

Scottish Countryside Alliance Response

Submitted to Rural Delivery Plan: vision, strategic objectives and key performance indicators

A vision for Rural Scotland

1 Do you agree with the proposed vision for rural Scotland?

Yes

2 Do you wish to comment?

This draft vision is what we, as an organisation, have been working towards since our inception. We are seeing a gradual erosion of the rural way of life in terms of legislation relating to hunting and shooting activities, a land reform bill that seeks to divide up large landholdings to the possible detriment of existing, successful business operations on which communities rely; uncertainty in the agricultural sector through the “family farm tax”; and no clear indication of agricultural funding after 2026. We want to see a thriving rural economy, with efficient, affordable and regular travel connections to allow the population to travel to and from work, and/or work from home with fast and efficient broadband connectivity. We are still seeing rural depopulation with younger people deserting the countryside to find work and affordable housing. It is clear that young people are struggling to afford a home and a vehicle, which is virtually a necessity in rural areas. Recent legislation is forcing some from their homes (which are often tied to jobs) and destabilising some rural-based positions. This, clearly, creates uncertainty, and the knock-on effect is that young people do not enter into those careers instead seeking employment elsewhere. The vision clearly states that its aim is to nurture the wellbeing of current and future generations. Very little legislation introduced over the past few years has been anywhere close to this claim, in fact, quite the opposite, resulting in a loss of trust and support from the entire rural sector in Scotland.

Strategic objectives for Rural Scotland

1 Do you agree with the proposed strategic objective for agriculture, forestry, marine and land-based businesses?

Yes

2 Do you wish to comment?

In general, we do support this objective, providing that the profitability includes existing individuals, communities and businesses. Enforced policies and legislation to increase profitability would not be welcome in every case. Change of land use, for instance, may have an argument for profitability, but if it comes at the expense of business owners, schools, residents or other stakeholders, then it would likely not be a sensible way to administer any proposed objective. Sustainability is key in every sector and would attract a great deal of support if

delivered in the right way. Rural Scotland desperately needs stability, and fluctuating funding only serves to destabilise this apparent objective.

3 Do you agree with the proposed strategic objective for economy and digital connectivity?

Yes

4 Do you wish to comment?

We need to balance the green economy with current community needs and employment. A countryside and shoreline full of wind turbines and solar panels on prime agricultural land, as alternative sources of energy production is not a positive vision for the future and a balance must be sought between energy needs and food security. The national grid needs to be updated to cope with changing energy needs, but not at the expense of rural communities by building miles of pylons across areas of natural beauty. Undergrounding should be the first consideration. Proposed pylons are currently closing some rural businesses that have been operational for decades and so more careful consideration should be given to planning and concerns of local communities should not be so easily discarded.

Enhance tourism in areas by starting with improvements to infrastructure so the rural area can thrive. The North Coast 500 is a prime example of clogged single-track roads with tourism traffic, which can cause difficulties for the emergency services to reach people in need, damage roadside properties and result in environmental issues related to litter, contamination, fires and hygiene.

More needs to be done to connect rural communities with fast, efficient broadband that can be relied upon, especially in isolated areas whereby residents take part in on-line NHS appointments, home-based work or online schooling.

5 Do you agree with the proposed strategic objective for population, education and skills?

Yes

6 Do you wish to comment?

Recent childcare issues on Orkney highlights the problems recruiting and retaining staff in childcare and early learning settings. Without adequate provisions in childcare, families experience barriers to living and working in these areas. More needs to be done to prevent the closing down and mothballing of rural schools. There are also problems recruiting and retaining NHS staff into rural areas, especially the Highlands and Islands region.

Some rural schools cannot offer wrap-around care, which prevents some parents from applying for or accepting opportunities that would be of benefit to both families and the community.

Clean heating systems are a focus for the Scottish Government, but these require qualified, skilled engineers in this specialist area across all rural areas. If the Scottish Government want to install these heating systems in every new home in Scotland, investment in local college courses and apprenticeships in rural areas will help retain younger members of the population instead of the majority migrating to larger towns and cities.

Land-based occupations are suffering of late with new legislation squeezing those already invested in our rural areas. The future looks extremely uncertain and so further assurances, funding and logistical support is required not only to halt this decline, but to reverse the damage

that is being done. It is less of an attractive sector to enter into given the guillotine that is edging ever downwards.

