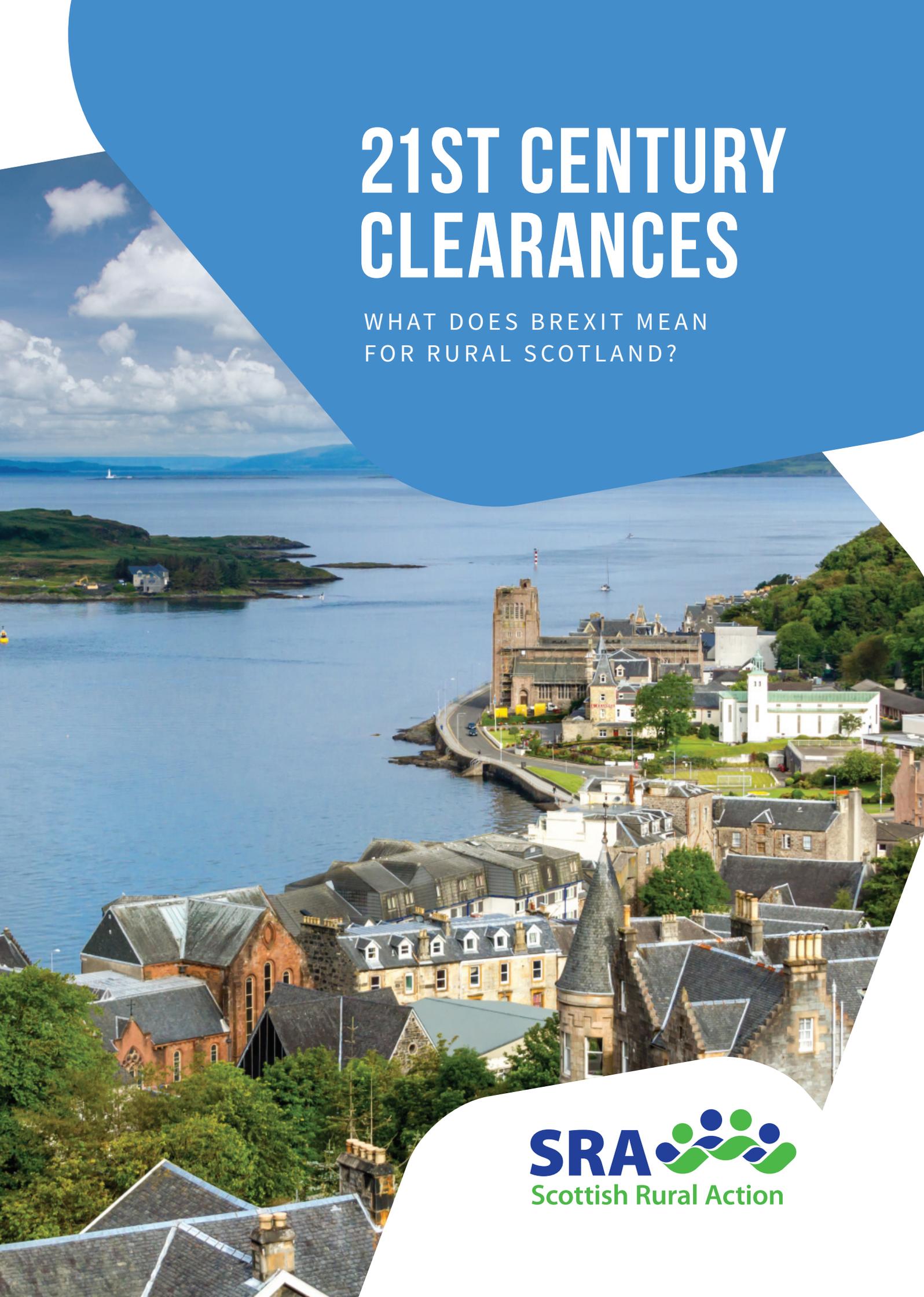


21ST CENTURY CLEARANCES

WHAT DOES BREXIT MEAN
FOR RURAL SCOTLAND?

