RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

AGENDA

17th Meeting, 2002 (Session 1)

Tuesday 25 June 2002

The Committee will meet at 1.30 pm in Committee Room 3.

1. Integrated Rural Development: The Committee will take evidence on its inquiry into integrated rural development from—
   Denise Walton (Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability)
   Jim Hume (Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability).

2. Integrated Rural Development: The Committee will take evidence on its inquiry into integrated rural development from—
   Ross Finnie MSP (Minister for Environment and Rural Development).

3. Rural Development Programme: The Committee will take evidence on proposed changes to the Scottish Rural Development Programme from—
   Ross Finnie MSP (Minister for Environment and Rural Development).

4. Integrated Rural Development: The Committee will consider a paper from Reporters regarding their visit to Colonsay.

5. Subordinate Legislation: The Committee will consider the following instruments under the negative procedure—
   The TSE (Scotland) Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/255)
   The Loch Caolisport Scallops Several Fishery (Scotland) Order 2002 (SSI 2002/272)
   The Plant Protection Products Amendment (No.2) (Scotland) Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/279).

Tracey Hawe
Acting Clerk to the Committee
The following papers are attached or are relevant to this meeting:

**Agenda item 1:**
Submission from Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability

**Agenda item 2:**
Submission from SEERAD

**Agenda item 3**
Consultation paper from SEERAD
Letter from Private Secretary, SEERAD to the Clerk
Letter from the Minister for Environment and Rural Development to the Convener
Press release from SEERAD re LFASS schemes

**Agenda item 4:**
Paper from the Reporters

**Agenda item 5:**
The TSE (Scotland) Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/255)
The Loch Caolisport Scallops Several Fishery (Scotland) Order 2002 (SSI 2002/272)
The Plant Protection Products Amendment (No.2) (Scotland) Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/279)

Extracts from Subordinate Legislation Committee’s 28th Report

Official Report of Subordinate Legislation Committee (TSE (Scotland) Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/255))
Introduction

In the very short time scale of only three years, a recent prediction on the number of economically viable farms in the UK suggests a fall to only 8000, fragmenting even further the servicing infrastructure and associated rural communities. Fewer farms, fewer jobs and larger scale farming contribute to the impoverishment of the environment, rural communities and also economic disadvantage.

Barriers to Change

Barriers to change need identifying, understanding and negotiating. Land use change is always a slow business, not least because husbandry cycles take time.

The principal barrier to change (but ultimately its principal driver) are EU policies and regulations. There are also other more fundamental barriers;

- **We do not yet have a vision of what we want in the countryside** not just as practitioners but also in Government, where there is deep uncertainty over what kind of market society we want. This is not just a national problem. At a recent meeting in Brussels where the future of the CAP was discussed, there was little consensus about the ecological priorities of farmland and no clear vision of the kind of agricultural landscapes for which we should be striving.

- **Integrated rural development, if it is to be sustainable needs muscles and minds to work together** at and beyond the farm gate as part of a mutually supportive ‘community’ movement. This is what happened in the middle-ages a period of great and innovative land use change in Britain for many of the same reasons as we are now having to consider; and a period of time considered to be the most balanced in terms of sustainable living. What we don’t have now is the network of skills and muscles and minds at a local level in our land-based communities which are growing increasingly fragmented and sparse. This is a cause for concern as this community is charged ultimately with implementing and sustaining the change that is called for. Even in Brussels our (UK), ability to draw-down agri-environment support is being seriously hampered not by regulation, but by the severe lack of person-power to complete projects and fill-in grant applications. There is a serious and increasing shortage of people let alone skills in rural areas to implement the desired sustainable changes.

- **Politically and economically the land-based community, its associated infrastructure, and representative organisations, all on whom change so depends, are on the back-foot.** It is difficult to countenance change when on the defensive. An inclusive attitude to all parts of the land-based community is essential in policy-making.

While these barriers need to be overcome, we also need to consider how we maximise the potential for sustainable and integrated rural development.
Rural Capital
It is argued that a proper understanding of the workings of a market oriented economy requires recognition of four ‘analytical categories’ of accumulated wealth;

- **Biophysical capital** – land and the environment in its widest sense (including, natural capital and the most appropriate category for rural capital)
- **Financial capital** – including appropriately valued industrial plant
- **Human capital** – including education, culture
- **Social capital** – personal interactions within communities and society

These categories of accumulated wealth are also defined as ‘livelihood assets’ which are the basis of ‘sustainable livelihoods’. This asset based approach makes one think wholistically of the processes which go to creating and determining livelihoods and economies. Discussions on change tend to be too confined and sectoral. They need to be broadened.

