



Big Panel Debate

Session curated by Scottish Rural Action and chaired by Ruth Wishart.
Attended by 114 delegates.

Panel One

- Ariana Burgess, [Scottish Green Party](#)
- Mairi McAllan, [Scottish National Party](#)
- Rhoda Grant, [Scottish Labour](#)
- Oliver Mundell, [Scottish Conservatives](#)
- Catriona Bhatia, [Scottish Liberal Democrats](#)

Discussion Points

Climate Change

- Panellists agreed on the role of education in tackling the climate emergency, both in regard to the school curriculum and supporting the general public to be informed.
- People need to be supported by the government to make good decisions, such as recycling, and to reconnect with nature.

Land Use

- Continuing to reassess the use of Scotland's land was a key theme discussed by the panel.
- The panel supported the planting of more trees but had difference target percentages. The importance of balancing trees with land use for food production was also identified.
- Ensuring land ownership and food production stays as local as possible was also discussed.
- Farmers should be supported to address climate issues and communities should be supported to develop land use skills.

Localising Decision Making

- The panel agreed on the importance of decision making happening on an as local level as possible.
- The role economic development agencies, local government, community councils and community trusts can play in localising decision making was highlighted – however such organisations need power and funding to work effectively.

Playing to the Strengths of Rural Communities

- The benefits of the digital economy for rural communities and the environment were highlighted, however the need for the infrastructure to be put in place to make this a reality and vital importance of connectivity was acknowledged.
- Supporting businesses already in rural areas to grow is important.

Housing

- Better supporting individuals and communities to build their own fit-for-purpose housing in rural areas was identified as a solution to tackle some of the housing issues.
- The regulation of second homes was also discussed, suggestions such as a “two market” system and giving local authorities power to manage second home ownership were mentioned.

Panel Two

- Theona Morrison, [Scottish Rural Action](#) and [CoDEL](#)
- Kate Rowell, [Quality Meat Scotland](#)
- Dr Michael Foxley, Further Education Regional Board for the Highlands and Islands
- Louisa Macdonell, [Development Trusts Association Scotland](#)
- Lisa Maclean, [Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn](#), [Community Land Outer Hebrides](#) and the [Scottish Government’s Social Renewal Advisory Board](#)

Discussion Points

Housing

- The panel discussed the importance of regulations in increasing affordable housing availability and managing second home ownership.
- Making it easier for people to build houses was also identified as a solution.

Skills for the Rural Economy

- Supporting people to set up and run their own enterprises and initiatives such as leadership training were identified as important in upskilling rural communities.

- Education around rural career options and to meet the needs of the local economy is important.
- The importance of connectivity for developing the skills of the rural communities and in education was acknowledged.

Supporting Mental Wellbeing in Rural Areas

- The panel agreed on the benefits of local, community-based solutions and networks in supporting mental wellbeing.

Food Production

- The panel discussed the need for more food processing facilities in increasing local food production opportunities.
- Increasing opportunities for communities to have access to land and develop food production skills was identified as beneficial.

Transport

- The panel discussed the importance of finding sustainable transport solutions. Using social enterprise led solutions and providing support and incentives for people to use green alternatives, such as electric cars and active travel was identified as important.
- Bringing services to communities to reduce the need for travel was also raised as a solution.

Rural Communities Being Heard in Decision Making

- The panel agreed that making political engagement easy and inclusive is crucial for people to be heard.
- Consulting with communities needs to become standard practice in decision making.
- Educating young people on democracy was identified as important.