

Cross-Party Group on Rural Policy

Group Re-registration and Scotland's Climate Assembly Report and its Implications for Rural Scotland - Minute

Tuesday 5th October 2021

Present

MSPs

Emma Harper MSP
Jenni Minto MSP
Mercedes Villalba MSP
Colin Smyth MSP
Finlay Carson MSP
Alexander Burnett MSP

Non-MSP Group Members

Abigail Williams – SRUC
Artemis Pana - Scottish Rural Action
Andrew Heald - Andrew Heald Consultants
Angela Lamont - Tyne Esk LEADER
Angus MacDonald
Anne McNeill – A heart for Duns Development Trust
Anne Hastie -Tyne Esk LEADER
Anne-Michelle Ketteridge - Forth Valley & Lomond LEADER
Arun Baguant - Student
Ashley Atkins - Office of Edward Mountain MSP
Barbara Kelly
Camille Dressler
Calum Macleod - Community Land Scotland
Carly Maynard - SRUC
Catharine Idle - Fife Council
Catherine MacNeil - Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Catriona Mallows
Charlotte Kenyon
Daniel Hooper-Jones - University of Edinburgh
David Nicholson
David Cameron – Community Land Scotland
David Wood - PAS (Planning Aid Scotland)
David McKay

David Skene
David Connelly
David Miller - James Hutton Institute
Davy McCracken - Scotland's Rural College
Eric Calderwood - University of Stirling
Fenja Kroos - University of Edinburgh
Fiona Mackenzie – University of the Highlands and Islands
Giorgia Lo Faro - SRUC
Ian Muirhead - AIC Scotland (Agricultural Industries Confederation Scotland)
Ian McCall
James Erskine
Jamie Carruthers - Dormont Estate
Jane Atterton - Rural Policy Centre, Scotland's Rural College
Jayne Glass – Rural Policy Centre, Scotland's Rural College
Jaya Scott
Jim Hume - Support in Mind Scotland
John Cairns - HiMRA (Highland Migrant and Refugee Action)
Jolanda van Munster - SRUC
Josselyn Rizo Olguin - John Muir Trust
Karen Fonstad
Kim Dams
Leigh Mair - Scottish Rural Health Partnership
Lindsay Wood – A heart for Duns Development Trust
Lorna Philip – Aberdeen University
Meilin Li
Michele Macdonald - Macdonald Partners
Murray Ferguson – Cairngorms National Park Authority
Neil Ross - Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Ninian Stuart – Falkland Estate
Oliver Escobar
Patricia Clark
Peter Ross - CLLD CHAIRS GROUP
Sam Foster - Rural Housing Scotland
Rosie Simpson - John Muir Trust
Rachel Selman
Sara Bradley - UHI
Sarah Skerratt - Royal Society of Edinburgh
Sarah Jones - Lancaster University
Sarah Marks
Susie Townend – Scotland's Climate Assembly
Shaun Marley - Stirling Council
Stan Green – The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA)
Stephen Young - Scottish Land & Estates
Steven Thomson - SRUC
Tracey Glover
Vanessa Halhead – Scottish Rural Action
Wendy Barrie – Scottish Food Guide

Apologies

Edward Mountain – MSP
Arianne Burgess - MSP
Liezal Tipper – MSD Animal Health
Rebecca Crowther – Equality Network
Leanne Townsend – James Hutton Institute
Kerry Hammond – SAC Consulting
Paul Zochowski – East Lothian Council
Sue Whittle

Agenda item 1

Welcome, introductions and apologies

Emma Harper MSP (chair) welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Group following the election.

It was noted that the agenda and list of registered attendees has been circulated and that almost 90 people have signed up to participate. A warm welcome was extended to everyone. The apologies for this meeting will be recorded in the minutes. Unapproved minutes will be posted on the website as soon as possible.

For those tweeting about the meeting, it was asked that #cpgrural be used in tweet posts to keep track of questions.

Agenda item 2

Group re-registration and election of office bearers

Emma Harper MSP noted that as we are in a new Parliamentary session the Group needs to be re-registered and office bearers - Co-conveners and Secretariat - need to be elected. Two Group Co-conveners were elected:

Finlay Carson MSP proposed Edward Mountain MSP as a Co-convener, seconded by Colin Smyth MSP. Edward Mountain MSP was elected as a Co-convener.