Rural Capital can be defined as the accumulated wealth of physical resources on-farms and land-holdings derived from the combined effect of natural processes and land management over time. It includes landscape elements and habitat features on the ‘land-holding scale’ eg farm buildings, rig and furrow fields, hedgerows, woodlands, ponds, quarries, ancient monuments, archaeological remains etc. Rural Capital has a regional and local distinctiveness arising ultimately from the relationship between the land and generations of individual farmers, their idiosyncracies, aspirations, families and traditions. It is very much the product of man working the land and the land itself. Generally speaking, the closer the relationship between local communities and their land – the greater the Rural Capital. These farmed landscapes rich in Rural Capital tend also to be the most diverse in terms of landscape, wildlife and culture.

These most environmentally diverse and sustainable European farming systems are associated with pastoralism. As in the Scottish uplands and upland fringes – these are often traditional family livestock farms, and the most labour intensive or people dependent.

How does the realisation of Rural Capital promote and sustain integrated rural development?

Rural Capital and Rural Development
The Scottish Borders is a predominantly upland region with some 51% in rough grazing, moorland and permanent pasture. Livestock production is a major agricultural activity. One of the most sparsely populated areas in Europe, it has a high number of personnel per farm holding (ie 2.28 as opposed to 1.66 for the Scottish average).

Primary research including a Rural Capital ‘audit’ commissioned by the Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability has identified some 200 Rural Capital ‘items’ (all of them either landscape elements or wildlife habitat features), in the Scottish Borders which are not involved in the production of food or forestry and on which some 90 different land based enterprises are, or could be, based with the potential of earning income. These land based enterprises include all the country sports, rural tourism, on-farm diversification and countryside maintenance (eg hedgerow planting, drystone dyking, pond construction etc). Please see

What is more this research, indicates that these enterprises or *countryside based activities* currently support some 4,250 individual jobs (1,230 FTEs) and generate direct annual expenditure of upto £41 million within the region. This is the realisation of Rural Capital into
‘The Countryside Management Industry’ (CMI). The CMI is clearly an economic entity in terms of measurable outputs ie expenditure and jobs.

This alternative rural or countryside management industry supports an all but hidden economy, which compares well with other land-based sectors in the Region;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Jobs</th>
<th>FTEs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Sector</td>
<td>£98 million</td>
<td>3,600</td>
<td>2,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forestry Sector</td>
<td>£24 million</td>
<td>6-700</td>
<td>470-540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The CMI</td>
<td>£41 mill</td>
<td>4250</td>
<td>1,230</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Such Rural Capital ‘audits’ need to be undertaken more widely and on a regional scale in Scotland to inform locally sensitive solutions to a more integrated and local approach to alternative landuse.

**Social Capital**

Rural Capital is nothing without people maximising it through networks and organisations. People are the link between Rural Capital and Social Capital; ie the imprint of past and current land management methods which contribute to the Rural Capital base and those who realise Rural Capital in making their living. Land management methods are a significant factor in giving landscapes their ‘sense of place’ and local distinctiveness.

The core idea of Social Capital is that social networks have value. It is the extent to which individuals are willing to co-operate with each other on the basis of interpersonal trust. This trusting, reciprocal, co-operation is the basis of civic virtue, volunteers and voluntary organisations. It is very evident in tightly knit rural communities. It is essential to realising sustainable alternative landuses.

Social Capital is fundamental to maintaining a vibrant democracy by allowing individuals through voluntary associations and ‘pressure groups’ to express their interests and demands on government and to protect themselves from abuses of power.

Political information flows through social networks. It also allows individuals to partake of the democratic process and engenders a greater understanding and acceptance of democracy through experience and the learning of social and civic skills. It is fundamental to enfranchisement and enablement. It does not necessarily require formal institutions to be effective. Friendship networks can be just as if not more potent than ideological commitment.

Social Capital is also seen as having an important role in economic performance;

- ‘Citizen trust’ reduces transaction costs in the market economy
- Trust helps to minimise the burdens of enforcement and policing
- It holds down the diseconomies of fraud and theft

It is apparent that Social Capital has at least as strong an influence on economic growth as Human Capital and education. It appears to have approximately the same influence on growth in under-developed countries as convergence or ‘catchup’; it is therefore a significant factor in participatory rural development, which is pivotal to the implementation of integrated rural development.

The antithesis of Social Capital is Social Exclusion. Symptoms of low Social Capital are low levels of mutual trust, high rates of serious and violent crime, electoral apathy and low voter turnout.
Threats to Social and Rural Capital (and to Integrated Rural Development)

Isolation and exclusion are the most malignant threats to the realisation of both Social and Rural Capital and to the realisation of sustainable alternative landuses and rural development. Isolation and exclusion weaken community networks making it more physically difficult to communicate, collaborate and co-operate. They threaten the realisation of sustainable alternative land-uses.