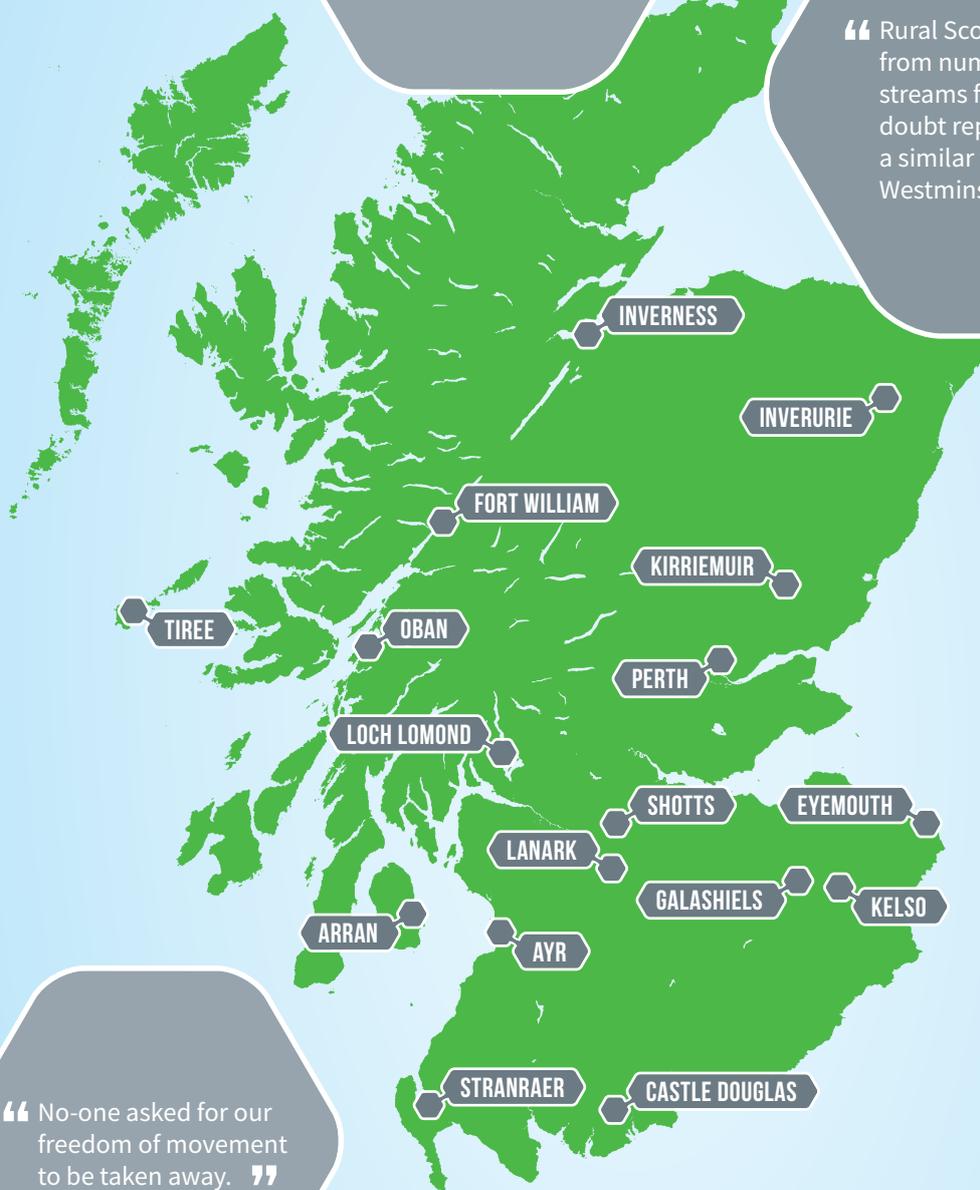


“ Everything about Brexit, as far as we know, is a total shambles and disaster for our rural communities and economy. ”

“ Educational users of Erasmus grants are numerous and this will now be lost to schools and the FE/HE sector. Such cultural actions between EU members are sometimes forgotten. ”

“ With a big fishing sector there is a belief that life will be significantly better. ”

“ Rural Scotland has benefited from numerous EU funding streams for many years. I doubt replacement funding of a similar value will flow from Westminster post Brexit. ”



“ No-one asked for our freedom of movement to be taken away. ”

WHAT DOES BREXIT MEAN FOR YOU?

Rural Scotland is bracing itself for impact from a future that is not yet known. Rural communities in Scotland believe they will be disproportionately affected by Brexit and they want their voices heard.

