible.

Jim Hume MSP asked if there were any objections from participants to a recording of the meeting to post on the CPG website for members who are unable to attend in person. No participants objected to the recording.

3. Presentations and Discussion

Four presenters spoke to the Group on the issue of 'Community Ownership of Assets'. Speakers had been briefed beforehand that the focus of their presentations should be on the processes of, and capacity and support for, community ownership.

The key points from their presentations are detailed below:

- **David Cameron (Community Land Scotland, CLS):** David started by noting that the concept of community has become somewhat theoretical, but communities are fundamentally about people. Ownership of assets, and particularly land, is increasingly being seen as a powerful 'enabling' tool by many (though certainly not all) communities, evidenced in CLS's growing membership. David noted a number of misconceptions about community land ownership, including that communities are 'not commercial' (in reality, they have to think commercially), that CLS 'demonise' other land owners (in reality, they argue that land ownership patterns need rebalancing and most communities are very willing to cooperate with other landowners), and that community land ownership is purely a Highlands and Islands issue (in reality, CLS is receiving enquiries from southern Scotland). David talked through the steps that communities can take towards community ownership, and the help available from organisations like CLS, HIE etc. David noted the importance of political commitment and will in moving forward with issues like community ownership (he referred to the example of fisheries in Norway), that communities are often afraid to register an interest in a piece of land in case it is seen as hostile, the wide-ranging positive impacts of community ownership of assets, including increasing school rolls, new businesses, community confidence etc., and the international interest in learning from Scotland's community land ownership experiences. He also noted that CLS is receiving an increasing number of enquiries from communities 'below the Central Belt' and from urban areas.
- **Sandra Holmes (Highlands and Islands Enterprise):** Sandra echoed David's comments about the transformational potential from community ownership of land and the importance of not under-estimating what can be achieved when ambitions are high. She noted the importance of HIE's unique economic and social development remit which has enabled it to recognise and take forward interdependent (i.e. integrated or 'indivisible') physical, social and economic regeneration in the Highlands and Islands area. The Scottish Land Fund has also been critical in creating a situation where 500,000 acres of Scotland's land is owned by communities. Community ownership also should not be under-estimated in terms of the time, commitment and effort that needs to be invested by volunteers, with HIE and other bodies providing the supportive environment for such commitment ('enabling the leap of faith') – this includes, but is certainly not limited to, funding. Sandra also noted the importance of partnership working, with Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise, the Forestry Commission, Big Lottery, DTAS, SCVO etc. She also noted that community ownership is a long process, with communities needing to buy-in for the long-term, and organisations needing to provide ongoing support for the long-term. She concluded by noting that one of the key challenges is not the level of funding, but state aid issues raised by investing public funding.

- **Peter Couchman (Plunkett Foundation):** Peter started by outlining the history of the Plunkett Foundation with Horace Plunkett in late 19th century Ireland, where more than 1,000 enterprises were created as a result of a renewed belief that communities could take control of assets, and respect for them to do so. He noted that there are many ways in which communities can get involved in owning assets, including through cooperative working, working with the private sector etc – there is no right and wrong and different approaches will work differently in different circumstances. A key role for support organisations is to know the people involved and how to tailor the support available to their requirements. The key is to achieve a sustainable, enterprise-based solution, with four stages: inspire (e.g. learn from others), explore (this may take time), create (i.e. thinking about the shape, characteristics, requirements etc of the project) and thrive (moving the project forward, networking, knowledge sharing, etc). Peter concluded by emphasising the importance of sharing information and best practice as, although every situation is different, there will be someone somewhere who has faced similar challenges. He noted that Plunkett Scotland was created on 1st January 2013.
- **Eric Samuel (Big Lottery Fund):** Eric provided information about the scale of Big Lottery's investment in communities in recent years. He noted that the focus is on outcomes and bringing communities together to acquire and develop local assets to deliver to local needs in a viable and sustainable way. The Scottish Land Fund 1 and 2 only focused/focuses on rural Scotland but the Growing Community Assets (GCA) programme is open to applications for ownership from urban areas. Eric talked through the different stages of the funding application process and noted the availability of support to communities from Big Lottery Fund across the different stages (and the cross-referral to other funders where appropriate). Eric's map of funded projects shows some gaps in the Borders and Central Scotland but generally good urban and rural coverage. He concluded his presentation by discussing some examples of funded projects from across rural and urban Scotland, including Applecross Community Company, the Isle of Skye ferry CIC, Birks Cinema in Aberfeldy and Maryhill Burgh Halls in Glasgow.

Discussion following the presentations covered a variety of issues:

- ***The reasons for the gaps in funding in some parts of Scotland:*** it was noted that often communities are motivated to pursue ownership where they see this has been successfully achieved by a neighbouring community. In areas where there are no projects, awareness raising work and sharing best practice examples is important, although it is important to recognise that this kind of ownership may not be desired or be appropriate for all communities. As the public sector (or other land or asset owners) looks to release assets, there may be opportunities to expand the community ownership approach into new areas (including urban communities). Often communities are encouraged to act in a situation of market failure, for example, where the only remaining shop is about to close (although this can be a challenging situation for a community to operate in). The different culture and history of the H&I compared to other parts of Scotland was also noted, as was the unique wide remit of HIE compared to its equivalent, Scottish Enterprise (although there are Scotland-wide organisations that offer support including DTAS and SCVO).
- ***The importance of thecrofting community right to buy legislation:*** there have been no community land purchases based on this legislation but it is important as a 'backstop' in

some cases. It was suggested that exploring a more workable legislative option may be useful.

- *The links between community ownership of shops and the local food agenda:* often linking a local community's passion for local food and the need/desire to save a local shop can make a strong combination, particularly if the shop/local food aspect can also add to an area's tourism offer.
- *The viability and sustainability of asset ownership projects:* all speakers emphasised that the sustainability of asset ownership is critical to applying for and successfully winning funding. However, it was also acknowledged that the viability of a project may change over time (i.e. a project might become viable even if it isn't initially), that a project may bring other non-economic benefits, including environmental and social impacts, and that 'payback' from project funding may only be revealed in the long-term and agencies are becoming increasingly aware that long-term support may be appropriate. It was also noted that a community applying for funding for a project manager is often critical to the success and dynamism of a project (or 'journey').
- *The need for more flexibility in funding approaches:* including issuing shares and fund-raising for projects in the community. Currently the right-to-buy legislation in Scotland does not permit this model to be used.
- *The importance of ensuring that all partners are fully informed and clear about aspirations, plans etc at the outset of a project to avoid problems late on:* this might include situations where landowners are keen to collaborate with communities but have concerns about the long-term consequences. While communities are encouraged to work in partnership with other actors, some funding (e.g. GCA) is only available in circumstances where the community leads the project.

Action: It was noted that Graeme Dey MSP, Alex Fergusson MSP and Jim Hume MSP all sit on the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee in the Scottish Parliament and will seek to ensure that information and evidence gathered from the CPG (on this and other topics) will inform this Committee's discussion.

Action: Jim Hume MSP noted that Jane Atterton will write a 2-page RPC Briefing on the key aspects of the discussion from this meeting and this will be published on the RPC website as soon as possible.

4. Date of next meeting

The final meeting of the Group in the 2012-13 session will take place on Wednesday May 22nd (approx. 5.30-7.30pm) in the Scottish Parliament, Committee Room 5. The topic of the meeting is 'Rural Transport'. Further details will follow shortly.