There are other linked threats; Using the Scottish Borders as an example (and this will be the same for many other parts of rural Scotland), the area’s rurality has a major impact on the cost of service delivery, inward investment potential, infrastructure provision with implications for the continued sustainability of local communities. It also results in higher costs of public transport because of longer journeys, and higher costs of private transport because of the relatively high fuel prices and greater need for the car. The services provided in settlements are threatened by the increasing centralisation of both public and private services, the continuing leakage of consumer spending to major urban centres outside the Scottish Borders, the increasing threshold levels for the provision of viable services, and the impact of E-commerce in drawing local business away through mail-order.

The E-phenomenon has other negative implications; From a Social Capital perspective the high speed, low cost and broad scope of mobilisation possible on the internet can be an advantage to political organisations. However it is also a ‘shortcut to civic expression’ which produces a lot of ‘noise’ possibly at the expense of deliberation and ‘exacerbates the imbalance between talking and listening that is a prominent feature of contemporary civic disengagement’. There is also the phenomenon of the ‘digital divide’ which refers to the social inequality of access to cyberspace. Rural communities are less ‘connected’ than urban communities.

Threats to Rural Capital ironically include agri-environment support. In upland situations where farming is barely viable, agri-environment incentives are widely adopted. They threaten the realisation of unique local Rural Capital by super-imposing a standard set of management regulations upon existing local diversity. For example the Argyll Islands ESA prescriptions aimed at restoring the number of Corncrakes (Crex crex) have changed the management of hay and silage production by restricting the first cut of grass to the first week of August. Prior to this there existed a patchwork of mown grass-fields and after-math grazing from June to the end of August. It is now all for silage because the window of opportunity against the variable weather conditions has been drastically reduced. This has resulted in mono-culture of heavily fertilised silage fields followed by a mono-culture of after-math grazing and (surprise surprise) no Corncrakes. Of more concern is the impact this is having on another endangered bird species. Families of Choughs (Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax) fledge in early June and rely on mown grass aftermaths for a short period during the summer which no longer exist under the silage regime.

This is not a call to end agri-environment support but one for locally sensitive solutions to landuse and community issues. These are most effectively formulated and developed on the back of rural capital audits.

Integrated Rural Development and Employment

What are the implications of achieving a more sustainable, integrated rural development through the realisation of Rural Capital and Social Capital on rural employment.

What characterises employment in Scotland is recognisable at the local rural level and certainly in the Scottish Borders;

- Hard to keep a job
- Hard to develop a career
• Huge skills gaps
• Decline in skilled manual labour
• Most new jobs are in the service sectors
• Only 10% of the British work force do a 40-hour week
• Most people prefer not to work
• Isolation from the labour market

Typical of all other rural areas in Britain while unemployment has remained relatively low in the Scottish Borders during the period 1991-2002, there has been a continuing out-migration of young people in the 15 to 29 age category. In December 1997, The Centre for Educational Sociology, University of Edinburgh, published an analysis of migration and young people in the Scottish Borders. This found that the Scottish Borders had the “highest rate of loss of young people in Scotland, after the Highlands and Islands areas”.

This imbalance in population has very serious implications for land management and the realisation of Rural and Social capital both of which require continuity. Research by the Rowntree Foundation published in 2000, and which used a case study in the Scottish Borders, has provided further evidence of the difficulties faced by young people (who do not leave to go into higher education etc) in accessing employment, transport and affordable housing. There is also a marked ageing of the population in the Scottish Borders. This is evidenced by the high proportion of the population over pensionable age. The Scottish Borders has high proportions of over 65s and over 75s.

A skilled and continuing work force is essential to sustaining alternative and integrated rural development. What is the solution to this unpromising outlook? Here are a few suggestions:

• **Attitudes to employment;**
  Broadening ‘work’ to include ‘constructive’ activities and not just ‘full time employment’. Employment in rural communities is typified by the high degree of part-time or seasonal work. This needs to be accommodated in policy.

• **Accessing the labour market;**
  In the Scottish Borders a labour exchange has recently been set up to share skilled manual labour between farms and other businesses eg the construction industry. Rural labour exchanges need to be expanded and supported throughout Scotland. Asylum seekers, many of whom are from land based communities, could be constructively included into the local labour force through rural labour exchanges to make-up the short fall.