Emma Harper MSP then stepped aside from chairing the meeting and asked Finlay Carson MSP to temporarily chair in her place.

Finlay Carson MSP proposed Emma Harper MSP as a Co-convener, seconded by Colin Smyth MSP. Emma Harper MSP was elected as a Co-convener,

Emma Harper MSP then stepped back in to chair the meeting.

Emma Harper MSP mentioned that Jenni Minto MSP had intended to attend the meeting but was still in the Chamber and will come along when she can.

Finlay Carson MSP proposed that SRUC's Rural Policy Centre (RPC) continue as Group Secretariat, seconded by Colin Smyth MSP (no other proposals were put forward). The RPC was confirmed as the Group's Secretariat.

Emma Harper MSP noted that forms will have to be submitted to the Standards Committee to confirm re-registration of the Group. This will be done by the Secretariat.

Agenda item 3

Presentations and discussion

The focus for discussion in the meeting was Scotland's Climate Assembly's report and its recommendations in the context of rural Scotland. Four presenters were asked to kick-start discussions, with Susie Townend introducing the work of the Assembly and three respondents (Artemis Pana, Calum MacLeod and Sam Foster) providing their thoughts on its recommendations from differing perspectives.

- **Susie Townend**, Head of Secretariat for Scotland's Climate Assembly: *An introduction to Scotland's Climate Assembly*
 - Covered a range of issues, including: how Scotland's Climate Assembly (SCA) members were chosen, what questions and themes were addressed, and how the assembly was run; impacts and outcomes of the Children's Parliament; recommendations and statement of ambition from [the final report](#). A short video on the Assembly can be found here: [We can make a difference – Scotland's Climate Assembly Video](#).
- **Artemis Pana**, National Coordinator, Scottish Rural Action: *20-minute neighbourhoods and other rural issues*
 - Covered a range of issues, including: the importance of citizen engagement like the Climate Assembly; the outcomes from the Scottish Rural Parliament, and particular links to the Just Transition Commission and Climate Assembly recommendations; the need for more power sharing and co-production of policies at the national and local level; rural and island first approaches to policy making – looking to rural and island places for solutions (called for by the Scottish Rural Parliament in March); the importance of rural and island places to tackling the challenges of climate change; the relevance and challenges of the concept of the 20 minute neighbourhood/community in rural and island Scotland; the need for 'hyper-local', real-time, accurate and up-to-date data (from all public, private and third sector partners) to inform the design of effective 20 minute neighbourhoods in terms of transport, energy usage, etc.; the importance of community solutions to some of these challenges but the barriers that many communities face in doing so. A video of the Climate Change Session

at the Scottish Rural Parliament 2021 can be found here: [Climate Change, Scottish Rural Action Video](#).

- **Calum MacLeod**, Policy Director, Community Land Scotland: *Land ownership reform and community right to buy*
 - Covered a range of issues, including: the importance of the land reform agenda (and particularly tackling the concentration of private land ownership) to tackling climate change effectively and fairly; close relationship between community empowerment and land reform; empowering communities to manage land around them in ways that address the climate emergency; there will be a new Land Reform Bill in 2023, including e.g. cross-party support for a public interest test for large scale land transfer; Scotland's Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement will be reviewed shortly; the Scottish Government's new Vacant and Derelict Land investment programme and associated investment is also important – it aims to encourage projects focused on climate and community regeneration objectives; opportunity to transfer such sites into community ownership; Assembly calls for investment in community action projects, including community growing, peatland restoration, etc.; CLS believes there is an opportunity to scale up what such a fund could achieve e.g. by potential to link to the Crown Estate's new ScotWind seabed leasing programme for new offshore RE wind sites; importance of community wealth funding to encourage community ownership but also community resilience and sustainability; potential also to enhance CRTB legislation, including by simplifying the processes for communities and encouraging projects which tackle climate change challenges; also worth noting big picture links between land reform and other policy areas (e.g forthcoming Human Rights Bill) in addressing climate change; need for bold and imaginative policy action to put them into practice. Community Land Scotland briefing paper for MSPs (August 2021): ['Act on land to counter twin threats to Scotland'](#).
- **Sam Foster**, Project Development Officer, Rural Housing Scotland: *Decarbonising the housing stock*
 - Covered a range of issues, including: the Scottish Government's wider policy aims around increasing the rural population, land reform, community empowerment and 20 minute neighbourhoods; refurbishment of existing housing stock important, not just about building new housing – but can be more difficult but also has a VAT penalty; refurbishment needs to be done in an appropriate way, not just one-size-fits-all, and RHS would like to see VAT on new build (0%) and on refurbishment (20%) equalised; also need to re-use existing empty housing stock, often caused by high levels of second home ownership; construction quality – mentioned by Climate Assembly, current a gap exists between what we design and how it operates (e.g. use more

