



Analysis of responses to the National Consultation

A Rural Conversation: Together We Can, Together We Will

September 2018

Conducted for:



**National Council
of Rural Advisers**

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“ *A real key from my perspective is about the 'how' of rural development. It's about a core approach of valuing strengths and building on them (in people, places, buildings).* Individual

1. Introduction

- 1.1** In June 2018 the National Council of Rural Advisers (NCRA) launched a national consultation, '*A Rural Conversation: Together We Can, Together We Will*'. In establishing the consultation, the Council's intention was to engage with a broad spectrum of stakeholders and gather perspectives, information and evidence to help formulate and shape the NCRA's representations to Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing.
- 1.2** The consultation was based on the findings of the 11 'Rural Thinks' workshops which took place in early 2018, summarised in the report '*Rural Thinks Consultation and Engagement Workshops*¹'. The 'Rural Thinks' workshops revolved around three key themes (i) Vision - the narrative of rural Scotland (ii) People - investing in talent and creating opportunity and (iii) Infrastructure - enabling success. Reflecting on these findings, the NCRA determined that these needs could be met through the development of a rural economic strategy and asked questions about the proposed strategy in the consultation document. This report is therefore organised around four themes:



- 1.3** In total the consultation achieved 130 responses, 63 from individuals and 67 from organisations. Respondents participated through the online platform *Citizen Space* or by emailing or posting their responses to the Scottish Government. The Lines Between, a research agency based in Edinburgh, was commissioned to undertake and report on the independent analysis of consultation responses.

Encouraging participation in the consultation

- 1.4** The consultation was open for six consecutive weeks through June and July. In efforts to encourage participation the NCRA launched a comprehensive social media campaign. This engagement reached/achieved:

¹ <https://beta.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/factsheet/2018/06/rural-thinks-consultation-engagement-workshops-report/documents/845664dd-3785-409a-acf6-2779d4a03c65/845664dd-3785-409a-acf6-2779d4a03c65/govscot:document/?inline=true>.

- 869 on Facebook (combination of likes, shares, views)
- 262 Twitter retweets, with 506 followers
- 364 NCRA video views on YouTube, and
- 76 Instagram followers

1.5 The consultation launch also garnered wide-ranging press coverage, reaching 120 publications and broadcasters. In addition, the NCRA engaged with the public at key events, including:

- Royal Highland Show
- Scottish Game Fair
- Glamis Transport Extravaganza, and
- Black Isle Show

1.6 Additionally, the NCRA hosted a workshop involving 20 Local Authorities and carried out 615 Mailshots across a wide range of sectors.

Analysis and reporting

1.7 The Lines Between developed an initial coding framework based on a review of the consultation questions and sample of responses. Qualitative data (responses to open questions) was coded manually according to specific themes; quantitative data was analysed with Excel. This analysis process enabled the research team to highlight and group key themes and messages that emerged from the responses.

1.8 This report presents the range of views expressed and trends amongst responses. During analysis it became evident that responses to some questions linked to numerous themes and in some cases fitted more strongly with other themes in the consultation document; the analysis has been presented under the most appropriate thematic heading.

1.9 Where appropriate, a sample of quotes is included to illustrate key points. Quotes provide useful examples, insights and contextual information, but may not always represent the views of entire groups, such as entire industries, sectors, or geographic areas of Scotland. Where participants gave permission for their responses to be published we have quoted directly, however minor spelling or grammatical errors have been corrected to improve readability.

1.10 Considering the open-ended nature of the consultation questions, the report is strongly qualitative in nature.



Rural communities do genuinely have unique requirements, but also have unique assets including self-help culture and behaviour. The key to building success is to tease out the key enablers that really do help rural bodies to deliver.

Individual



2. Rural Economic Strategy

- 2.1** In the consultation document the NCRA highlighted its clear goal to create an ambitious Rural Economic Strategy. To support the shaping of the strategy, the NCRA asked questions about how policy makers in Government should make sure that the economic needs of rural Scotland are taken into account.

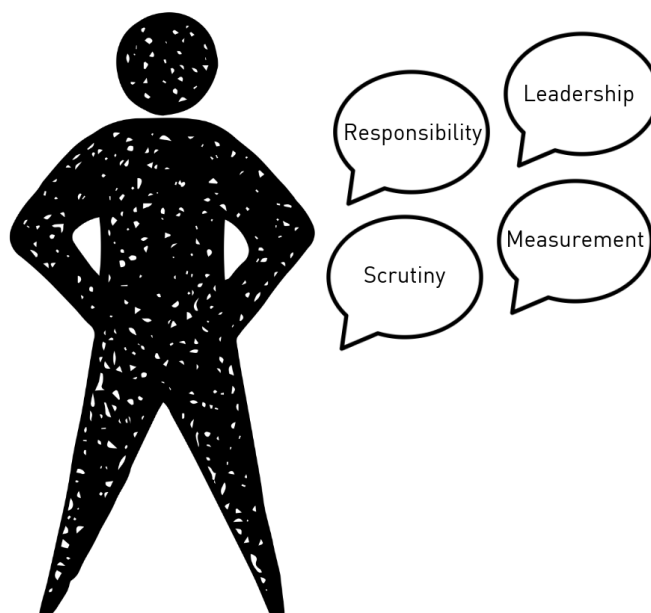
The findings in this chapter are largely drawn from analysis of responses to the following consultation question:

Question 1: The development of relevant Scottish Government mainstream policies should consider the effect upon the Rural Economic Strategy and its consequent policies.

- How should policy makers in Government make sure that the economic needs of rural Scotland are taken into account? Should there be an ability to call to account Scottish Government and their Agencies to ensure collaboration and actions to meet the objectives of the Rural Economic Strategy?
- Should there be an ability to call to account Scottish Government and their Agencies to ensure collaboration and actions to meet the objectives of the Rural Economic Strategy?

- 2.2** The majority of respondents (102 out of 130) answered the question “Should there be an ability to call to account Scottish Government and their Agencies to ensure collaboration and actions to meet the objectives of the Rural Economic Strategy?”. Of these, most answered yes (90%), a minority (3%) said no, and 7% said they don’t know.

- 2.3** Most respondents identified a need for accountability when implementing the strategy and many went on to describe how they felt this could be achieved, expressing a demand for leadership, greater scrutiny, measurement and allocation of responsibility (see Appendix 1 for more detail). Some identified priorities for the Rural Economic Strategy, however a few questioned the approach. There were several suggestions about ways to ensure the Strategy accurately reflects rural needs, with an emphasis on consultation and some creative ideas about changes to policy development processes.



- Some respondents highlighted matters that they see as **priorities for the Rural Economic Strategy**. They asked that consideration be given to the unique nature of the rural economy, for example the prevalence of micro and small businesses and seasonal nature of economic activity. Key themes included consideration of workforce needs, making rural areas attractive and viable options for young people, families and migrant workers. Areas of potential growth were noted as opportunities for the Strategy to respond to including tourism, food, community-based provision of services and creative industries. Some respondents highlighted the potential for rural Scotland to become leaders in new and emerging industries, referring to the rural way of life as an incentive for people to relocate to rural areas.
- A small number of participants **questioned the decision to pursue a Rural Economic Strategy**, feeling that it could marginalise rural issues. They suggested that a national strategy which comprehensively reflects rural considerations could be more inclusive and effective.
- A common theme across responses was the importance of extensive **consultation and collaboration** in strategy and policy development. Numerous partners, sectors and organisations were mentioned as having the potential to contribute important insights, evidence and perspectives in consultation processes.
- Some **innovative changes to policy making processes** were also put forward; for example relocation of policy teams to rural areas and the creation of a government agency with rural affairs as its sole remit. These suggestions were typically explained as a means to address a perception that policy makers have an urban-centric focus. A few respondents noted approaches and learning from elsewhere that could be applied in Scotland.