7 Do you agree with the proposed strategic objective for social justice?

Yes

8 Do you wish to comment?

Many rural areas in Scotland are not on the gas grid and rely on electric, oil-fired or clean-heating systems with secondary heating sources such as a wood-burning stoves. Improving the social rural housing stock will go some way to help decrease fuel poverty but is not an immediate solution. Housing needs to have good insulation and EPC rating at C or above to effectively withstand Scotland's harsh winter conditions. Stop bank, post office and NHS service closures in rural areas, or at least provide either a regular mobile service that is reliable or rural community hubs for banking and NHS services. Investment in community spaces and local services is critical to counteract loneliness and isolation for all age groups.

The ability for communities to be able to purchase local assets more easily will protect both those assets and the community as a whole. Harbours, places of interest and any other area which could benefit from restoration or regeneration should be offered to the community so that any deterioration can be halted. Improvements in the process are required and, if funding is not available or in short supply, the asset should not be out of the reach of that community either financially or owing to administrative restrictions. Large commercial operations have a clear advantage over local schemes, but this is often not the best path to follow. In short, we agree with this proposed section providing priority and assistance is given to communities above all else.

9 Do you agree with the proposed strategic objective for housing?

Yes

10 Do you wish to comment?

The SCA has made it clear that prime agricultural ground should not be forfeited for the mass building of low quality housing, forestry, turbines, pylons or solar farms. It is also clear that the financial margins in our agricultural sector are dwindling and it is often more lucrative for land to be sold off for other purposes or uses. The solution is not clear. We need affordable housing, but not at the expense of those who live and work in our countryside. Investment in agriculture and retaining prime land for food security purposes must factor in the solution to this difficult issue.

See 8 above.

Strategic objectives for Rural Scotland

11 Do you agree with the proposed strategic objective for health and social care?

Yes

12 Do you wish to comment?

See 8 above. In order to encourage NHS staff into rural areas, there needs to be sufficient resources and infrastructure to incentivise and enable employees with families and younger employees to work in these areas. There is currently a recruitment campaign for numerous GP

jobs on the islands at the moment, possibly demonstrating a skills shortage. We are also seeing reports that the maternity services in Dumfries and Galloway are inadequate and putting lives at risk. In isolated and rural areas, provisions need to be made to allow communities access to online NHS services where applicable. For example, online or telephone appointments are common as a first line for mental health services, but digital connectivity issues and inadequate broadband services may prevent this in more remote areas. Providing regular mobile NHS clinics in community halls with links to local GP surgeries should also be considered for people that are unable to travel large distances to attend appointments. Telephoning GP surgeries at 8am for an appointment is archaic and the consideration of an online booking system should be considered as it is being implemented elsewhere. Specialist nurses are thinly spread and travel county-wide to deliver a service, resulting in delays in treatment, advice and support. Transport links are limited, can be expensive and often serve a large area, resulting in a simple journey by car being replaced with a convoluted and extended bus journey.

13 Do you agree with the proposed strategic objective for environment and climate change?

Partially

14 Do you wish to comment?

A participatory approach to national legislation with rural stakeholders is needed. This ensures that policies can capture on-the-ground realities within rural communities, involving local voices. For a circular economy to work in rural areas, recycling initiatives need to be modernised to help rural communities recycle locally, rather than travelling some miles in order to recycle glass, for instance. Some recycling centres only allow for certain items to be disposed of and round-trips of 30-40 miles are not uncommon to dispose of general, household items. Forestry and rewilding are key areas in which serious thought needs to be given to the planning and introduction of schemes or policies. It is accepted that more trees are required, and that some habitats require further protection, but this should not be at the expense of prime land and community benefit.

15 Do you agree with the proposed strategic objective for transport?

Yes

16 Do you wish to comment?

Included in this objective should be reliability. Public transport in rural areas can be woefully inadequate and expensive. In some rural areas, it is not uncommon to have two buses running one route per day. Bus stops are often scrapped with very little notice and the public then need to use private cars to travel to work, school, hospital appointments. The Workforce Mobility Project is carrying out some excellent work on modelling and planning transport networks across Southern Scotland, showing where there are weaknesses in transport links. This project, or similar, should be supported, progressed and rolled out across the whole of Scotland. Rail fares are rising and are now in line with, or are often more expensive than flight prices.