Scottish Rural Action facilitated open dialogue with people in rural communities across Scotland asking what Brexit meant for them and their communities. We wanted to give voice to a rural point of view that is rooted in Scotland's people and places, rather than its rural industries. Our approach was based around conversation; both individual and workshop based.

- 17 Brexit Rural Conversations events held
- 284 people took part in face to face discussion
- 1500 people engaged with the campaign online
- 134 people participated in online discussion

KEY FINDINGS

CONCERN	UNDERSTANDING	COMPLEX	IMPACT	REALISTIC
People in rural communities are deeply concerned about Brexit and its impact on the future of their rural communities.	They had good knowledge and understanding of how Brexit issues, such as citizen's rights, trade and customs, could impact their communities.	They shared the belief that Brexit is an all-encompassing, complex issue with interrelated strands that must be addressed as a whole, not as individual elements.	The vast majority* believe Brexit will have a catastrophic impact on rural communities in Scotland, particularly those dependent on a migrant workforce to run businesses and provide services.	Most understand that the degree of influence and control that the Scottish Government has is limited but people do expect a strong response to the impact of Brexit on rural Scotland.

*VIEWS WERE HIGHLY POLARISED, APPROX 90% OF THOSE PARTICIPATING WERE OPPOSED TO BREXIT, WHILE 10% WERE IN FAVOUR OF IT.

BREXIT: THE 21ST CENTURY CLEARANCES?

Our Rural Conversations invited people in rural communities to list and prioritise areas of concern. While over-arching issues around rural funding, depopulation and regulations were consistently mentioned and received a high priority ranking in all of the discussion groups, the themes raised in each location were largely place-based in nature. For example, communities reliant on agriculture, tourism or inshore fishing prioritised issues affecting these sectors rather than generic concerns.

DEPOPULATION

There is an underlying fear across rural Scotland that Brexit will lead to rural communities becoming unviable with a resulting depopulation of rural Scotland. Loss of freedom of movement is expected to have a major impact on Scottish rural life.

Participants highlighted that rural areas are particularly dependent on a migrant workforce to run businesses and provide services. They believe there is an urgent need to address the rural-specific impacts of a loss of migrant workforce. The general perception is that since rural economic activity is diffuse rather than concentrated in major single-site employment, the labour impacts are less visible to politicians. However, Brexit is already affecting the viability of Scotland's rural businesses:

- In Angus an employer within the soft fruit industry requiring a workforce of 4,500 predominantly seasonal migrant workers currently has just over 20% on his books.
- In Inverurie a shortbread factory employing a high number of migrant workers is 20% down on staff numbers.
- In Oban and Fort William two local inshore fish production companies employing in excess of 700 migrant workers each are facing severe turnover of existing staff due to Brexit uncertainty.

“ Brexit will impact negatively on importing from the EU, as well as the sectors which depend heavily on EU workers at the lowest skill levels. This is already happening, and will get worse. ”

“ There are also concerns around the status of EU workers here in Scotland. Many local businesses, be they fruit farms or hotels, rely on EU workers, therefore the outcome of Brexit stands to have a significant impact on their operations. ”

HIGHLAND CLEARANCES 2

THIS TIME IT'S YOUNG PEOPLE

WE ARE FU@% ^D

21 CENTURY CLEARANCE

SCANDAL OF THE RURAL POOR

BREXIT BONUS FOR BANKERS



RURAL SCOTLAND ABANDONED

MEDS MAYHEM

SHELLFISH SHAMBLES

RATIONING RE-INTRODUCED

Workshop participants were asked to come up with headlines that they might see in a future newspaper to reflect opportunities and concerns about Brexit.

FUNDING

There is increasing concern about the loss of EU funding for rural communities and rural infrastructure development.

This was by far the most vocal and substantive issue in all discussion groups. There was an expectation that resources available to Scotland via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will be less than is needed. Further, there was a belief that this lack will be compounded in rural areas as a consequence of a centralised approach to resource allocation that will mitigate in favour of urban rather than rural communities.

Concerns were expressed that while some industry sectors had been given assurances about continuity of funding, no assurances have been made about community led, place-based funding which has contributed significantly to rural economic development. Participants wanted the Scottish Government to take steps to mitigate the loss of this essential funding for Scotland's rural communities.

“ In general, ‘Europe’ looks after rural areas as they have lower populations and therefore less representation than urban areas. The UK does not have a balancing mechanism. ”

“ Loss of rural Leader which funds rural development will be a massive blow. ”

SOCIAL COHESION

Rural Scotland is fearful that its needs are unheard and will be unmet. They recognise that the EU has brought a long history of support for peripheral rural and island areas which has had a significant impact on the sustainability and development of rural Scotland.