Illustrative international examples that the NCRA were asked to take note of:

- “One approach which might be worth noting is that taken in Northern Ireland through the Rural Needs Act. The Act states that public authorities must report annually to the Department for Agriculture, the Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), while DAERA must report annually to the Northern Ireland Assembly, including through a ministerial statement, on its functions and the work undertaken by others. The ministerial statement was regarded as particularly important by some stakeholders who argued that it provided an extra layer of accountability and transparency to the process compared to, for example, simply lodging a report in the Assembly library.”
Scotland’s Rural College
- “The recently enacted Islands (Scotland) Bill 2018 Part 3 specifies that certain authorities have a duty to have regard to island communities and that those authorities must carry out an island communities impact assessment in relation to the development of policies or strategies. This duty could also be laid on certain authorities regarding strategies and policies for rural areas and rural businesses in particular.”
Bòrd na Gàidhlig

Rural Economic Strategy - illustrative quotes



“

There is a real need to call to account Scottish Government and their agencies to ensure collaboration and actions to meet the objectives of the Rural Economic Strategy.

Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers

“

By allocating actions from the Rural Economic Strategy to public agencies and the private sector, lead organisations can be called upon to outline outcomes and impact as well as any differences in targets reached.

East Lothian Council

“

It is to be expected that the development of any national strategy would be a collaborative and consultative process between central government, local authorities, community planning partners, other key agencies, and so on. That is a minimum requirement and necessity in terms of developing a Rural Economic Strategy which meets the disparate needs of regional and islands' economies.

Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership

“

Many people in rural areas operate more than one unregistered micro business, frequently tourism-related... growing the numbers of businesses across a variety of sectors should be a strategic priority for the rural economic strategy.

Federation of Small Businesses

“

It is crucial that a rural economic strategy covers all aspects of the rural economy and not just the land based economic sectors ... we do believe strongly that the rural economy will be stifled if the non-land based economic sectors are not given a focus or not identified as in need of support.

Name withheld (Organisation)

“

The vision for a becoming a 'good food nation' should be incorporated in any rural economic strategy.... The protection and enhancement of natural capital stocks, already recognised by the Scottish Government, should be acknowledged in a future rural economic strategy.

Scottish Wildlife Trust

“

Addressing the challenge of retaining and attracting young people and young families to rural Scotland should be a high priority for the Rural Economic Strategy.

BT



3. Vision

- 3.1** The consultation document stressed the importance of an ambitious narrative for the future of rural Scotland, which acknowledges the need for coherence and collaboration.

The findings in this chapter are largely drawn from analysis of responses to the following consultation questions:

- **Question 3:** Build on existing work to gather evidence and data to measure the true value of the rural economy and monitor its growth.
 - Going beyond the economic contribution of rural businesses, what positive examples of social (i.e. community cohesion), cultural (i.e. protection of heritage and traditions) and environmental (i.e. carbon reducing) impacts of rural businesses can you think of?
 - What specific outcomes of rural businesses should be measured and why?
- **Question 5:** Develop opportunities for the businesses of urban and rural Scotland to share ideas and work together.
 - How do you think we could do this? (for example through schools or membership organisation groups)
 - Facilitating learning/sharing between urban and rural areas to improve and have a better understanding of the opportunities that are available would be new for Scotland. What would interest you in this approach? Are there any benefits/drawbacks?
- **Question 6:** Create communities of interest (digital, physical) where businesses and people can come together to solve problems, share ideas and understand opportunities.
 - Is there any place that you can think of in your community where people already do this? Can you please tell us about it?
 - What might be the benefits of this approach?
 - What things would your local community need to help people in your local area come together?
- **Question 9:** Make sure that community resources that contribute to our economy (like tourist attractions) also deliver benefits to their communities.
 - Can you think of any examples of resources in your community e.g. that attract visitors and make money but that do not benefit the community?
 - Are there examples of attractions in your community that you would like to promote? What could help you do this?

- 3.2** Across responses linked to achieving the vision there were positive and negative comments - some participants identified issues to resolve, others focused on opportunities for growth and change.



3.3 A recurrent theme across responses about the vision for rural Scotland was the notion of greater **engagement, connectivity and collaboration** as a solution to many challenges; in person and through digital platforms.

- Comments on **collaborative working** included across and within areas, sectors, by government agencies and representative bodies. Respondents also highlighted the potential for separate organisations to work in isolation towards common goals.
- In discussions about collaboration, **many benefits** were identified. For example collaboration was noted as a means to ensure responsiveness to issues and challenges. Some mentioned that through engagement, individuals, communities and organisations would have greater buy-in and motivation to achieve change. Others highlighted the likelihood of improved profitability, productivity and sustainability of economic activity through practical demonstrations and sharing of best practice. Empowerment, identity, the establishment of networks and other community and social benefits were also attributed to collaborative processes.
- The consultation gathered **numerous examples** (see following page) of existing successful collaborative efforts to achieve positive impacts for individuals, communities and businesses. Several national organisations described their own work as of relevance when considering ways to increase collaboration and connections between rural and urban areas and some pointed to lessons from sectors that span rural and urban areas.
- Some **urged for caution** around any new collaborative efforts, feeling that much collaborative activity is underway and expressing concerns about the potential for duplicated work and waste of resources. They suggested that a joined-up approach should be a priority for organisations and government bodies involvement in shaping the future of Scotland's rural economy.
- Of interest is the number of respondents who suggested **more could be done to support people** (rather than businesses or organisations) from rural and urban communities to interact with one another as a route to more meaningful collaboration; often suggesting 'place' based activity including Twinning, exchanges, roadshows/tours or changing location of activities from cities to rural areas.
- The **Scottish Rural Parliament** was mentioned as way to engage people across the rural economy by a significant proportion of respondents.



Examples of collaboration drawn from consultation responses

- In rural Stirling, Stirling Council and LEADER have recently come together to jointly fund the refurbishment of Council owned or business owned facilities to make them into rural business hubs which can be accessed 24 hours a day with a key fob arrangement. One facility has been used by Business Gateway to deliver a website training course.
- In Argyll and Bute, the Council has been working with SURF (Scotland's Regeneration Forum), supported by the Highlands and the Islands Enterprise, to form groups of local people to tackle longstanding regeneration issues in the communities of Bute and Dunoon.
- Through its Townscape Heritage scheme, Argyll and Bute Council and Bute Island Alliance are working together to create a combined pop-up retail and co-working office space in Rothesay. The space will be offered at affordable rates to people who want to grow their business and want to work from a business environment rather than their home.
- The Rural Innovation Support Service is part of the Scottish Rural Network, and is led by Soil Association Scotland in partnership with SAC Consulting, SAOS, and Scotland Food & Drink. It enables groups of land managers in Scotland to explore their business ideas in a collaborative way, by taking a supply chain approach.
- Perthshire Tourism Partnership brings together tourism leaders from across Perth and Kinross with the agencies (VisitScotland, Perth and Kinross Council, Historic and Environment Scotland) once a quarter to hear short presentations.
- Newmilns Regeneration Association, a community and business led project to redevelop the rural village of Newmilns, hosts events throughout the for the local community which also brings in large numbers of tourists.
- CVO East Ayrshire supports voluntary organisations to come together for common purposes and to enable local people to gain access to decision making processes which affect their community. There are also outreach facilities in rural villages.

Demonstrating the value of rural businesses

- 3.4** A range of ideas were put forward about measuring outcomes from rural businesses. In comments, respondents highlighted the potential to use data as an agent of change, learning and understanding of its value.
- 3.5** Above and beyond the economic impact of business activities, participants highlighted other important contributions.
- Some mentioned the particularly important role that **rural businesses can play in addressing social issues**, noting that robust evidence about this would lead to greater recognition and support. Examples included flexible working arrangements that enable people to sustain employment while fulfilling caring responsibilities, direct provision of social care services, the creation of volunteering opportunities that can serve to address social isolation, provide diversion from harmful behaviours and also provide



opportunities for people who do not live in rural areas to access Scotland's natural environment.

- A few mentioned the **environmental impact of rural businesses**; both in terms of service that involve looking after the natural environment but also through efficient, low impact ways of working. For example one said that rural businesses often develop innovative ways to solve problems – such as reusing materials or adopting low cost, new ways of working. Others noted that rural business owners are predisposed work in environmentally friendly ways because they are much more likely to have to live with and see the impact of any environmentally harmful practice.
- In relation to **culture**, participants mentioned that local businesses sustain and build social capital. They highlighted the importance of arts and crafts in rural economy and the culture of making. Others noted the important role of rural businesses in developing an understanding of Scotland's history, for example by facilitating tourism around culturally significant sites.

3.6 The unique nature of the rural economy was often mentioned, with a perception that there is a gap in understanding and evidence at present.

