

## Local Government and Communities Committee

### City Region Deals

#### Submission from Scottish Natural Heritage

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) provides advice to the Scottish Government on how to protect and enhance Scotland's nature and landscape. We are responsible through Ministers to the Scottish Parliament and are funded by the Scottish Government. Our statutory purpose is to:

- secure the conservation and enhancement of nature and landscapes;
- foster understanding and facilitate their enjoyment of them; and
- advise on their sustainable use and management.

#### Natural capital supports economic growth

Good development enhances the quality of people's lives by maximising the benefits from natural capital. Natural capital provides social and economic competitive advantage, supporting Scotland's sustainable economic growth and its transition to a low-carbon economy. Our natural assets contribute more than 10% of Scottish economic output and support 1 in 7 of all full time jobs. They are worth more than £17.2 billion to the Scottish economy.

We understand that the purpose of City Region Deals (CRD) and Local Growth Deals (LGD) in Scotland is to encourage Local Authorities to work together at the regional level to help deliver Scotland's Economic Strategy (SES). In line with that strategy, we would therefore expect individual CRDs to *“enhance our natural capital, our brand and reputation as a country of outstanding natural beauty, and the opportunities these assets provide for our economy and future generations”*.

#### Are CRDs and LGDs delivering?

The Glasgow Clyde Valley CRD is beginning to help deliver projects that will contribute to our natural capital and Stirling CRD is aiming to be the greenest deal in Scotland (see below). However, in our experience, the other existing and emerging CRDs and LGDs are missing key opportunities to get greater economic and social benefits from Scotland's nature. We suggest there are three main issues to address to ensure we make the best investments for people, places and the economy:

- The process for developing the deals could be more transparent and inclusive
- Communities of interest and communities of place should be empowered to help develop a shared vision and decide which infrastructure projects are a priority for investment

- Projects should demonstrate more innovation and ambition in terms of low carbon development, 'greener' cities and infrastructure to support more active travel

### **More transparent, inclusive management and governance**

Our experience is that in general, CRD/LGD governance and management has not resulted in a very transparent, inclusive, collaborative approach to the preparation of CRD/LDG proposals. It has not always been clear what the governance arrangements are for the different CRD/LGDs or how SNH and other key agencies can most effectively engage with the process. Despite efforts to engage, we have had little input to the development of the project lists for the three agreed CRDs and little influence on the nature of the proposals that make up the other deals currently under negotiation. This makes it more likely that key opportunities to secure investment in Scotland's natural capital and to get greater economic and social benefits from Scotland's nature could be missed.

It also means that rather than engaging in the process 'upstream' we may need to direct our input 'downstream' to help redesign some CRD/LGD projects or help ensure any adverse environmental impacts are mitigated. This is already the case with the Glasgow & Clyde Valley CRD. It would be helpful therefore if CRD/LGD management teams could set out in more detail how they expect to engage key agencies such as SNH going forward so we can contribute in a more targeted, organised and efficient way.

### **Local decision-making and community involvement**

As a key agency with respect to Strategic Development Plans (SDPs) and Local Development Plans (LDPs), we have observed that the work to prepare CRD/LGD proposals has not been closely aligned and integrated with development planning and community planning. Given that CRD/LGD represent significant opportunities to deliver on both Development Plan and Community Plan ambitions, there is a risk that opportunities are not realised if these processes are not more closely aligned.

CRD/LGDs have created new structures that are removed from the structures that we currently engage with on matters related to infrastructure planning and investment. In addition, CRD/LGD partnerships have no statutory obligation to consult with key agencies or with the public. There is a danger therefore that, although more decision-making powers may be devolved to local government, the communities they serve and the partners with which they would normally engage through the planning system may not feel part of the decision-making process. This does not help to foster a sense of ownership in terms of the proposals that emerge from the process.

## **Low carbon development, greener cities and active travel**

Elements of the Stirling CRD (in negotiation) have the potential to deliver enhanced natural capital. Nature features strongly as a key means of transforming Stirling's hinterland and approach to the City and we are working closely with the Stirling Council on what they see as the "greenest deal in Scotland". The Glasgow and Clyde Valley (GCV) CRD will also deliver some improved public realm and better water management. We have been pleased to match fund three of the GCV projects through the Green Infrastructure Strategic Intervention, part of the 2014 – 2020 European Regional Development Fund for which we are currently the lead partner. The fund aims to transform some of Scotland's most deprived urban areas by developing and improving their green spaces and has the potential to deliver a total of £37.5m of investment in Scotland's city regions throughout the course of the programme.

Elements of the GCV CRD and the Stirling CRD are likely to deliver more opportunities for active travel, although these elements are relatively small-scale in ambition. As far as we are aware, there is a lack of innovative, ambitious projects in the deals under negotiation that aim to achieve a significant modal shift towards more active forms of transport. Indeed, there is a risk that some of the transport infrastructure projects being progressed might have a negative impact on the coherence of the existing active travel network.

CRDs could be one means of supporting a more connected National Walking and Cycling Network (NWCN), a National Development in the National Planning Framework. We have recently prepared a schematic map to illustrate the NWCN vision. We have also produced a Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) strategic active travel routes map and helped to embed the routes in development plans. These networks will connect towns and cities, link key destinations such as settlements and transport hubs, while connecting to areas of economic growth. Providing facilities more comparable to our Northern European neighbours could also play on Scotland's strength as a tourist friendly country with excellent access to high quality natural assets and the outdoors.

## **Conclusion**

There is potential for CRDs and LGDs to deliver more natural capital. There could be more projects that support greener cities and a low carbon economy. Projects that support active travel could have a key role to play in delivering this ambition.

We would be keen to work more closely with CRD and LGD teams to help ensure we make the best investments for people, places and the economy through existing projects and by helping shape proposals still to be agreed. However, in order for SNH and other key agencies to contribute more effectively, the CRD and LGD

partnerships should consider how they can engage with partners in a more transparent and inclusive way.

**Scottish Natural Heritage**  
**2 May 2017**