Participants believe Brexit has exacerbated the sense of ongoing powerlessness in rural communities and they agreed that an independent mechanism is needed to enable the voice of rural Scotland's people and places to be heard in a way that can influence national policy.

There was concern that Brexit will have a detrimental impact on the social cohesion of rural Scotland, and consensus that Brexit is interpreted by some as a valid platform for openly expressing racist views with a negative impact on celebrating cultural diversity.

There is a consensus that Brexit is interpreted by some as a valid platform for openly expressing views with a negative impact on cultural diversity. This is particularly the case in relation to immigration issues. A proactive approach is needed to develop community cohesion and address concerns of racism and xenophobia.

“ Politically the UK is in a very scary place just now with so much intolerance of others. The risk is that we will isolate ourselves further and become even less tolerant of others. ”

“ I expect a hard Brexit will have a significant impact on every aspect of life. ”

BREXIT: THE STRAW THAT BREAKS RURAL SCOTLAND'S BACK?

Brexit is not happening in isolation. It was clear from workshop discussion that Brexit is compounding long standing concerns about rural equity and rural demographics. Some delegates referred to it as the 'final straw' that could break rural Scotland, noting an underlying fragility that makes rural communities particularly vulnerable to Brexit impacts.

Several participants highlighted a perceived over-reliance by the UK and Scottish Governments on EU funding to 'prop-up' rural economies which has created a rural dependence on EU structural funds. Participants generally believed this makes rural Scotland particularly exposed to loss of EU support in the future. Overwhelmingly participants wanted to know that their voice would be heard and their rural experiences understood by policy makers.

A COMPOUND PROBLEM

Brexit is taking place at a time when rural Scotland already believes itself to be marginalised and disadvantaged. Rural economies have been hollowed out by the retreat of the state after ten years of austerity, centralised public procurement and widening societal inequality. This, combined with a general belief across rural Scotland that investment is mainly targeted at urban areas, has created a perception of increasing rural peripherality.

Since it is not 'just' Brexit that concerns rural Scotland, a post-Brexit Scotland must address more than simply the cessation of EU structural funds.

It must address all the factors that are negatively impacting upon rural economic and community sustainability.



“ The lower the population the lower the priority. Once we might have been able to get grants to offset these disadvantages from the EU but I do not see these being replaced with grants from the UK Government. ”

“ There has been too much dependency on the EU. ”



DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

Many participants expressed anger at Scotland being forced to leave the EU when it voted to remain. There is concern that Scotland and the other UK devolved governments are being excluded from decision-making throughout the Brexit negotiations.

“ The whole idea is a total economic disaster self-inflicted by England on behalf of the UK – and imposed on Scotland. ”

While rural Scotland understands that the Scottish Government is limited in what it can influence and control in relation to Brexit, rural communities expect them to better understand and respond to the impact of Brexit on rural Scotland.

UNCERTAINTY & PACE OF CHANGE

The lack of clarity around Brexit has created a climate of uncertainty, risk aversion and hesitation. It is clear that Brexit has already damaged rural Scotland through a reduction in economic activity and a halt to forward planning through anticipated lack of funding. Participants from the agricultural community highlighted that the anticipated pace of change is unworkable, while representatives from community development organisations noted that lack of resource continuity is halting progress in rural community empowerment.

“ General feeling of threat and panic as we go into the unknown and unplanned future. ”

“ Currently farming businesses in Scotland are very reliant on subsidy in order to generate a profit. If no subsidies are going to be implemented farming businesses need 10 years to adjust to this change. ”



BREXIT: THE OPPORTUNITY?

Around 10% of those attending Rural Conversations events and engaging online were pro-Brexit. These contributors generally fell in to one of two camps. Either they saw industry specific opportunities arising from Brexit or they were pro-Brexit in response to being anti-Scottish Government or anti-immigration.

Those with sectoral interests noted an opportunity to re-think how things are done, "I am not in favour of leaving but I am a pragmatist; I know that before EU membership there was support - farm price support was introduced after the 1930s. I am sure that support will continue but without 'a middle man' as before." Another participant acknowledged the funding their sector had received from the EU but stated, "there was always a pound of flesh to pay, it did nothing for fishing, just wrecked our industry."