- There was a perception that little is done to analyse any **difference in take up and access to support and services** between rural and urban areas, particularly in relation to finance, advice and business development.
- Suggested **measurements** in relation to rural businesses included:
 - Interaction with the local community – in addition to customer numbers, there were calls for insights around social and other values for example professional services for other local businesses, provision of a service such as carer that could not otherwise be provided locally
 - Multiplier effects and 'sticky money'
 - Impact on the environment
 - Profile of business owners – for example starts up by young people, gender etc.
 - Reach of business (tourist point of origin)
 - Turnover and employment statistics
 - % of diversified farms
 - % added value food
 - Farm tourism
 - Land use as a catalyst for a new business
 - Interaction with support agencies such as Business Gateway (to show deficit in rural take up)
- One participant also suggested it could be useful to adopt other mechanisms to **evidence social change** occurring as the vision for Scotland is realised, for example capturing the conversations that are taking place on online platforms, such as exchanges between young people in rural areas or members of the agricultural community on Twitter.

- There was mention of **the importance of getting buy-in around data collection**, so that those being asked for information (particularly micro businesses) see it as relevant activity that will demonstrate value; one person suggested that it would be easy to collect more comprehensive data through the annual farm return. However, some urged for caution, viewing any additional paperwork as a burden on businesses.
- Others noted the **difficulties in capturing informal activity and exchanges** between individuals and businesses that has an important role in rural areas.
- Some took a **holistic approach** to the consideration of evidence and described a need for data around individual experiences and needs, for example the numbers of people affected by loneliness or levels of mental wellbeing issues.
- Participants urged the NCRA to take note of **specific data sets and references** (see Appendix 2).



Challenges

3.7 In discussions about economic activity that detracts from community life, participants highlighted:

- Large chains in rural areas do not circulate their earnings within the local economy. Supermarkets deliver in rural areas without employing locally or contributing to the local economy
- Right to roam is exercised by tourists with little thought given to the impact they may have on local industries, e.g. sheep worrying
- A lack of local ownership and employment in local businesses means that money may be taken out of the local economy
- Some larger sites and attractions draw large numbers of visitors without encouraging footfall to other small local businesses such as eateries
- Hotels and other businesses may host disruptive events, such as events with fireworks, which have a negative impact on local livestock and young children
- Pollution by businesses, e.g. quarries
- Self-contained tourism, e.g. campervans, cruise ships, where the benefit to the local community can be limited as visitors have their own provisions for accommodation and food but use local infrastructure such as roads with little expenditure to make up for this

3.8 Not surprisingly, when considering the vision for rural Scotland, respondents highlighted complex and systemic challenges for policy makers to consider, with repeat mention of issues covered elsewhere in this report such as:

- Infrastructure
- Subsidies and taxation policies
- Land ownership
- Changes to the education system
- Scotland post-Brexit
- Encouraging and managing tourism

Vision – illustrative quotes



“ *The monitor farm programme in Scotland has brought together groups of like-minded farmers who wish to improve their businesses by sharing performance information and best practice around a nationwide network of host farms.*

Lantra

“ *Transport is too often viewed solely as a barrier and its value as a legitimate economic activity is far too often ignored. A crofter who runs the school bus, the shop keeper who takes folk to the town once a week or the plumber who carries a passenger – these are all opportunities to add value and provide a service. The strength of the rural economy lies in its diversity and the ability of rural dwellers to multi-task.*

Name withheld (Organisation)

“ *It is important to work together building on each other’s expertise and findings and being careful to avoid the creation of new organisations which duplicate work and lack joined up thinking. ... We stress the importance of collaboration and having a united approach from a government level and down to grassroots organisations for this to be achieved.*

Scottish Land and Estates

“ *The equine industry which is often very much on the urban fringes sees a lot of amalgamation and collaboration between the urban and the rural. More understanding between urban and rural leads to better stewardship, e.g. less litter, understanding food production and appreciating good animal welfare’.*

British Horse Society

“ *As the majority of rural businesses are small businesses and many people in rural areas have ‘portfolio careers’ a method of aggregating the economic impact of businesses in a place and/or by sector would be helpful in addressing business support, training and distribution needs.*

Tayside and Central Scotland Transport Partnership

“ *We also need to be ambitious about becoming the base for new sectors and alternative technologies and employment opportunities; it’s not just about continuing with the existing traditional sectors. Digital, coding + AI + FinTech, distributed energy, health and biomedicine should be seen as key development areas.*

South of Scotland Alliance

“ *Technology may help sustain virtual communities (who may share the same interests whether they are in urban or rural areas), but thought should be given to how these relationships can be initiated in the first place. Initiatives such as the Scottish Rural Parliament can help create opportunities for face to face contact.*

National Trust for Scotland



4. Infrastructure

- 4.1** The consultation document stressed there should be no reason why people living, working or visiting the rural economy should face great challenges in 21st century Scotland.

The findings in this chapter are largely drawn from analysis of responses to the following consultation questions:

- **Question 7:** Help ensure there are the same opportunities and access to services between urban and rural areas.
 - For people living and working in rural areas there are often big differences compared to urban areas in what services might be available (things like broadband, childcare, transport, community development etc.).. What do you need to enable you to choose to live and work in rural Scotland?
- **Question 8:** Make sure Government policies, regulations, planning and support mechanisms help local businesses.
 - What types of policies, regulations, planning and business support need to be strengthened or removed to help a wide variety of small and micro businesses in rural areas?
 - Can you think of any problems in transport, housing, social care and digital infrastructure that prevent economic growth for your industry sector, business or community?

Opportunities for developing Scotland's infrastructure to support communities and economic development

- 4.2** Unsurprisingly, many respondents highlighted infrastructure issues as having a particular impact on rural economic development and most highlighted concerns about broadband and transport.
- 4.3** Several respondents suggested there is a need for targeted business/economic growth support that reflects the needs of the rural economy. As mentioned in previous chapters, there were comments on the need to consider the unique nature of rural employment including high levels of self-employment and people who hold multiple jobs. Across the comments on factors impeding economic growth were many suggestions about holistic, place-based and local approaches to planning, regulation, tax and finance; many of which would require action by the Scottish Government.
- Participants asked for **matters of regulation** to reflect the impact on rural settings. One person gave the example of being required to get an annual MOT for their vehicle, while living on an island with no garage. Another noted that the Scottish Government is currently looking at increasing regulation in the short-term letting market and felt that it might harm businesses that host holidaymakers in rural areas.



Several were critical of health and safety policies that they feel discourage small business owners in rural areas from becoming employers.

- Several participants commented **on rates and discounts**. There were many comments about the future of the Small Business Bonus Scheme, in which participants suggested that the re-introduction of rates could hamper small scale operations. A few respondents suggested that the re-introduction of sporting rates could put Scotland at a competitive disadvantage. One person urged the Scottish Government to reduce fuel duty in rural areas. Many urged for the provision of subsidies or grants to encourage businesses to start up in rural areas
- There were calls for holistic approaches to implementation of **planning**. For example,
 - Some criticised inflexible procedures that do not recognise the complexity and changing nature of rural businesses and employment pathways. They called for faster decisions on planning matters.
 - Others called for an integrated approach to land use and management.
 - One asked for greater transparency around planning, for example clarity about the land available for development in a local area and the type of development that is allowed on particular types of land.
 - Another asked for more recognition of rural needs in planning processes, noting that they should accommodate changing use of farm steads which may need to adapt to incorporate new workers or ageing family members in order to survive.
 - Others asked for more planning protections for environmental, historic and culturally important sites.
- Some asked for state intervention to support rural areas, particularly around **employment and benefits**. For example, one person urged the Scottish Government to introduce a rural Citizens' Income Scheme, another suggested that zero-hour contracts be banned. Another respondent suggested the Scottish Government should undertake efforts to encourage migrant workers to rural areas of Scotland, arguing that a new Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme is needed to support transition around Brexit.
- Some also asked for state intervention in relation to **affordable house pricing** and some called for **more support around community land purchasing**.
- There were calls for **investment and a re-prioritisation of resources** to support rural economic development. For example,
 - Several described a perception that business development agencies do not have the reach, skills, knowledge or experience to effectively support small businesses in rural Scotland development.



