WHAT IS RURAL SCOTLAND?

ACCESSIBLE RURAL:
WITHIN A 30 MINUTE DRIVE TIME TO THE NEAREST SETTLEMENT WITH A POPULATION OF 10,000 OR MORE.

REMOTE RURAL:
MORE THAN A 30 MINUTE DRIVE TIME TO THE NEAREST SETTLEMENT WITH A POPULATION OF 10,000 OR MORE.
Rural Scotland is different to urban Scotland. The challenges rural communities face and the opportunities rural areas embrace are largely defined by their geography, natural capital and infrastructure – in short, their future is defined by the nature of their rurality.

The Scottish Government has recognised that since almost all of Scotland’s policy development takes place in the urban cities of central Scotland, there is a need for an independent interface to ensure rural Scotland’s voice is consolidated, communicated and understood. Scottish Rural Action and the Scottish Rural Parliament are tasked with that role.

Our volunteer Board has a breadth of experience and a depth of understanding of rural Scotland that we draw on to inform our strategic direction and priorities. Perhaps more importantly, we are deeply connected through a network of organisations and community groups - from the smallest community development trust to national NGOs – all of whom help inform our rural response to consultations, advocacy and campaign activities. We aim to be a prism through which rural Scotland’s needs, opportunities, challenges, opinions and solutions can be focussed, shared and understood. A voice for rural Scotland is more important than ever.
More than 400 people took part in the 2018 Scottish Rural Parliament in Stranraer; Scotland’s largest participatory democratic event.

Hosted every two years, the Rural Parliament brings people working, volunteering and representing rural communities together with policy makers and influencers to explore solutions to rural challenges. Topics of discussion this year included health service provision, future rural policy, rural gender pay gap, supporting refugees in rural areas, connectivity and rural housing.

The twin themes were Brexit and empowering communities to ‘Take Action’. Delegates represented most of rural Scotland, from host region Dumfries and Galloway in the south to Orkney and Na h-Eileanan Siar in the north. Valuable knowledge and experiences were shared by international representatives attending from Ireland, Finland, Wales and England.

“IT IS AN AMAZING OPPORTUNITY TO NETWORK AND REALLY HELPS TO OPEN UP NEW DOORS - IT IS NOT THAT OFTEN YOU HAVE SO MANY COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS TOGETHER.”

DELEGATE FEEDBACK

“KEY MESSAGES COMING FROM TODAY’S POST BREXIT PANEL - WE NEED A COLLECTIVE & STRONG RURAL VOICE IN SCOTLAND TO ENSURE A FUTURE FOR OUR INDUSTRIES, SECTORS, COMMUNITIES, EU EMPLOYEES & EMPLOYERS”

“SCOTTISH RURAL PARLIAMENT 2018”
Participation by young people was prioritised throughout the event, with a large number of young community representatives and youth organisations taking part.

The programme included 54 workshops, a number of panel based topical debates, keynote speeches and votes on policy positions, including the approval of rural Scotland’s post-Brexit policy statement. Key to maximising knowledge transfer across rural Scotland were informal networking sessions, an exhibition area and social occasions.

The 2018 Scottish Rural Parliament has created a legacy of information that will inform policy positions and campaigns, and most importantly, enhance connections and people-based networks across rural Scotland. Post event feedback suggests 82% of participants rated the Rural Parliament as very or extremely valuable. We look forward to building on that valuable legacy in the years to come.
Young people are the future of rural Scotland bringing energy, passion and creative approaches to co-creating the future of their rural communities. The Scottish Rural Parliament made the inclusion and involvement of young people a priority throughout the planning, development and delivery of the 2018 event, reflecting Scotland’s Year of Young People 2018.

Our multi-agency liaison group identified ways to maximise the involvement of local young people in all aspects of the Rural Parliament. A key outcome was collaboration between local restaurants and Dumfries and Galloway College’s hospitality students to deliver an outstanding catering service that showcased emerging skills and local produce. This approach delivered valuable real-world training opportunities for the participating young people and created capacity within local businesses.