“ The rural economy has diversified greatly over the last 50 years. It's not just farming and fishing any more. It's tourism, manufacturing, retail, education and much, much more. ”





PREPARING FOR CHANGE

Whether Brexit is perceived to be a threat or an opportunity, change is inevitable. Rural Scotland generally believes there is now an urgent need to radically re-think how its businesses and its communities function.

Whilst appreciative of EU funding, workshop participants were not uncritical of it. Many of those attending Rural Conversation events had experienced frustrations with the administrative burden and fragmented nature of EU support. Several highlighted an opportunity to 'do things differently' in a post-Brexit Scotland.

Participants were almost unanimous in recognising the untapped potential of rural Scotland, but emphasised the need for resourcing and an enabling approach. They highlighted the track record of success in place-based asset development and good examples of innovation and empowerment in rural Scotland, and the need for rural Scotland's voice to be heard.

They noted that the community led local development approach of LEADER combined with the experience of the community development trust movement could enable locally designed development strategies that focus on capacity building, place differentiation and reduction of regional inequalities. Will being 'free' of EU constraints enable the Scottish Government and its agencies to adopt a more innovative approach to supporting rural Scotland? It could.

REFRAMING RURAL

Some noted an opportunity to detach rural funding from agriculture and fisheries policy, acknowledging that technological developments are potentially changing the way in which people will live in rural communities as the 21st century progresses.

Resourcing will be critical to whether a positive outcome for rural Scotland can actually be achieved post Brexit, in particular participants emphasised the need for sustained investment in resourcing rural local economic and community development.

FROM ASKS TO ACTIONS

Findings from the first phase of Rural Conversations were consolidated into Ten Asks which were agreed at the Scottish Rural Parliament in November 2018 and presented to Michael Russell MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations.

- A clear and direct UK and Scottish Government commitment to rural people, places and enterprise in Scotland.

- Strong government and political leadership that provides clarity over Brexit.

- Reassurances that the UK and Scottish Governments will welcome migrant workers from across Europe.

- Funding allocations to be made on an equitable basis for Scotland and for rural communities within Scotland.

- Place-based rural community development should continue.

- Support to celebrate cultural diversity and community cohesion.

- The UK Government to respect and commit to working with devolved governments throughout the transition from EU membership.

- The recognition of the importance of an independent voice for rural communities in Scotland.

- The unique manifestations of poverty and hardship in rural Scotland, and the impact of Brexit upon these, to be recognised and addressed.

- Recognition of the value and diversity of the rural economy.

The harder the Brexit, the higher its impact on rural communities in Scotland. Regardless of the final agreement, action needs to be taken to strengthen rural communities and to address the underlying fragilities that would be exacerbated by Brexit.

Our Rural Conversations revealed a vision for rural Scotland held by the people who reside there. Regardless of the outcome of Brexit, delivering that vision will create resilience and empowerment across rural Scotland, lessening structural and demographic rural fragilities.

A VISION FOR RURAL SCOTLAND

VISION

Rural Scotland's people and places are empowered to reimagine rural for the 21st Century; leveraging local assets and increasing their social, economic and environmental wellbeing.

COMMUNITY-LED PLACE-BASED

Local control
Wellbeing focussed
Place differentiation
Collaborative decision making

ENABLING INNOVATION & CHANGE

Connectivity and digital skills
Higher and further education
Climate change and the environment
Social and technological innovation

A STRATEGIC APPROACH

DELIVERING RURAL EQUITY

Access to services
Transport, housing and infrastructure
Celebrating diversity
Measure delivery

CAPACITY TO DELIVER

Sustained investment
Collaboration & knowledge transfer
Reframing rural

RURAL ACTIONS: FIRST STEPS

- Commit to the continuation of funding specific to rural communities.
- Introduce an annual Rural Barometer to measure satisfaction with key deliverables across rural Scotland.
- Create an interface through which rural Scotland's people and communities can collaborate, exchange knowledge and enable evidence-led place-based decision making.
- Explore how public sector supply chains could be localised.
- Develop a Rural Resilience Action Plan.

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Scottish Rural Action is a registered charity. Our vision is to help improve the lives of people in rural Scotland and to reduce rural inequality. Scottish Rural Action is a non-profit company limited by guarantee. Company number SC461352. Charity number SC048086.

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