- They asked for tailored business support, with many describing the need for specialised knowledge about matters that affect rural businesses, particularly grants.
 - They appealed for recognition that some rural businesses need to diversify to provide sustainable employment across the year, and may require more development, planning and financial support than those in urban areas.
 - Some asked for simplification or support with challenging business processes, such as calculating VAT payments and establishing companies.
 - A few respondents asked for the introduction of interest-free loans for small businesses.
 - Others urged local authorities to invest in the creation of shared workspaces and to provide support for local enterprise networks.
- Across comments there was a call for **an enabling attitude and approach** from public sector bodies. For example, some suggested that national procurement practices exclude rural businesses from acting as suppliers to public sector bodies in local areas. One respondent asked for added value investment in the food processing sector to enable Scottish producers to compete more effectively with other countries.
 - Some argued for more **recognition of activity that already works**. The felt that this could help to avoid duplication of efforts and give grounds for communities and businesses to replace important resources or assets that are lost or falling into disrepair. Cited examples of success included: local income generation from renewable energy sources, promotion of the circular economy, initiatives such as GrowBiz that specifically support micro and small business development and the LEADER development process.
 - One person argued for existing farming **subsidies to be withdrawn from shooting estates**.

Opportunities and access to services

- 4.4 Participants' reflections on infrastructure and access to services point to the challenges of rural living. Some mentioned that austerity has made things worse in recent years. Several respondents noted that it is unrealistic to expect the same level of provision across rural and urban areas but highlighted a sense of inequity in terms of matters that affect quality of life.
- 4.5 It was suggested that improvements to public transport infrastructure could benefit and enable independence for older members of rural communities, as well as young people who may not have access to a car. This would enable them to more easily access education, training, and employment within their home community, thereby reducing the need for young people to move to urban areas to access opportunities.



- 4.6 Some participants highlighted the serious personal impacts that of lack of adequate infrastructure has on them and their families. One participant explained that the lack of public infrastructure required them to commute for lengthy hours and use their leave entitlements to meet their caring responsibilities.
- 4.7 It was highlighted by one respondent that people living in rural communities may lose access to the legal justice system in coming years, if infrastructure provision does not improve, as courts and tribunal services are increasingly moving to online systems. They noted that research has identified a risk that individuals in rural areas who are eligible for legal aid may not be able to find solicitors to provide advice.
- 4.8 Across responses, there were repeat mentions of challenges in relation to:
- Accessing benefits
 - Availability of childcare
 - Broadband and the expense of broadband alternatives (4G etc)
 - Public transport – specifically the need for different provisions to be linked up
 - Availability of healthcare services, including inadequate provision of carers
 - Parity of costs e.g. fuel/heating costs, delivery costs/charges across areas
 - Broken telephone lines
 - Declining high street services – post offices, banks
 - Declining resources for community spaces that support recreation and connectedness
 - Inadequate roads and cycle paths



- “ *Policy that encourages the availability of more affordable housing in a rural context will improve access to housing for young people stay or migrate to the area, and older people to move into more suitable housing within their rural communities.*
- Scottish Land and Estates
- “ *The geographical lay out of the country can cause significant inconsistencies in health and social care provision. Hospitals, and other services, including mental health care as well as GP and dental provision have all been reduced at a local level. Services are often centralised to main towns and too many community services have been withdrawn.*
- Name withheld (Organisation)
- “ *The procurement and commissioning policies of many Councils and other public bodies undermine the rural economy rather than support it. There would be a significant impact if they did more to encourage small, micro and family businesses, and locally based providers.*
- Outside the Box
- “ *Often enterprises seem to get held back by over-onerous support application procedures, lack of planning flexibility and, what appears to be, little understanding of what small businesses need in a rural setting. ...Business support needs to be tailored to the businesses.*
- Scottish Crofting Federation
- “ *It is extremely difficult [...] to carry out what are taken for granted as simple tasks [...] The most accessible way of completing the likes of social security is through online processes. ... Within education, subjects are heavily reliant on the internet.*
- Name withheld (Organisation)
- “ *Opportunities to share ideas and closer working between rural and urban Scotland could come from the concept of “business accelerators”, with its emphasis upon peer to peer learning. However, the majority of such organisations in Scotland are based in urban areas. We suggest the addition to the model of an urban-rural knowledge exchange dimension.*
- James Hutton Institute
- “ *A lack of joined up thinking when it comes to transport provision.*
- Individual
- “ *No protection of local housing which gets sold on the open market at prices outwith the reach of local people.*
- Scottish Crofting Federation
- “ *Small businesses should be greater protected by planning rules to prevent the national chains swooping in and swooping out after they have closed the local family companies.*
- Individual
- “ *The public sector could stimulate rural economic growth in its procurement practices by [...] local-sourcing of products and services, such as food supplies for public institutions.*
- Food and Drink Federation



5. People

- 5.1** The consultation document highlighted that Scotland's people are one of its greatest assets. It stressed the need for support, encouragement and empowerment; ensuring that opportunities exist for rural communities to flourish and make positive decisions for the future. The theme of people was designed to capture factors that influence economic and social development as well as quality of life.

The findings in this chapter are largely drawn from analysis of responses to the following consultation questions:

- **Question 2:** Create quality job opportunities (that are well paid, flexible, and purposeful) to promote skills and opportunities, but also deal with inequalities in the rural labour market (such as the gender pay gap).
 - What employment opportunities do we need to meet the current and future needs of our changing rural economy? Where should these be? (either by location and/or sector)
 - How do we tackle the inequalities we face in rural Scotland? i.e. challenges faced due to age, gender, socio-economic, educational and ethnic background
- **Question 4:** Encourage future entrepreneurship by ensuring the Scottish Government's rural skills action plan meets the needs of the Rural Economic Strategy.
 - What skills are required to have a vibrant rural economy?
 - How do we best ensure that people of all ages, genders, areas, socio-economic educational and ethnic backgrounds receive appropriate support?

Employment

- 5.2** Participants shared ideas around increasing employment and encouraging business growth across sectors. In comments on skills development, mention was frequently made of the importance of engaging the education sector, including those providing life-long learning opportunities, on issues of rural employment. They identified skills gaps and areas for development, that if addressed, offer potential for sectoral expansion. These include:





- 5.3 Some highlighted that supporting any development of the rural labour market would require a shift in focus among enterprise agencies, toward nurturing the skills needed to grow micro and small businesses. Innovative ways to provide this support were suggested, including bringing smaller business together to deliver skills and other training, thereby sharing costs over a larger number of participants. Others highlighted the potential of online training to alleviate travel costs and losses due to time spent away from the business.
- 5.4 As mentioned in Chapter 4, several participants emphasised the need for hubs and workspaces to support multiple small businesses under one roof, thereby encouraging knowledge sharing, offering joint training opportunities, and reducing the isolation that small business owners in rural areas may face. Several people suggested that more creativity on the part of public sector employers would also help to promote and retain employment in rural areas; for example, encouraging and facilitating remote working arrangements.
- 5.5 Many of the issues described in the previous chapter are also barriers to accessing the labour market, particularly housing, transport, childcare, and caring responsibilities. Participants indicated that flexible arrangements around working hours and childcare services could help to address this. Some argued that public transport provision in rural areas is inadequate and does not accommodate part-time work arrangements, which are common in the rural economy.

Tackling inequalities and supporting for diverse communities

- 5.6 Participants' reflections on ways to tackle exclusion and inequality typically focused on access issues, gender, age and different aspects of poverty. Suggested solutions point to public awareness campaigns, creation of alternative role models, education, changes to business support, revisiting subsidy provision and legislative/policy changes.
- 5.7 Succession of farms through the male line was highlighted as a traditional practice that continues to perpetuate the belief that farming is an occupation reserved for men. One participant also suggested that gender pay gap disclosure, taxation reform, and improved access to barrier-free housing would help to combat inequalities. A few suggested that a mainstream 'gender-aware' approach should be adopted to all enterprise and growth policies to combat gender inequalities.
- 5.8 Some participants mentioned a paucity in data through which to understand and evidence inequalities in rural areas. This is particularly evident across groups with protected characteristics. A few respondents expressed concerns about the suitability of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation for use in rural areas and some said that local community-based groups should be involved in the development of new, more appropriate, and therefore more accurate, measures.
- 5.9 Participants shared their reflections on supporting social and cultural experiences, and typically mentioned the importance of space and opportunities for interaction and engagement. Some participants called for spaces members of the community can come together. These spaces would be open to people from all backgrounds to come together and learn. More specifically, local area meetings for a particular type of business could offer a platform for people to discuss and share ideas.