Young people were also involved in the staging of fringe performances and attended as delegates themselves, including the Highland Youth Convener, representatives from Police Scotland’s Youth Volunteers and Modern Studies students from Stranraer Academy who contributed greatly to our panel debates.
More decision-making should be carried out at a local level, and more services should be delivered at a local level. There was consensus that rural people believe there are a wide range of issues on which their voices are not heard and needs not met by the public and private sector. It is generally believed that urban needs are prioritised because more people live there.

There needs to be a transparent, formalised and obligatory process for identifying rural-urban tensions and needs within the policy-making process. Rural communities require support and information in understanding how public sector decisions are made and if, and how, those decisions balance rural and urban needs.

The rural voice needs to be heard on issues which are key to the future and sustainability of rural communities. Too often the rural voice is often not present in the room when policy is being agreed. For example, the Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Action Group had no rural representation.

Communities need to be educated and supported to take advantage of new legislation designed to empower them, for example, making use of compulsory purchase legislation to build new housing. This legislation could be highly effective, but only if communities are effectively supported in utilising it and bureaucracy in doing so is minimised.

KEY FINDINGS

Fifty-four workshops took place across three days addressing a wide range of topics relating to rural life, rural challenges and rural solutions. Despite the diversity of themes discussed, common themes emerged, these were:
Rural communities can be and are agents of change. By proactively engaging with decision-makers, leading by example in terms of inclusion and being innovative in solving problems, rural communities are often the key to unlocking rural potential.

There is a need for increased cross-sector knowledge and experience-sharing; examining specific issues and solutions with a view to adapting and replicating the innovation which is taking place in some rural areas. Challenges can be best addressed cost-effectively through co-production and partnerships; we need to be working together to tackle those issues which are going to have the deepest impact on the sustainability of rural communities.
INSPIRATIONAL VISITS

An important aspect of the Rural Parliament is that the host venue moves around rural Scotland, providing an opportunity for delegates to experience different parts of the country and to see rural solutions in context.

This year’s venue, Stranraer, encapsulated both the challenges and the opportunities of rural Scotland. Young people leaving rural areas, difficulties in attracting health service professionals and poor transport infrastructure – these are all topical challenges within Galloway and they are common issues across most of rural Scotland.

However, community empowerment and excellence in community led rural development are also evident, and community-led solutions formed the basis of the Rural Parliament field trips. Trips included a new distillery that uses sense of place as a key marketing asset, a harbour now owned by its community through a hugely successful community share scheme, community trusts who are reviving, and creating new, heritage assets, and an insight into the incredible rural regeneration story that is Scotland’s National Book Town, Wigtown.

What all our field trips this year had in common was asset based community development and a strong focus on place. The November weather may have been inclement, but the welcome across Galloway for our Rural Parliament was very warm indeed.
A highlight of the Scottish Rural Parliament is the showcasing of the Scottish Rural Innovator Awards winners. In 2018 five projects and organisations from across Scotland were named as outstanding examples of rural innovation and they shared their stories - including their challenges and their successes - during the opening ceremony of the Rural Parliament.

The awards highlight excellence in rural innovation, particularly innovation in meeting the needs of rural communities, across Scotland. Entry is designed to be as inclusive as possible, reflecting the variety of approaches in governance, organisation and funding, adopted by rural areas. As a result the awards frequently showcase examples of solutions-focused rural innovation that may not be a ‘fit’ with other avenues of recognition or influence. By providing a platform at the Rural Parliament our intention is to facilitate knowledge transfer and enable peer to peer learning and inspiration across the whole of rural Scotland.

More than two and a half thousand people voted to select the winners of the 2018 awards. Each one of the winning projects demonstrates how communities can take action to address the challenges and opportunities their particular communities face, and they are all outstanding examples of rural community empowerment.
Kirrie Connections provides advice, support and activities to people living with dementia, their families and carers. It runs a community hub open 6 days a week running activities such as arts and crafts, and each individual is supported in participating in activities that are meaningful to them.