heating, less comfortable, etc.); RHS want to see statutory mechanisms (e.g. National Planning Framework 4) used to demand that new housing performs as its meant to; referenced higher living costs in rural areas, plus heating costs more, need to travel by private car, means that homes in rural areas need a very different approach to those in urban areas; lots of discussion about low carbon heating systems but if homes themselves are not refurbished/insulated properly the benefits are lost; essential that move away from bringing in labour and materials from round the world – climate implications but also means local wealth taken out of an areal Scottish National Investment Bank with one mission to promote zero carbon development – have opportunity to use resources from Scotland for housing and upskill our workforce to use these local materials; very encouraging that we have a Just Transition Minister in Scotland; but there is a disconnect, RHS hears lots of platitudes ‘blah blah blah’ and not being met by actions on the ground; Braemar community trying to get PassivHauses built locally and SG fund to support half of construction costs (Rural Housing Fund) doesn’t have in guidance appropriate support measures at local level. You can read the Rural Housing Scotland Manifesto here: [‘Building Our Rural Future: Manifesto for the 2021 Scottish Parliament Elections’](#).

Key issues raised in the discussion included:

- ***Feasibility of 20 minute communities in rural Scotland.*** SCA members from rural communities discussed guaranteeing access to services locally through remote, digital and mobile provision. Linked to recommendation with 100% support (the only one) regarding improvement in broadband connectivity. This could include improved access to work hubs, and smart devices were discussed as necessities. The children talked about more safe cycle routes across rural Scotland. We do not have a definition in Scotland of a 20 minute neighbourhood; having that would be helpful. A key issue is lack of data around transport, connectivity and all aspects of mobility, and how this can be used to encourage behaviour change. Bridging digital and connectivity divides is critical. CLS project working with community land owners to reimagine their way out of the pandemic and the digital divide challenges are central, particularly for young people for social networks as well as more fundamental services. Key question about relationship between communities and state and role of the state in terms of providing services and how this is changing. Some scepticism about the concept of 20 minute neighbourhoods in rural and remote Scotland. It is useful as a shorthand tool, but there is such diversity of rural communities, individuals in rural communities, etc. that it cannot be applied simply and easily. Broadband/digital is not the answer to everything, we need to take into account protected characteristics, and the deprivation experienced by different groups in society. The key underlying desire is to build communities and service

provision in a place without having huge climate impacts; key is local provision of services or consideration of the different ways that services can be delivered locally. You can read the Assembly's recommendations on 20 minute communities including rural localised living here: [20 Minute Communities, Climate Assembly](#) .

