

Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Rural Policy

Tuesday 4th December 2012

5.45 – 7.30pm, Scottish Parliament Committee Room 5

Minutes (Approved)

Present

Name	Organisation
Madhu Satsangi	Stirling University and Convenor of the Rural Housing Service (speaker)
Alastair Cameron	Chief Executive, Scottish Churches Housing Action (speaker)
Jamie Dent	Chief Executive, D&G Small Communities Housing Trust (speaker)
Graeme Dey	MSP (chair)
Stephen Pathirana	Scottish Government
Becky Marshall	Scottish Government
Lorna Philip	Aberdeen University
Ian Macdonald	NFUS
Sheila McWhirter	East Lothian Council
Andrew Brough	Estate Manager, Buccleuch Estates, Selkirkshire
Colette Backwell	Independent Consultant
Alex Fergusson	MSP
Jim Hume	MSP
Elaine Murray	MSP
Jean Urquhart	MSP
Mike MacKenzie	MSP
Derek Logie	Rural Housing Service
Jane Atterton	SRUC
Artur Steinerowski	SRUC
Steven Thomson	SRUC
Sarah Hunter-Argyle	SRUC
Mike Woolvin	SRUC
Fiona Mackenzie	UHI
Lisa Strachan	Holyrood Magazine
Ross McLaren	Scottish Churches Rural Group

Apologies

Name	Organisation
Barbara Kelly	
Patricia Neeson	
Jonathan Wordsworth	Archaeology Scotland
Eric Samuel	BIG Lottery
Jenny Brothie	Carnegie Trust UK
Alison Elliot	Chair of the Land Reform Review Group
Rob McMorran	UHI
Alan Laidlaw	Crown Estate Scotland
Ian Cooke	Development Trusts Association Scotland
John Watt	Director of High Life Highland (formerly of HIE)
John Farrington	Dot Rural Aberdeen University
Maggie Gordon	Dumfries and Galloway LEADER
Susan Smith	Economic Development Manager East Lothian Council
Nicola Hill	Field Officer Dumfries and Galloway LEADER programme
James Ogilvie	Forestry Commission
Dr Richard Simpson	MSP
Tavish Scott	MSP
Annabelle Ewing	MSP
Sarah Anderson	National Farmers Union for Scotland
David Whiteford	North Highland Initiative
Karen Dobbie	SEPA
Clare Hall	SRUC
Davy McCracken	SRUC
Sian Ringrose	SRUC
Sarah Skerratt	SRUC
Jane Smernicki	SRUC
John Oldham	SRUC
Alistair Hamilton	SRUC
David Gass	Upper Quartile
Jim Hunter	Vice Chair Land Reform Review Group
Rebekah Widdowfield	Scottish Government

1. Welcome and Apologies

Graeme Dey MSP (chair) welcomed all participants to the meeting. All participants introduced themselves (see list above). Jane Atterton read out the list of apologies received (see list above).

Graeme Dey MSP noted Dr Sarah Skerratt's promotion to Group Manager Land Economy and Environment Group (LEERG) SRUC and Reader, Rural Society and Policy. The Group passed on their congratulations to Sarah.

2. Approval of minutes from the October 2012 meeting

Two amendments were noted to the minutes of the October 2012 meeting (Derek Logie's name is incorrectly recorded and Fiona Mackenzie was in attendance). JA agreed that these amendments will be made and a revised version of the minutes produced and uploaded onto the CPG website.

Jim Hume MSP proposed the minutes as a true record of the meeting, and Alex Fergusson MSP seconded. The minutes were accepted as a true record of the October meeting.

3. Presentations (followed by discussion)

Three presenters spoke to the Group on the issue of Rural Housing. The key points from their presentations are detailed below:

- *Madhu Satsangi (Stirling University and Convenor of the Rural Housing Service)*: Madhu described a series of 8 myths regarding housing in rural Scotland and set out the evidence for/against them. Evidence presented included: data on recent in-migration to rural Scotland (e.g. 12.1% from 2011-2010 in accessible rural areas) which has led to rising demand for housing; the high proportion of low income households in remote rural Scotland; ratios of mean house prices to income in rural Scotland regularly outstrip ratios in urban areas creating problems of housing affordability; the importance of housing design in not 'spoiling the countryside'; the availability of land for new housing; the tendency of planners to regard new housing/development in the countryside as 'unsustainable'; unit development costs are on average higher in rural Scotland but 'too costly' depends on a judgement of value; and the need to ensure that in future rural Scotland has balanced and diverse communities.
- *Alastair Cameron (Chief Executive, Scottish Churches Housing Action)*: Alastair set out the story of the new charity, Whitebeam Homes, which has been established to buy properties on the open market and turn them into affordable homes. The charity is starting work on Arran in early 2013 (purchasing two properties) with the hope that further finance will be secured to work elsewhere too (in rural and urban areas). The initiative has been prompted by a range of issues, not least the frustration at seeing empty homes side-by-side with housing need. The properties will be made available to local people (or those moving to Arran for work) for rent at below market rate. The initiative has started with a £100,000 contribution from the United Reformed Church (URC) and an appeal will be launched for further funding in January 2013.
- *Jamie Dent (Chief Executive, Dumfries and Galloway Small Communities Housing Trust)*: Jamie described DGSCHT's work with communities to promote housing investment and the provision of affordable housing in small villages and settlements throughout D&: 'Local Houses for Local People on Local Wages'. DGSCHT is a designated Rural Housing Body which means that property sold by the organisation must be offered back to them at discounted rate at every subsequent sale and that the organisation can enter into long-term leases of land for housing (i.e. 100 years). The organisation also works with housing associations to encourage them to invest in rental

housing or shared equity housing for sale, with private developers using the rural housing burden, with private landlords (e.g. Dormont Estate and the 'PassivHaus' development – a previous speaker to this Cross Party Group) and with communities to establish Community Land Trusts to develop community-led housing projects. Jamie finished his presentation by outlining some of the challenges faced by the organisation including the need for more local cost housing in the right places, for further rural proofing of existing housing policies, the need to secure more housing for young people and the high deposit level required for purchase and self-build.

Discussion focused on the following issues:

- The role of planning policy in serving as a barrier to affordable housing development in rural Scotland – it was argued that a change in 'mindset' is required amongst planners at national and local level, but that 'good intentions' at national level take time to percolate down to local level. It was noted that here is a need to make changes in planners', surveyors' etc. education and training to encourage this mindset change. This should include showing them examples of 'best practice' design etc. There is also a need to share evidence of need with other local actors, including councillors.
- It was noted that the Rural Development Council's report (Speak up for Rural Scotland) provided a clear steer to planners about the need for affordable housing in rural Scotland.
- The growing importance of Community Land Trusts in 'unleashing real energy and ability to do things' with respect to housing requirements at a local level.
- The 'Housing Association buying land and then putting up housing' method of affordable housing is an 'urban approach'. The number of houses required to achieve economies of scale makes this approach less likely in a rural context.

It was decided that, drawing on the evidence relating to the need for affordable housing in rural Scotland and on the evidence about 'good practice' approaches to securing it heard at the meeting, the Secretariat should draft a letter from the Cross Party Group co-convenors to be sent to the Housing Minister (Margaret Burgess MSP). Attendees at the meeting agreed that this was a good idea and that responsibility for sending the letter should be delegated to the co-convenors.

Action: SRUC Secretariat to draft a letter and circulate it to Group co-convenors, speakers and Derek Logie for comment.

4. AOB

- Alastair Cameron (Scottish Churches Housing Action) informed attendees about a Parliamentary Reception hosted by Kenneth Gibson MSP on 22nd January 2013 (6.30pm in the Scottish Parliament) to celebrate the inauguration of Whitebeam Homes. Please email Alastair at: whitebeam@churches-housing.org if you wish to attend.
- On behalf of Pat Snowdon (Forestry Commission Scotland) Jane Atterton informed attendees about an event in the Scottish Parliament on December 13th (5.30-7.30pm) entitled "Banking for Growth: Can the GIB propel Scotland to become a new economy

powerhouse?”. Further information can be obtained from Jane Atterton (jane.atterton@sruc.ac.uk) or Pat Snowdon (Pat.Snowdon@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).

- Derek Logie (Chief Executive, Rural Housing Service) noted that the Rural Housing Service Annual Conference will take place in Birnam Arts and Conference Centre on Friday February 22nd 2013. Speakers include Margaret Burgess MSP (Minister for Housing and Welfare) and Alison Elliot (Chair, Land Reform Review Group).

5. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Group will take place on Tuesday February 5th (in the Scottish Parliament from 5.45-7.30pm approx.) and will be on the topic of 'Rebalancing the supply chain'.