5.10 The value of intergenerational initiatives were frequently highlighted, and a few respondents emphasized the importance of recognising diversity as an asset, not a problem. One participant suggested a mentoring programme be established that would partner young people with more experienced professionals in their local community. Linked to this, as mentioned in Chapter 4, the potential for supporting businesses to tackle social issues was also suggested by a few respondents.

People – illustrative quotes

“

More flexi time in employment and providing child care.

British Horse Society

“

Part-time employment is also common in rural areas and can cause difficulties in providing traditional public transport solutions.

Tayside and Central Scotland Transport Partnership

“

In food and drink manufacturing we have a skills shortage and will need to recruit 19,000 new people to the industry by 2024. We have a shortage of STEM qualified people particularly engineers and food technologists. There is good provision for young people who want to enter the food and drink industry.

Food and Drink Federation

“

NC500 is an example of a highly successful tourist industry which brings thousands of visitors into the area, most of whom pass through very quickly without spending much money in the local area.

Scottish Tenant Farmers Association

“

Added value investment is also desperately needed in Scotland's food processing sector so that Scotland can effectively compete with other countries [...] The lack of malting barley capacity and dairy processing units are just two examples of where Scotland is missing opportunities to process and market produce from home and losing quality product to processors down south or in Ireland.

National Farmers Union

“

If we accept that there should be no reason why living, working or visiting the rural economy should be any greater a challenge than in urban Scotland, then the full spectrum of jobs available throughout Scotland should be considered possible.

Scottish Countryside Alliance

“

Many people in rural areas operate more than one unregistered micro business, frequently tourism-related.

Federation of Small Businesses

“

A belief in the success of small things. At the moment success is measured by many, including Scottish Enterprise, as how big your business is. This could be turnover, profit, foreign markets tapped into. However a vibrant rural community is not going to be based on lots of large businesses.

Individual

6. Conclusions

General comments

- 6.1** A large number of individuals and organisations that represent, live and work in rural Scotland took part in the consultation, providing a robust evidence base for the NCRA to reflect upon in the development of its recommendations. The dominant trends across responses align with, and are given additional weight by, findings gathered through the detailed workshops undertaken by the NCRA at the start of 2018. They highlighted a multitude of existing assets in the rural economy for policy makers to build upon and many additional opportunities for growth in the short, medium and long term. These useful examples and insights about activity may be worthy of further exploration by the NCRA in terms of mapping and case study.

Rural Economic Strategy

- 6.2** Most clear is broad support for a Rural Economic Strategy. Participants suggested ways to achieve accountability for strategy design and implementation, as well as priorities and areas for the strategy to focus upon. Reflecting a perceived under-representation of rural matters in policy development processes, there is an appetite for increased consultation. A desire for changed ways of working within and across government to support rural economic development was also expressed.

Vision

- 6.3** There is an appetite for change and growth rural Scotland. Participants identified the potential to nurture and utilise assets for the benefit of individuals, communities and businesses, recognising advantages for those in rural areas and the wider country as a whole. Sustainable employment, investment in infrastructure, opportunities for collaborative working and ownership, new ways of doing business and greater connectivity between planning at national and local levels were highlighted as factors most likely to achieve change. Many respondents referenced evidence to support their suggestions; others identified gaps in data, that could be gathered to add depth and insight into the need for and impact of any changes.

People

- 6.4** Linked to the notions of change and opportunity, responses about people - largely related to workforce, education and communities - provide insights into the benefits and challenges of rural living. Many identified opportunities for investment and some urged for a reconsideration of national approaches that have unintended and unhelpful consequences for those living in rural areas. Some participants articulated a sense of joy about life in a rural setting, highlighting the quality of life impacts from the local environment, community, culture, open space and a sense of freedom in places that are not densely populated.

Infrastructure

- 6.5** Comments about infrastructure highlight well-known and complex issues that may take some time and considerable resourcing to unpack and address. Almost all participants alluded to important barriers that affect everyday life and economic development, particularly access to transport and broadband. Participants expressed mixed expectations about availability of services, but there was repeat mention of the declining high street presence of important service like banks. Key opportunities for supporting economic and social development were linked to social services, planning, regulation, tax and access to finance.

Rural Economic Strategy: Further discussion of themes



Key themes associated with accountability in relation to the proposed Rural Economic Strategy

- On the theme of **leadership**, participants identified the need for a strong and clear commitment from the Scottish Government, fed down through all departments and relevant agencies, in order to achieve the desired aims of the Rural Economic Strategy. In comments on leadership, some described a feeling that there is an imbalance in representation that favours the majority who live in urban areas; a few participants mentioned a loss of representation and resources for rural areas as a result of Brexit.
- In relation to **scrutiny**, participants asked for the establishment of processes to enable the NCRA and others to hold the Scottish Government and its agencies to account. This reflects a view expressed by many participants that developing and implementing a strategy will be a complex process. Some noted a perception that those in rural areas have been calling for action for some time, but believe there has been little change.
- On the theme of **measurement**, a mixture of standard and innovative approaches were described. There were suggestions that measurement activities could be utilised for two purposes; firstly, adopting well established approaches to evidencing progress and secondly, to stimulate new ways of working. Comments on the adoption of standard measurement practices included setting clear indicators and outcomes, recording progress, monitoring spend and resourcing, tracking any activity delivered, and capturing outcomes achieved. Suggestions about the use of monitoring as a tool for change included measurement of collaborative practice and other new approaches to working, plus capturing the learning from and success of any innovative practice implemented by government agencies.
- In discussions about **responsibility**, participants noted the scale and complexity of change involved to successfully implement the proposed rural economic strategy, suggesting it would involve work within and across a broad range of government departments and partners from the public, third and private sector. Clear responsibilities and duties were described as necessary to ensure that different agents understand their roles and have the power and resource to make progress.

Rural Economic Strategy: Additional illustrative quotes



“ *Some clarity on who will be accountable, to whom and how they will account for their actions and what measures are in place if progress isn't made or outcomes aren't achieved.* ”
Individual

“ *People should be held to account for the quality of their collaboration and ability and willingness to learn and innovate rather than any particular failure... It's pointless creating a whole new tier of audit mechanisms that don't directly contribute themselves to outcomes like increased creativity, confidence, releasing untapped potential etc.* ”
Individual

“ *Accountability should be a given, and built into any set of policies which aim to achieve the desired outcomes.* ”
Individual

“ *Subject committees in the Scottish Parliament have started to integrate scrutiny of the extent to which revised National Performance Framework Outcomes (June 2018) are being delivered in their areas, e.g. climate change. This approach could be further developed as it “matures” to integrate rural economy priorities.* ”
Scotland's Rural College

“ *There needs to be a procedure set in place to ensure policies and initiatives across Government and their Agencies are aimed at meeting the objectives of the Rural Economic Strategy. This will be critically important ... in a post-Brexit scenario.* ”
Name withheld (Organisation)

“ *To ensure health and wellbeing are strengthened across the rural economy, there is a need for the Rural Economic Strategy to work across Government directorates...* ”
Convener, National Rural Mental Health Forum

“ *Setting of appropriate indicators, monitoring progress and reporting on actions in meeting national outputs is essential... Any actions taken by Scottish Government and its agencies have to be towards meeting the intended national outputs – this requires collaboration, a clear understanding of national outputs and actions designed to meet those outputs.* ”
Scottish Crofting Federation

“ *Improved collaboration between enterprise agencies, local authorities and the Scottish Government is crucial to avoid duplication of work and maximise available resources.* ”
Name withheld (Organisation)

“ *There is a need to have a much clearer idea of what constitutes rural policy (as opposed to sectoral policies which have 'rural' dimensions). More robust cross-cutting links need to be made between different policy areas to remove siloed policy-making.* ”
Community Land Scotland

“ *If the new strategy is to be effective, it is also important that the new strategy is ‘owned’ by a single policy department of the Scottish Government and with direct oversight by a Government minister.* ”
Name withheld (Organisation)



“

Key rural activities lie across several Ministerial portfolios: Farming, Tourism and Culture, Environment. At the same time, Housing, Transport, Economy, Employment and Welfare have an impact across the whole of Scotland.

Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers

“

Rather than ability to call into account, Lantra would much rather see active conversation and collaboration continue.