- ***Role of children in the climate assembly.*** Over 100 children were brought together to listen to evidence and deliberate alongside and in the same ways as assembly members. Assembly members were struck by how similar the calls to action were from the children and the other members, and how much more direct the children were in presenting their recommendations (e.g. in relation to land ownership and plastics use). Inclusion of children in the assembly process was met with mixed reviews by assembly members at first with some scepticism, but over time there was an appreciation of the advantage to be gained from sharing experiences and views, and the shared development of actions. There are perhaps some wider lessons to be learned here in terms of the ways in which we might involve children in future decision-making in Scotland.
- ***How can the biodiversity crisis be brought more to the forefront of the SCA agenda?*** We have been in a biodiversity crisis for longer than we've recognised the climate emergency but biodiversity does not feature heavily in the report. What does this say about our failure to transfer the urgency regarding biodiversity if our citizens don't say anything about it? How do we convey the importance of the role of communities in terms of managing biodiversity and the opportunities that brings? This is commonplace in construction projects too – they are the first things to be cut because we don't quantify the value of them and they are always seen as peripheral. Other countries (e.g. Germany) set targets for blue and green spaces and we have an opportunity through planning regulations and NPF4 to put targets for the increases into law. The youth-led session at the Scottish Rural Parliament did interweave biodiversity into climate change and food production discussions. We need to mainstream biodiversity action as we're mainstreaming climate action and reinforce the urgency of the biodiversity crisis. This strongly relates to debates about how we value our landscapes and who gets to value them – this is 'professionalised', and our notion of place-based sustainability. It was also recognised that Assembly members when discussing climate change also recognised the co-benefits of climate action, including relating to biodiversity. The need for planners to come forward with positive solutions to address biodiversity challenges was also noted.
- ***There remain challenges around second home ownership in much of rural Scotland and Covid-19 may also lead to more people moving to rural places and working remotely with higher incomes than people working locally.*** In Scandinavia there is legislation around second houses which allows for the building of homes that will only be used in the summer and then housing

stock is not being taken away from those that need it year-round. Sweden has a two-tier housing market system which prevents first-homes (primary dwellings) from being sold as second-homes (holiday dwellings). Implementing a similar system in Scotland could be effective in preventing permanent primary dwellings from being sold into a second home market. Many private estates do have an important role to play in the provision of housing locally, and funding may be available to support those kinds of activities.

- ***Additional topics were discussed between participants and speakers in the chat box including digital connectivity, rural public transport, local governance and sustainable transport.***

Emma Harper MSP noted that the Co-convenors are very keen to ensure that these CPG meetings result in action items as the Groups are so important e.g. writing to Cabinet Secretaries or Ministers in relation to specific issues raised at Group meetings for them to take note (with links to the current/future policy context), taking forward a members' debate, informing a portfolio question for a specific Minister/Cabinet Secretary, etc. It was noted that Finlay Carson MSP, who convenes the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee, was in attendance. It was noted that we do not have to have an immediate action from every minute.

Agenda item 4

Actions from this meeting are:

- Susie Townend called for support from those attending to ensure that the Scottish Government's response to the Climate Assembly report (which needs to happen by 23rd December 2021) is substantive and then to encourage action where there is commitment for that in the Government's response.
- Scottish Rural Action (with relevant others, e.g. SRUC) to discuss how to continue discussions on the 20 minute neighbourhood concept and its applicability to rural and island Scotland, particularly to inform current Government work (including the consultation) on National Planning Framework 4. Emma Harper MSP also noted that 20 minute neighbourhoods have also been discussed in the context of the Health Committee's work planning.
- It was noted also that CLS has written to the First Minister regarding the importance of having a Community Wealth Fund, particularly for climate action at local level. Participants may want to consider in more detail and advocate for such a fund.
- Murray Ferguson from Cairngorms NPA highlighted a consultation on the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan. Deadline for submission is 20th December 2021. [National Park Partnership Plan – Have your say.](#)
- Finlay Carson MSP noted that the Rural Affairs, Island and Natural Environment Committee would be finalising their work programme in late October. This can now

be accessed here: [Rural Affairs, Island and Natural Environment Committee Work Programme.](#)

- The Secretariat will explore potential communication platforms to facilitate conversation and collaboration after and between the Cross Party Group on Rural Policy meetings. This will be discussed with the group at the 7th December meeting.

Agenda item 5

Next meetings

Emma Harper MSP reminded members to contact the secretariat with any future topic ideas for the CPG. Emma Harper MSP proposed having four meetings per year and reminded everyone of upcoming meeting dates: Tuesday 7th December 2021, Tuesday 8th March 2022, and Tuesday 7th June 2022

Emma Harper MSP concluded the meeting by thanking the speakers and the audience for their contributions. Jane Atterton, on behalf of the Secretariat team, also thanked the co-conveners, speakers, and attendees.