17 Do you agree with the proposed strategic objective for culture, arts and language?

Yes

18 Do you wish to comment?

The "fabric of rural life" is defined as the rural experience such as community cohesion, volunteerism, local traditions, and access to services. New government policies, such as those related to large-scale housing developments or depopulation may lead to a dilution of local cultural identity and the linguistic character of rural communities. Retention of youngsters in rural areas should be prioritised over schemes relating to attracting others from further afield to fill the gap. An easy way to ensure culture and heritage is retained.

19 Do you have any further comments on the proposed strategic objectives?

Key performance indicators

1 For the agriculture, forestry, marine and land-based sectors, which of the below data indicators should be scored as high priority, medium priority or not appropriate for inclusion in the Rural Delivery Plan?

Data indicator scoring for agriculture, forestry, marine and land-based businesses - Agricultural and forest area under environmental management schemes:

Not Appropriate

Data indicator scoring for agriculture, forestry, marine and land-based businesses - Scottish Gross Value Added (GVA) by sector: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing sector:

High Priority

Data indicator scoring for agriculture, forestry, marine and land-based businesses - Percentage (%) Employment by sector: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing sector:

High Priority

Data indicator scoring for agriculture, forestry, marine and land-based businesses - Sustainability of Fish Stocks:

High Priority

Data indicator scoring for agriculture, forestry, marine and land-based businesses - Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Scotland by Territorial Emissions:

Agriculture:

Medium Priority

Data indicator scoring for agriculture, forestry, marine and land-based businesses - Area of woodland creation:

Medium Priority

Data indicator scoring for agriculture, forestry, marine and land-based businesses - Value of agritourism per annum:

Medium Priority

Data indicator scoring for agriculture, forestry, marine and land-based businesses - Average farm income, income by farming sector and from diversified activity:

High Priority

Data indicator scoring for agriculture, forestry, marine and land-based businesses - Number of new entrants into crofting:

Medium Priority

Data indicator scoring for agriculture, forestry, marine and land-based businesses - Number of crofters who are resident and actively using their croft:

Medium Priority

2 Do these adequately measure what success should look like in this area?

Partially

3 Do you wish to comment further?

Difficult to prioritise some of these options. The measure of success should include the protection and recovery of certain species, the impact on the rural community and what benefit each action provides for both the environment and the rural sector as a whole.

4 For economy and digital connectivity, which of the below data indicators should be scored as high priority, medium priority or not appropriate for inclusion in the Rural Delivery Plan?

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Residential broadband coverage by service type/download speeds:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Business openings and closures:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Youth unemployment rate:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Economic inactivity:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Secure employment:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Involuntary non-permanent work:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Gender, disability and ethnicity pay gaps:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Employer provided training:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - 4G geographic coverage:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Registered businesses in Scotland:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - High growth businesses:

Medium Priority

5 Do these adequately measure what success should look like in this area?

Partially

6 Do you wish to comment further?

7 For population, education and skills, which of the below data indicators should be scored as high priority, medium priority or not appropriate for inclusion in the Rural Delivery Plan?

Scoring of data indicators for population, education and skills - Population by age, mid-year estimates:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for population, education and skills - Population growth (annual percentage change in population):

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for population, education and skills - The proportion of 16-19 year olds in Scotland participating in education, training or employment:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for population, education and skills - Establishments that have a skill-shortage vacancy:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for population, education and skills - Percentage of all school leavers in positive destinations at 9-month follow-up:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for population, education and skills - Percentage of settings providing funded Early Learning and Childcare achieving Care

Inspectorate grades of good or better across all four quality themes:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for population, education and skills - Percentage of pupils achieving expected Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Levels by Urban Rural Classification and stage:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for population, education and skills - Childcare costs – Annual household spend on childcare as a percentage of annual income:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for population, education and skills - % of day-care of children services that offer a service during school holidays – Care Inspectorate:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for population, education and skills - % of day-care of children services that are open before, during and after school hours Care Inspectorate:

High Priority

8 Do these adequately measure what success should look like in this area?

Partially

9 Do you wish to comment further?

Funded childcare before and after schools, as well as during holidays, is key in promoting growth in rural Scotland. Opportunities for parents to work and to contribute to local economies are severely limited because of the lack of funded childcare.

Key performance indicators

10 For social justice, which of the below data indicators should be scored as high priority, medium priority or not appropriate for inclusion in the Rural Delivery Plan?