Lantra

“

It is important to take the time to understand the places and trends, collect baseline data and involve the people who live, work and have businesses in the area at every level through: consultation with rural local authorities, health boards, enterprise agencies, regional transport partnerships etc. is critical as these organisations understand the challenges of delivering services in rural areas.

Name withheld (Organisation)

“

In order to take opportunities and allow farming and crofting businesses to take up new forms of support that enable innovation, restructuring and greater market focus, a new agricultural policy must be developed between Scottish decision-makers and food producers which enables every agricultural business to seize opportunity, by becoming more productive, more profitable and delivering more for the environment.

National Farmers Union

“

Government should ensure that it is engaged with representative organisations and rural businesses in a regular, meaningful and timely way to gauge views and priorities [...] and to gather feedback [...] This kind of iterative consultation process could inform and be integrated into a “rural-proofing” of Government policies going forward.

Name withheld (Organisation)

“

It should seek to understand the main pressures on household incomes across the different constituencies by engaging directly with residents. This can be done either through community councils, community land trusts or other community groups.

Individual

“

Going forward a regular framework of discussion and consultation should be put in place to allow the ever-changing needs of the rural economy to be captured and addressed.

Individual

“

Look at relocating some government agencies from the central belt into rural areas to reduce property costs and give a much-needed jobs boost to rural areas.

Name withheld (Organisation)

“

'Road testing' policies to see how they will affect/ benefit rural areas.

Individual

“

Link all strategies into an urban-rural framework where rural issues have to be dealt with for each.

Individual



“

Without accountability, a strategy is just good intentions. It is very easy for the policies that suit the urban majority to override the needs of the rural minority, particularly when the rural minority's needs are in opposition to government policy (IE transport & environment).

Individual

“

The process/method should combine "bottom-up" experiences and pragmatism with "top-down" capabilities, resources and government power.

Name withheld (Organisation)

“

The Highland region [needs] its own say on the direction forward... We all thought when we voted for a Scottish parliament the first step would be to achieve via Brussels a less costly animal slaughter process... Who speaks for us?

Individual

“

It is crucial that a rural economic strategy covers all aspects of the rural economy ... we do believe strongly that the rural economy will be stifled if the non-land based economic sectors are not given a focus or not identified as in need of support.

Name withheld (Organisation)

“

Scotland needs one over-arching economic strategy that reflects the diversity of the country and ensures that the whole of the whole of the country has access to relevant services, resources and advice. A separate Rural Economic Strategy could lead to further marginalisation of rural issues and funding.

Individual

“

The rural economy also differs markedly between remote and accessible rural areas, and within these areas themselves. We therefore question whether a strategy solely focused on the economy would be appropriate or effective.

National Trust for Scotland

“

Our view is that the interests of Scotland's rural economy might not be best served by creating a separate Rural Economic Strategy but that there may be an opportunity to develop a rural economic action plan as a supplement of the National Economic Strategy.

Scottish Enterprise

“

We would recommend that rather than a Rural Economic Strategy there should be a Rural Sustainability Strategy which deals with the economic, social and environmental needs of these communities within one, holistic document. This should be a key element of an over-arching Land Use Strategy which takes a strategic approach to better integrated land uses.

Woodland Trust Scotland

Vision: Useful data sources



Examples of data sources that participants highlighted as worthy of review by the NCRA

- The Federation of Small Businesses referred to research undertaken by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies, *Local Procurement: making the most of small business, one year on: Scotland report*²
- NFUS referred to two of its policy documents, *Steps to change: a new agricultural policy for Scotland*³ and *A new agricultural policy for Scotland post-Brexit*⁴
- NFUS also referred to the joint industry document *Educate, sustain, promote: the industry vision to promote a good food nation*⁵
- NFUS also referred to Citizen Advice Scotland's report *Delivering for business: Scottish SMEs use of postal services*⁶ when describing poor or variable access in some rural areas to broadband
- North Ayrshire Council referred to a recent report published by the Scottish Parliament's Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee Inquiry, *Scotland's economic performance*⁷ to highlight uneven growth in Scotland
- Dumfries and Galloway LEADER Programme Local Action Group and North Ayrshire Council directed the NCRA to James Hutton Institute's work for the Scottish Government in developing a Socio-economic Performance report in 2015⁸
- The South of Scotland Alliance recommended to the Scottish Government the Policy Statement⁹ which emerged from the 11th OECD Rural Development Conference which took place in Edinburgh in April 2018 and the OECD's *Policy Note Rural 3.0. A framework for rural development*¹⁰
- The South of Scotland alliance cited figures from a 2012 report published by EKOS entitled *Creative sector in the south of Scotland*¹¹ to highlight the contribution the south of Scotland's cultural industry makes to the economy
- One individual respondent referred to a report by Europa, *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*¹²
- The same respondent also referred to a report published jointly by Pearson, Nesta and the Oxford Martin School at the University of Oxford, *The future of skills: employment in 2030*¹³
- The National Rural Mental Health Forum indicated that the issue of mental health was missed by the consultation and referred to research carried out by Scotland's Rural College with support from Support in Mind Scotland, *National rural mental health survey Scotland: report of key findings*¹⁴
- East Lothian Council and Tayside and Central Scotland Transport Partnership referred to the Scottish Government's *Understanding the Scottish rural economy*¹⁵ research paper

² https://www.fsb.org.uk/docs/default-source/Publications/publi_spec_scotprocure_july2013.pdf?sfvrsn=1

³ <https://www.nfus.org.uk/userfiles/images/Policy/Brexit/STEPS%20FOR%20CHANGE%20March%202018%20-%20for%20email.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.nfus.org.uk/userfiles/images/Policy/Brexit/Brexit%20Doc%20-%20pages.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.nfus.org.uk/userfiles/images/Policy/Good%20Food%20Nation%202018.pdf>

⁶ https://www.cas.org.uk/system/files/publications/delivering_for_business_-_scottish_smes_use_of_postal_services.pdf

⁷ <https://sp-bpr-en-prod-cdnep.azureedge.net/published/EJFW/2018/6/21/Scotland-s-Economic-Performance-1/EJFWS052018R05.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.hutton.ac.uk/research/groups/social-economic-and-geographical-sciences/mapping-rural-socio-economic-performance>

⁹ <http://www.oecd.org/cfe/regional-policy/Edinburgh-Policy-Statement-On-Enhancing-Rural-Innovation.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/regional-policy/Rural-3.0-Policy-Note.pdf>

¹¹ http://cscot-build.squid.co.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/22276/Creative-Sector-in-the-South-of-Scotland.pdf

¹² <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/118025/118123/Fitoussi+Commission+report>

¹³ https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/the_future_of_skills_employment_in_2030_0.pdf

¹⁴ https://www.sruc.ac.uk/downloads/file/3332/national_rural_mental_health_survey_scotland_report_of_key_findings

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/02/3310>

- One individual respondent said the Museums Galleries Scotland data and research can evidence multiple examples of community centres, museums and attractions which have dual benefits.



Vision: Additional illustrative quotes

“

An example of a successful social impact model is the Care & Wellbeing Cooperative in Highland Perthshire, which is a non-profit umbrella for 32 micro-enterprises and self-employed individuals coming together to provide a range of care and wellbeing services in a remote rural area. This cooperative was set up in response to self-directed support legislation and is now contracted by local health services and other businesses including drivers, therapists, carers etc. and has shown to be a very successful model.

Women's Enterprise

“

Study visits (or something like that) where the people can chat, explore, discuss and consider different approaches etc. Communities can take "short cuts" by learning from others and may (possibly) recruit some supportive expertise.

Individual

“

Until the Scottish Government recognises the massive contribution that tourism brings to our economy and provides levels of support (financial, bureaucratic and legislative) commensurate with that contribution to the economy, the local workforce will continue to consider working in this sector as second rate. A highly successful tourism strategy creates opportunities in the adjacent industries to support it - infrastructure, retail, food, farming, support services, transport etc.

Individual

“

The concept of sticky money (rural multiplier effects) should be part of the appraisal of public financial support for new local economic developments.

Donald McPhillimy Associates Ltd.

“

Rural tourism is something that is measured in England but not Scotland. Perhaps the contribution of the rural economy to tourism would be more highly valued by if we measured it in Scotland?

Individual

“

If this means more paperwork, please spare us!

Individual

“

Renewable and new energy sources will need to be developed to meet our climate challenge, offering further opportunities.

