



Scottish
Rural Parliament

Pàrlamaid Dhùthchail na h-Alba

Scotland's first **Rural Parliament**

Oban 6-8 November 2014

Empowered, Sustainable, Connected



Shared Vision for Rural Scotland

The Scottish Rural Parliament offers the people who live and work in rural Scotland an opportunity to develop a shared vision of what rural Scotland can be and to agree what actions are required for that vision to be fulfilled.

Scotland is fortunate that 95% of its land is rural and this is widely acknowledged as a valuable national asset. However, it is important that those who live and work in rural Scotland are not disadvantaged by challenges arising from their location, and that rural life is sustainable socially, economically and environmentally in the long term and for future generations.

To this end, the Scottish Rural Parliament aims to give a new voice to Scotland's many rural communities and interests, and to work with Scottish Government and others to achieve a rural Scotland that is fairer, healthier, more socially just and prosperous for all.

*"Rural Parliament is an idea
whose time has come!"*



Rural Innovators Award



We were looking for innovative and inspiring projects and received nominations from all over rural Scotland from people, projects and organisations who are improving life in rural communities. These were put forward for voting under the categories of our main themes.

The finalists were invited to the Rural Parliament and gave speeches at the opening ceremony to determine the winner. It then went to a public vote and the winner was announced on Friday evening at dinner. The 2014 winner was 'Stramash'

from the Argyll and Bute category. Stramash use the outdoors to facilitate personal, social, emotional and educational development and environmental education. The organisation delivers the only outdoor children's nursery for young people in Scotland and is the largest provider of outdoor education apprenticeships in the country.



Stramash receiving their prize

Exhibition

The exhibition took place over two days at Corran Halls in Oban. There were just under 40 exhibits which included a variety of community organisations and local businesses. Delegates and exhibitors were entertained by young talented local musicians throughout.

"The SRP exhibition was a great opportunity to meet folk from our area of operation and have time to speak to them meaningfully"



THURSDAY – Day 1

Visits

There were morning and afternoon visits to many local projects and businesses including trips to the Isle of Mull, Ballet West, Stramash, Scottish Association of Marine Science, Dunollie Castle and Oban Phoenix Cinema. Two delegates who visited the Phoenix cinema and Isle of Mull swimming pool told us that they found them interesting as their own communities were looking into community owned projects of the same nature and it was helpful for them to see the end product and how it now functioned.



The Fringe: Your ideas and workshops

Events included:

- + What are the key issues for young people in rural communities?
- + Low impact cargo transport and west coast shipping
- + Improving the effectiveness of governance
- + What skills are needed in rural areas?
- + Community empowerment
- + Examining positive responses to a changing climate
- + Our youth – Our community: Delivering innovative youth work in a rural setting
- + The right tree in the right place
- + Onshore gas exploration and extraction

Opening Ceremony

Participants were welcomed to the event in three languages by Chair of Scottish Rural Action John Hutchison and were given an insight into the key themes and European Rural Parliament. Delegates enjoyed 'world-class' entertainment from Finlay Wells and students, The Oban Gaelic Choir, the award winning Oban High School Pipe Band and international ballet school Ballet West. They all demonstrated the diversity and quality of local entertainment with Karen Matheson closing the evening.



Chair John Hutchison

"I believe strongly in the power of people to change things. Let's be ambitious for our Rural Parliament – yours and mine. Let's be bold and make a difference. All of us together!" John Hutchison

'Fab speeches & first class entertainment on Thursday at Atlantis for first Rural Parliament @OurIslandHome'

*"Great privilege to have composed the Rural Parliament March"
Donald Shaw*

Ballet West



FRIDAY – Day 2

Presentations

Friday opened with a welcome from Mr Richard Lochhead, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and the Environment. Dr Carol Craig from the Centre of Confidence and Wellbeing discussed wellbeing in rural communities and Anneli Kana the CEO of the Estonian Village Movement Kodukant outlined the Estonian Rural Parliament and the impact it had had in ensuring the viability of rural life in Estonia.



Richard Lochhead



Anneli Kana

"Through sharing ideas and working together, we bind our separate lives into one. It makes us all stronger"

Workshops on Key Themes

Each of the key themes were explored in a series of workshops during the morning. Delegates were able to take part in two workshops each on topics such as 'Land use and land reform, Strengthening communities, Infrastructure to facilitate sustainable economic growth, Local democracy and Removing barriers to growth.'

"Most of the services we regularly use are within 5 miles of our doorsteps but decisions are made 50 miles away"



"Sharing experiences help us to learn"

Open Space – 400 people, 42 topics, 4 hours

'A new way of holding meetings and conversations which ensures everyone has the chance to decide the agenda and voice their opinions, reflect and move on to MAKE THINGS HAPPEN'

"A truly empowering experience

- Open Space harnessed the collective intelligence of the Scottish Rural Parliament!"

Open Space Rules:



"Open Space was scary – the thought of it – but the energy and inspiring quality of the topics was unique!"

Dinner and Celebrations

Delegates gathered together at the Argyllshire Gathering for night of dinner, drinks speeches and ceilidh dancing. There was also the announcement of the winner of the Rural Innovators Awards; which was Stramash from Oban. Skipinnish lead the ceilidh and had everyone up dancing.