Scoring of data indicators for social justice - Relative poverty - Proportion (%) of people in each category who are in relative poverty:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for social justice - Relative child poverty - Proportion (%) of children in each category who are living in households that are in relative poverty:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for social justice - How easy or difficult people find it to afford transport costs:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for social justice - Housing costs as a percentage of earnings:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for social justice - Level of fuel poverty:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for social justice - Perceptions of influence over decisions affecting local area:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for social justice - How the household is managing financially:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for social justice - Number of assets, number of community groups, area and percentage of land area in community ownership:

High Priority

11 Do these adequately measure what success should look like in this area?

Partially

12 Do you wish to comment further?

13 For housing, which of the below data indicators should be scored as high priority, medium priority or not appropriate for inclusion in the Rural Delivery Plan?

Scoring of data indicators for housing - New Build Housing Completions:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for housing - Proportion of rural households rated EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) C or above:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for housing - Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP) Completions by local authority area for 2021-22:

Not Appropriate

Scoring of data indicators for housing - Proportion (%) of all dwellings that are second homes:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for housing - Proportion (%) of all dwellings that are short-term or long-term vacant homes:

High Priority

14 Do these adequately measure what success should look like in this area?

Partially

15 Do you wish to comment further?

16 For health and social care, which of the below data indicators should be scored as high priority, medium priority or not appropriate for inclusion in the Rural Delivery Plan?

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Quality of care experience:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Self-assessed general health:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Healthy life expectancy (males):

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Healthy life expectancy (females):

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) score:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Experience of out of hours healthcare:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Rating of health, care or support services:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - How easy it is for people to contact their General Practice in the way they want:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Balance between caring and other things in their life:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for economy and digital connectivity - Supported to continue caring:

High Priority

17 Do these adequately measure what success should look like in this area?

Not Answered

18 Do you wish to comment further?

Key performance indicators

19 For environment and climate change, which of the below data indicators should be scored as high priority, medium priority or not appropriate for inclusion in the Rural Delivery Plan?

Scoring of data indicators for environment and climate change - Percentage (%) of household waste recycled:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for environment and climate change - Renewable Electricity Generation (MWh)³:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for environment and climate change - Clean Seas: the percentage of biogeographic regions with acceptably low levels of contaminants:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for environment and climate change - Biodiversity: This indicator is a combination of trends for three measures of Scottish species, index of abundance of marine species (based on seabirds), index of abundance of terrestrial species and index of occupancy of terrestrial species.:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for environment and climate change - Fresh Water condition: The percentage of river and loch waterbodies achieving 'Good' or better status in terms of four metrics; water quality, water resources (flows and levels), access to fish migration and physical condition.:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for environment and climate change - Hectares of restored peatland: Cumulative area of peatland restored since 2012 (thousands hectares):

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for environment and climate change - Awareness, understanding and support for biodiversity conservation:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for environment and climate change - Status of rare and threatened species:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for environment and climate change - Total area of forests and woodlands:

Medium Priority

20 Do these adequately measure what success should look like in this area?

Partially

21 Do you wish to comment further?

Marine species, including kelp, is massively threatened. It is irreparably damaged on a daily basis and more needs to be done to protect what can not be seen. This ecosystem is just as important as forestry and peat restoration. Sustainable fishing methods need to be enforced.

22 For transport, which of the below data indicators should be scored as high priority, medium priority or not appropriate for inclusion in the Rural Delivery Plan?

Scoring of data indicators for transport - How adults usually travel to work/education:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for transport - Satisfaction with the quality of public transport:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for transport - Proportion of primary schools delivering on-road cycle training:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for transport - Household access to a bike (with focus on regional and socioeconomic variation):

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for transport - Number of disability accessible or low-floor buses used as Public Service Vehicles in Scotland (Local Operators):

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for transport - Passenger journeys on local bus services:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for transport - Local authority road network condition:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for transport - Local bus fare indices:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for transport - Electric Vehicle (EV) infrastructure:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for transport - Ferry reliability:

High Priority

23 Do these adequately measure what success should look like in this area?

Partially

24 Do you wish to comment further?

25 For culture, arts and language, which of the below data indicators should be scored as high priority, medium priority or not appropriate for inclusion in the Rural Delivery Plan?

Scoring of data indicators for culture, arts and language - Attendance at cultural events and visiting places of culture:

Medium Priority

Scoring of data indicators for culture, arts and language - Participation in any cultural activity:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for culture, arts and language - Percentage (%) of the population that can speak Gaelic:

High Priority

Scoring of data indicators for culture, arts and language - Number of visits to Scotland's visitor attractions:

High Priority

26 Do these adequately measure what success should look like in this area?

Partially

27 Do you wish to comment further?