South of Scotland Alliance

“

The jobs of the future will be located in rural as well as urban areas. The importance of innovation in supporting economic growth is equally important in the rural setting. There is a growing application of digital technologies to the rural setting whether through the use of satellite navigation for crop management and harvesting, the use of drones for asset survey and management and new packaging techniques that enhance the life of products.

Tayside and Central Scotland Transport Partnership

Infrastructure: Additional illustrative quotes



“Evidence suggests that rural people often do lack services that would be more readily available in urban locations (high speed, reliable broadband, a range of childcare) and that this may ‘hold them back’ from fully participating in society and employment opportunities. In many communities the response has been for local community and third sector groups to provide these services but not all rural places have this option as local people lack the necessary resources and capacity.

Scotland’s Rural College

“Services are becoming increasingly centralised ... Bank closures are particularly damaging due to poor broadband services and negative impact this has on businesses but also on day to day lives. The lack of employment opportunities often forces people to seek employment in urban areas, however the lack of rural childcare and transport causes them severe issues and can even result in people moving away from rural communities. ... Rural communities are losing many valuable young families which then has knock on effects on school closures and increasingly ageing rural populations.

National Farmers Union

“Bus, ferries and flight timetables should be designed to complement each other and be fit for purpose for inter islands and off islands travel. ... Infrequent seasonal transport is still a problem for many island residents.

Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership

“Those relying on ferries appreciate when bus and train timetables synchronise allowing for onward travel so communication and coordination between providers is encouraged.

Scottish Land and Estates

“For doctors, etc. appointments, I must take substantial time out of work to fit in with the current service and transport. ... Why would I want to continue trying to bring up children here? The economy should be working to my (community's) benefit not an end in itself.

Individual

“The High Streets as we know them are no longer for purpose (pure retail), we need to have a focus on them as attractive areas to live in, to meet as a community and to cater for those of an older age group who have disposable incomes to spend – easy access, places to sit, good customer focus and attention would all make a difference. Can we waive rates for community groups/starter businesses that want to reinvigorate the High Street?

Name withheld (Organisation)

“In rural areas where the tourism industry is especially strong, it is vital that infrastructure and amenities – including accommodation, car parks, toilet facilities, retail, roads and public transport – keep pace with growth in visitor numbers to support consolidation and further expansion. Some attractions and communities have reached peak capacity, hampering their ability to achieve additional growth, such as Skye.

Name withheld (Organisation)

“If rural businesses are to communicate with and share business with urban centres, they MUST get better developed Broadband and Connectivity; we still lag behind similar countries in rural network.

National Sheep Association



“

Why should we fall behind urban areas because they have high speed broadband? At the moment some days our broadband is so bad, 2 miles from the City boundary of Dundee, that I go and work from the cafe in nearby Tesco's. We are losing over the phone sales when the broadband cuts out and you are in the middle of a transaction.

Individual

“

The bottom line is we need the digital infrastructure to facilitate video conferencing and live video feeds. Top class digital connectivity is a precondition to economic growth in rural regions and it is integral to developing the networks of advice and support, which can help our communities to realise their potential.

South of Scotland Alliance

“

We support a place-based approach to address the diversity of needs between different rural areas. This would need to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including the public sector and third sectors.

Name withheld (Organisation)

“

Affordable housing in rural areas is so rare that young people have to leave. This is partly down to planning policy which is preventing [affordable] houses being built.

Scottish Crofting Federation

“

A flexible and enabling planning system that is fit for purpose in a rural context is crucial to combatting inequality. There is a need to ensure planning is not a barrier to economic growth but an enabler of sensitive development. A well-resourced local authority would be well placed to understand its rural areas and implement appropriate local policies to contribute to the reduction in inequalities. At this scale there should be scope for a long-term vision and strategy.

Scottish Land and Estates

“

Legislation which is more flexible and which allows multi-focused businesses to trade safely and flexibly is a key element that can help rural businesses [...] Repealing the 24-hour contract exemption to the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 Section 22.1(c) is likely to seriously diminish the ability of the Shetland tourism industry to provide transport services...

Name withheld (Organisation)

“

The whole debate around short-term letting where our sector is being unfairly targeted – mainly in urban settings, but with implications and knock-on in rural areas as steps may be taken to limit/regulate peer-to-peer activity.

Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers

“

Lots of policies and their counterpart actions diverge at the point of bureaucracy. Fine words get bogged down in rules that stifle any attempt to support the target. Actually becoming an enabling agency rather than a rule-making agency would enhance the civil service image.

Individual

“

No protection of local housing which gets sold on the open market at prices outwith the reach of local people.

Scottish Crofting Federation

“

We are a low-density economy with a low population across a large area. Current planning processes etc. are sub-standard through application of a traditional market-led economy.

DG LEADER LAG



“ *The public sector could also stimulate rural economic growth in its procurement practices by supporting local businesses by local-sourcing of products and services, such as food supplies for public institutions.* Food and Drink Federation

“ *The fewer roads available in rural areas mean that travel arrangements are disproportionately affected by maintenance, accidents, landslips, snow and flooding or other events. This has effect not only on people, but services and goods provided.* Tayside and Central Scotland Transport Partnership

“ *The current policy of a minimum of 3ha as being a farm further ignores many small land-based businesses [which are] excluded from being supported in providing societal and environmental services, while much larger farms can draw down enormous amounts. ... It would be great if the smaller businesses without the financial access to consultants could also successfully apply for these grants in the future.* Individual

“ *Small business Bonus Scheme needs to continue.* Individual

“ *Lack of funds [creates] a no 'can do' attitude from the agencies that are meant to help.* Individual

“ *Need our public sector agencies to be less cautious and risk averse, not be afraid of implementing radical policies to drive change. e.g. Italian government allows farmers to earn 65,000 euros tax free if providing a food experience on farms i.e. farm restaurant.* Individual

“ *Better guidance through the many processes currently in use is required to assist businesses through the regulation requirements [...] a more proactive, open minded approach.* DG LEADER LAG

“ *Crofters are helped with the Croft House Grant Scheme which historically has been shown to be the most effective use of public money in provision of rural housing. The loan element of the scheme needs to be reinstated as it is not possible to raise a commercial loan on croft land.* Scottish Crofting Federation

“ *There is business support available for tourism businesses, with Digital Tourism Scotland rolling out a useful programme currently.* Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers

“ *GrowBiz [...] is much more locally-based and locally-tailored and therefore more appropriate for the needs of its client base. It is worth exploring the potential for this kind of business support model to be rolled out to rural areas elsewhere in Scotland and the potential for the new South of Scotland Economic Partnership/Agency to learn from this community-based approach.* Scotland's Rural College

“ *WES supports the successful 'GrowBiz' model which is proven to work very well for women in enterprise. Using a mix of 'traditional' and 'smart' support methods for businesses, GrowBiz has proven to be an excellent model of support for rural businesses.* Women's Enterprise



“

Rural Leader has made a huge difference to Rural Scotland, with many social and economic projects supported, like the Aberfeldy Workshop in the NRCA paper. The recent parliamentary debate highlighted the scheme well with MSPs illustrating the range of successful projects, many tourism related.

Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers

“

Rural Leader has demonstrated an appetite for Rural Development, and the benefit of public money match funding projects to get them up and running. Many projects would not have happened without the assistance of Rural Leader, or taken much longer to get going. A replacement for Rural Leader is essential as it benefits the rural economy in immediately tangible ways.

Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers

“

The loss of EU funding needs to be replaced by Scottish Government grants to ensure that ... communities might develop, flourish and retain working age people.

Name withheld (Organisation)

“

EU Transnational programmes such as INTERREG, ERASMUS and HORIZON used to be ideal for exchanging best practice and replication of successful ideas, across the EU, and if this type of territorial cooperation is to cease, an alternative programme could be implemented at Scottish and UK level.

Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership

“

The loss of EU funds will leave a funding and policy vacuum which UK governments must fill [...] This goes beyond financial loss. It covers strategic planning, multiannual programming and multi-level governance. Regional targeting has to be maintained in successor programmes if regional economic disparities are to be addressed and opportunities maximised.

North Ayrshire Council

“

There is a need to replace the current EU funding packages available to coastal activities (EMFF) and onshore (LEADER/SRDP) with more appropriately targeted publicly funded grants maintaining the theme of sustainable development. Grants should be targeted to SMEs to assist new starts as well as established enterprises.