Kirriemuir is a small rural town at the foot of the Angus Glens in Scotland. Much of this area is very rurally isolated, with an older than average population, there is a higher than average incidence of dementia in the community. Dementia is already an isolating condition. When it is combined with issues specific to rural locations, it becomes even more so. Kirrie Connections will soon pilot the first Dutch style ‘Meeting Centre’ in Scotland. The centres are based on a grassroots community-led version of dementia care, where families and carers are as much a part of the centre as the person living with dementia.

RUNNER-UP: CREATIVE CARE PROJECT, GROWBIZ

**ENVIRONMENT AND LAND USE AWARD: THE MOUNTAINS AND THE PEOPLE**

A unique landscape project with two overarching aims; to restore and upgrade 125km of existing upland paths across Scotland’s two national parks and an on-going community engagement programme designed to encourage the public to help manage and maintain paths in the future.

In popular areas paths have become as wide as 40 meters due to large numbers of walkers each year using just a little bit more of the path each trip. By re-laying paths, replanting turf, and diverting mountain users away from man-made ‘short-cuts’, natural habitats and highland vegetation will be restored. Over the past three years 24 of the planned paths have been completed.

The project also aims to encourage people to become directly involved in the long-term conversation of the Park’s mountain paths. There have been five 6-month vocational training courses in which 36 young people have become accredited in path building.

RUNNERS-UP: INCREDIBLE EDIBLE BUTE, FYNE FUTURES CASTLEBANK PARK, LANARK COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TRUST
FOOD & DRINK AWARD:
FORTH ENVIRONMENT LINK, STIRLING NEIGHBOUR FOOD

Stirling Food Assembly brings local producers and local communities together by facilitating the purchase of locally grown or locally produced food by local people. They use an on-line platform which is designed to be easy to use by customers, whilst the ‘model’ means that local producers keep 80% of all the sales they make (compared to say 20% of what they would make if they sold through a supermarket).

Stirling Food Assembly was set up in 2016 and already has 1900 members with over 4,200 ‘baskets’ sold. Following the recent cessation of The Food Assembly platform, Stirling Food Assembly became Stirling Neighbour Food. The rural innovation lies in the way it brings communities together while supporting local agriculture and rural food producers.

RUNNER-UP: MYCORRHIZAL SYSTEMS LTD

TRANSPORT & INFRASTRUCTURE AWARD:
BALQUHIDDER COMMUNITY BROADBAND

Approximately 250 people live in the glen and there are a number of business operating in the area who require fast internet. A sub-group of the Community Council was set up to campaign for a solution to poor digital connectivity. In 2015 the community formed Balquhidder Community Broadband CIC in order to build a community network. The physical build commenced in 2017 with a plan to lay around 35km of fibre across the rugged rural terrain. The community relied on local volunteers to dig trenches for the cables, encountering stone strewn soil, boulders, tree roots and other obstacles along the way. They also laid the fibre along fences and placed around 6km of cable in the waters of Loch Voil to minimise the amount of digging needed.

To date 25/32 km of core fibre has been laid with 60 premises already connected and the remainder scheduled for connection at the end of 2018. The publicity that the project has received has resulted in people now choosing to move to Balquhidder, a local developer who has struggled for years to sell his plots has recently sold four because of the location and world-class fibre broadband in the area. The economic uplift model created by the community for the project suggests an annual trading uplift of €1M.

RUNNERS-UP: BADENOCH & STRATHSPEY COMMUNITY TRANSPORT COMPANY

YOUTH AWARD:
BRECHIN HEALTHWATCH

The HealthWatch project was conceived by the pupils at the Brechin High School in response to the changes in local health services, such as a reduced family planning service. The students identified that the community should be consulted about health services provision. They designed a questionnaire to audit the views of pupils about access to local health services, carried out dummy patient phone-calls to the practice and they consulted with local groups. Their research evidenced that people faced several barriers in accessing health services, particularly young people.

Thereafter the group has focussed on mental health issues and have carried out an audit to establish the prevalence of mental health problems in the pupil and the staff communities. They are planning a Health and Wellbeing Day and numerous other events to raise the profile of mental health issues. The pupils plan to become MH First Aiders and to use a Chameleon model to allow students and staff to decorate the model to reflect how they feel on the day.

RUNNERS-UP: LGBT YOUTH SCOTLAND
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