SATURDAY – Day 3

Speeches

Saturday morning started with a presentation from Councillor David O'Neill on the findings of the Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy. The concept of local democracy was a recurring theme throughout the Rural Parliament.

"Radically transforming local democracy is not just an aspiration – it is absolutely vital"

"I am even more convinced that Scotland is over governed and over centralised and there is a huge need to local government reform."



Councillor David O'Neill

"Local democracy should become the right of all people who are sovereign"

Size of councils:

Country	No. of Councils	Median Population
France	36,781	380
Spain	8,112	564
Italy	8,100	2,343
Norway	431	4,439
Germany	12,013	6,844
Scotland	32	115,000

McIntosh report (1999)

‘Scottish community council budget – £400, English parish council budget – £½ Million’

“If all ‘town councils’ in Scotland were restored we would have local democracy equal to the rest of Europe”

“This Rural Parliament advocates a new democratic structure to replace the existing levels of local government, to devolve real powers to local communities”

96.6% of participants voted to continue the Rural Parliament with the next major event to be held in 2016.

Summary and key messages

Peter Peacock summarised all the items discussed over the last three days and the key areas where the Rural Parliament could make a difference for rural communities over the forthcoming two years. The focus was on creating a more empowered, connected and sustainable rural Scotland. Participants agreed to also ask the Scottish Government to commit to a national conversation on local democratic renewal as a first step towards radical reform of local government that will bring power much closer to communities.

Local MSP Mr Michael Russell, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning reflected on the findings of the Scottish Rural Parliament and received a briefing paper on behalf of Scottish Government from the event organisers outlining all of the findings of the Rural Parliament during and leading up to the event.

John Hutchison then provided closing remarks and thanks to our sponsors Caledonian MacBrayne, Argyll & Bute Council and other significant supporters and organisers of the Rural Parliament.



Recommendations

The Scottish Rural Parliament gave general assent to the following recommendations being taken forward on their behalf. Rural communities need to be empowered, connected and sustainable.

Empowered:

- + **Stronger local democratic structures** – Communities are best placed to make decisions about matters that affect them. Communities need to be able to influence decisions that affect them at a local and national level. The current system does not sufficiently empower communities and this needs to be urgently addressed.
- + **Visioning & co-design of services** – Communities need further powers and additional support to be able to develop a local vision and to then enact this vision.
- + **Access to assets** – Communities need to be able to access assets to ensure their own sustainable development and should be able to influence decisions over assets within or affecting their community.
- + **Ability to influence ‘big policy’** – Communities need to feel that Scottish Government and local authorities will listen to, support and facilitate action to support rural communities.

Connected:

- + **Broadband and mobile phone** – Communities are frustrated by the pace of progress and patchy information available regarding broadband improvements. Communities are unclear on the strategy for improving mobile phone services. Both are essential services for rural life. The negative impact of the market-driven approach on rural areas should be formally acknowledged but, in future, policy and instruments for delivery should mainstream rural considerations.

- + **Transport** – Communities need transport agencies and companies to explain how they are seeking to integrate timetables and identify what mechanisms exist to allow communities to seek improvements to timetabling. Fuel price initiatives need to remain in place and be extended.
- + **To each other** – Communities want to connect to each, share experiences and learning. The Scottish Rural Parliament is one way in which communities can do so.

Sustainable:

- + **Essential services** – Communities need a baseline of services to be in place in order for their community to survive, and additional services for their community to thrive. These need to be identified and monitored with interventions available when services fall below baseline.
- + **Employment** – A sustainable community is one in which employment, training and skills are available, land is available for development, and planning systems operate effectively. Communities need to know that the rural dimension is considered within overall employment policy.
- + **Quality of life** – Arts, culture and activities, especially for younger people, need to be present in all communities. They are part of ensuring rural communities are sustainable and help counter depopulation.
- + **Live sustainably** – Energy, food and, sensitivity to climate change are essential considerations for rural communities.



Five asks of Scottish Government

The Scottish Rural Parliament gave general assent to the following asks being made of Scottish Government on their behalf:

- ✦ Commit to supporting rural communities and the Scottish Rural Parliament to let us to decide and deliver more of what we aspire to.
- ✦ Work with us to agree where the Scottish Government is best placed to deliver our agenda and to develop a plan of action.
- ✦ Focus on and involve us in agreeing tailored support arrangements to allow more community-led actions.
- ✦ Commit to co-creating a national conversation on community democratic responsibility and power as a first step toward reformed local democratic arrangements.
- ✦ Commit to agree with us a range of rural outcome measures and monitoring arrangements

“There was a brilliant sense of being at a point of change for the better; there was a great sense of commitment to the ideas being expressed and I met a lot of interesting people who are committed to building a better rural Scotland.”

“If only every rural person could attend”

“An incredibly open exchange of ideas, views and opinions in an atmosphere of genuine common aims”

“We are not alone. By working together we can change things.”

“Community empowerment – the thirst that local communities have to be in control of their lives has already inspired me to provide a ‘solution’ to a local Trust looking to take charge of their own ‘asset’”

“A greater passion to improve services in Rural Scotland”

“Empowerment to tackle and solve problems that face our community. Support in that the problems are shared across rural Scotland. Unity in addressing these problems.”

Scotland's first Rural Parliament
firework display, Oban 2014

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