Name withheld (Organisation)



People: Further discussion of themes

Discussion on skills required for a thriving rural economy

- **Sector specific** skills, for example, those related to:
 - Tourism, particularly the soft skills needed to engage with visitors as well as specific skills around aspects of outdoor activity that are currently growing including Scotland as a destination for mountain biking and other adventure sports.
 - The food and drink industry, including the broader need for STEM qualified workers in the sector, such as engineers and food technologies.
 - Forestry, farming, fishing, horticulture, agribusiness, agriculture, game keeping, ghillies, stalkers and land management skills. In these comments some participants urged for rural apprenticeships and incentives for people to enter these industries.
- **Business skills** including marketing, finance, human resources and legal practitioners. Participants repeatedly spoke of the range of core skills and services small businesses need or require access to, in order to be successful.
- **Creativity and entrepreneurial skills**, these were noted as important to enable current and future growth of the rural economy. Creative examples mentioned by respondents included developing innovative experiential tourism such as agri-tourism and digital industries.
- **Community development** skills. Many respondents referred to the important role of community development activity and described a need for resourcing and skills development to embed these practices and realise their full potential for Scotland's rural areas.
- **Skills for core service provision** including health, social care and teaching. Respondents highlighted that remote rural areas struggle to fill and replace crucial positions.

People: Additional illustrative quotes

“ *Business support which brings micro businesses together to deliver skills training are important. These help to spread the cost and deliver training where it is required. Online courses are also helpful as travelling to the central belt for training is costly and time consuming. Support for the creation of shared workspaces, such as small units would be welcomed but demand is often hidden.* ”

Scottish Land and Estates

“ *The provision for quality and affordable co-working space has the potential to tackle inequalities by providing opportunity for businesses to grow, peer to peer learning whilst also combating social isolation and promoting inclusion.* ”

Name withheld (Organisation)

“ *There should be a “no wrong door” approach for business, with information-sharing, collaboration and reciprocal signposting of products and services more deeply embedded across the public sector.* ”

Food and Drink Federation



- “ *Digital Enterprise Hubs – Establishing hubs in rural towns which businesses can use or visit for better connectivity, start-up workspace, hot-desk space and training.* Scottish Countryside Alliance
- “ *Investment in a business ‘hub’, there are lots of small and micro businesses in my community all operating as independent traders. Empowering e.g. the community council to host business connectivity sessions in the village hall may start the ball rolling.* Individual
- “ *To tackle such inequalities we recommend ensuring that any future rural economic strategy is integrated with other public policy in rural regions.* Name withheld (Organisation)
- “ *Through mainstream policy and legislative measures (e.g. gender pay gap disclosure, taxation, barrier-free housing etc). More equal societies do better.* Nourish Scotland
- “ *‘Rural proofing’ policies and approaches and having addressing inequalities as the key priority can help focus public sector interventions in particular.* East Lothian Council
- “ *At a farming level, many farms continue to be inherited by male children, although this is changing in some individual businesses. More education and awareness that ‘farmers’ is not a male term and that both men and women are equally capable of owning and running a farming business is required.* Individual
- “ *Succession is also an issue in many farming businesses with often people in their 60s and 70s making key decisions, owning capital and title deeds. This prevents younger people running the business. Maybe only giving subsidies to businesses that have ownership of people less than age 60 would help.* Individual
- “ *Adopting a mainstream ‘gender-aware’ approach to all enterprise and growth policies is critical to meet the needs of women led businesses in rural Scotland and to unlock the economic potential.* Women’s Enterprise
- “ *Considerable evidence already available on the lack of “fit” of largely urban-based measures of poverty and disadvantage (e.g. SIMD) and of affordable housing measures, to rural Scotland.* Scotland’s Rural College
- “ *We need more detailed labour market intelligence for all rural sector - Standard Industrial (SIC) and Occupational (SOC) classifications constrain detailed research analysis, planning and action, for example by placing all land-based, predominantly rural, occupations into 5 unit groups under the minor group of ‘Agriculture and Related Trades’.* Lantra
- “ *Evidencing issues for sections of the communities in rural Scotland is often hampered by lack of data collection – particularly across groups with protected characteristics. Disaggregated data is essential across all protected groups so that effective policy development and measurement is standard.* Women’s Enterprise
- “ *The lack of data available about the impacts of policies or needs of rural communities can stifle rural economic growth.* Scottish Land and Estates



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Lack of access to local Human Resources, legal and other professional services is a barrier to business growth.

Name withheld (Organisation)

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Overall there are still gaps and difficulties in recruiting staff across specific skill sets and sectors: tradesmen/skilled labour (electrician, mechanic etc.); chefs; administrative staff; professional/technical; caring occupations; teaching; aquaculture and fishing; construction; and renewables, agriculture and forestry.

Name withheld (Organisation)

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One of the main challenges facing island and rural communities is retaining an economically active population. This will require innovative solutions from a range of partners in relation to employment, affordable housing, quality child and health care, affordable and reliable transport links and connection to high speed broadband and mobile.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig

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More apprenticeship and graduate apprenticeship opportunities to support young people to stay and work in rural areas.

Name withheld (Organisation)

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Secondary education should include more about land management and the job opportunities there are.

Confor: Confederation of Forest Industries (UK)

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Make more of 'Meal Makers' in rural areas. This is a great way of connecting older or infirm people with those interested in food regardless of education and ethnic background.

Individual

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Practical/technical training and continuous professional development or life-long learning for the established workforce, including improved health and safety, occupational competence, business development, diversification, self-employment, tendering for contracts, leadership and management skills, are integral to the developing economy.

Lantra

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Further opportunities for life-long learning in rural areas – for example, work based courses or online courses. This will ensure that people have the opportunity to use practical experience and/or remote based learning to gain knowledge and skills.

Scottish Land and Estates

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Schools should view vocational qualifications and further education with parity of esteem.

Name withheld (Organisation)

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Create spaces in rural places where people of different backgrounds can come together more often and encourage conversations. These can often be learning hubs where old, young and in between can come together to learn all sorts of things. Make more of 'Meal Makers' in rural areas.

Individual

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Better public transport, twinning between communities, support for community development trusts and those working to protect green spaces and the environment.

Individual



- “ *The higher level of older people living in rural areas should be considered and mechanisms put in place to ensure adequate public and/or community transport services are provided to mitigate the issues associated with lack of access to services. [...] Similarly, adequate transport solutions need to be found for young people who may struggle to afford a car and are either to access further education or [...] employment.*
Tayside and Central Scotland Transport Partnership
- “ *We need to ensure there are opportunities for communities to come together. This is especially important when we look at age as most social activities are age segregated and this can be felt especially strongly in the rural areas. Challenges due to age can be tackled through intergenerational projects, be that community gardens, nurseries or cycling projects that bring younger and older people together.*
Generations Working Together
- “ *There is already a thriving agricultural community on Twitter, though younger members of our organisation have WhatsApp and Snapchat groups. That in itself is a problem where forums change; would there be a possibility of a managed forum for farming ideas, but with a monitored host? Creating local area meetings for a particular type of business where like-minded people can meet up to discuss and share ideas.*
National Sheep Association
- “ *Work-based skills development should be strengthened to capture the potential productivity gains from digital technologies by ensuring that workers have the range of coinciding digital, analytical and ‘soft’ skills, for example through ‘super users’ in SMEs and the wider use of the Scottish Union Learning course on basic digital skills.*
BT
- “ *It is important that the higher proportion of older people living in rural areas is not seen as a problem, which is implied by some local rural strategies. Older people make a significant contribution to their communities in buying goods and services from local retailers and businesses and in their roles as volunteers and informal carers and friends.*
Outside the Box
- “ *There is a need to look at developing young people in rural areas and encouraging them to come forward to be part of organisations in their community. For example, resourcing of mentoring programmes between young people and more experienced older community representatives and/or business owners in local areas could be piloted. Supporting positive action programmes and pilot schemes target specific groups and encourage engagement in different sectors should be developed.*
Women’s Enterprise
- “ *Courts and tribunal services are increasingly moving to online systems, for example employment tribunal applications are now almost exclusively online and it is envisaged that criminal procedural courts will move to digital systems in coming years. [...] Individuals in rural areas who are eligible for legal aid may not be able to find solicitors to provide advice.*
Law Society of Scotland