• **Education;**
  Educational processes need to encourage a multi-skilled, flexible and motivated work force in the countryside

**The Countryside Management Industry and Integrated Rural Development**

The CMI has been identified in the Scottish Borders. It exists in every other Region of Scotland. As demonstrated in the Borders, it is currently a sustainable contributor towards the improvement of rural livelihoods and the strengthening of both rural communities and landscapes. It simultaneously and sustainably utilises and contributes to both Rural and Social Capital

It has considerable potential if constructively and inclusively harnessed for stimulating integrated rural development in Scotland as a whole. Indeed it could be argued that truly
integrated and sustainable rural development is not achievable without harnessing the CMI on
a Regional scale.

Recommendations for Growing the Countryside Management Industry

Firstly, the need to gain recognition of this, currently highly fragmented, industry as an
important component of the Scottish rural economy.

Secondly, the contributions of countryside-based recreation and sports activities need to be
both recognised and reflected respectively in the reinforcement and development of
existing/appropriate institutional structures, training facilities and financial
incentives.

Thirdly, the development of programmes designed to achieve sustainable diversification
throughout the rural economy needs to be one of the main cornerstones of a viable
and strong CMI.

Finally, all of the main public, private and voluntary sector stakeholders need to be consulted
in undertaking a feasibility study into development of possible CMI structures,
facilities, incentives and diversification programmes. In carrying forward the
preferred institutional arrangements, the full spectrum of stakeholders needs to be
represented. The latter is required in the interests of ensuring that the CMI is
effectively managed. This requires that the existing, highly fragmented CMI
structure is replaced by one that is both fully inclusive and well co-ordinated.

An industry, which in the Scottish Borders is already sustaining annual direct expenditure and
employment of \textbf{upto £41 million and 1,230 FTEs}, deserves no less than the implementation
of these recommendations.

The components of the Countryside Management Industry and the organisations, upon which
an integrating council or standing body would draw, require to be identified for each Scottish
Region to implement locally sensitive solutions based on local knowledge or audits.
Consideration also needs to be given to both the establishment and monitoring of
performance standards for sustainable, integrated rural development.
RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT

WRITTEN EVIDENCE

At the Committee’s meeting on 12 February 2002, it was agreed that the Scottish Executive should be invited, at this stage, to submit written evidence to the Committee’s inquiry. This request was subsequently relayed to my office by the Acting Clerk.

I am conscious that the Committee is at the early stages of this inquiry, and is undertaking a series of visits to rural areas to gather evidence. The Committee has set a very ambitious and wide-ranging remit for this inquiry, and I would think it likely, as the inquiry progresses, that some particular themes and issues will begin to emerge, and may shape the Committee’s final report. The evidence which I am providing at this stage is therefore of a fairly general nature, but I would be happy to supplement this at a later stage, if there are particular issues on which the Committee would welcome the Executive’s input. I would also be willing to pick up on any emerging issues when I come to give oral evidence later in the inquiry.

Executive’s Approach to Rural Development

The Executive approach to rural development is an integrated one, with structures in place to encourage policy development across Ministerial portfolios, and policies, programmes and strategies which deal with various aspects of rural development in a holistic manner. My own appointment as Minister with responsibility for Rural Development gave an early signal of the priority which the Executive attaches to rural development. I am supported in my role by the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Rural Development, which oversees progress in promoting rural development across the Executive to ensure that policy developments take account of rural circumstances. The membership
of this Committee has recently been reviewed, and now includes the Minister for Finance and Public Services, the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, the Minister for Social Justice, the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development and the Deputy Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport. In addition, the Scottish National Rural Partnership, with a membership covering the main government and non-government agencies involved in rural development, has a role in advising Ministers on the broad spectrum of rural issues.

There are numerous examples of our integrated approach to rural development, and the following list draws attention to some of them:

- The **Agriculture Strategy** was developed in conjunction with a Steering Group, which consisted of members drawn from across the rural and agricultural spectrum - ranging from farming to retailing and the financial sector to environmental groups. The Agriculture Strategy Implementation Group (ASIG), formed to take the Strategy forward, has a similar range of members. The Strategy has three linked components - economic, social and environmental – and aims to move the agriculture industry forward, in the context of broader rural development:. The 54 Actions within the Strategy require participation from a wide range of interests both across the Executive, its agencies and outside organisations and the ASIG is a mechanism for helping the industry and related organisations to work together to achieve common objectives.

- The **EC Rural Development Regulation** facilitates a range of interventions in the rural economy, principally to help farmers build a financially and environmentally sustainable future. Member States were required to prepare Rural Development Plans describing how they would use EC co-financing to implement rural development measures. In Scotland, our Rural Development Plan was prepared by a plan team chaired by my officials but including representatives from key interests - such as local authorities, Scottish Enterprise, SEPA, the Forestry Commission, Scottish Natural Heritage, the farming unions, and various NGOS such as the Scottish Wildlife Trust. This team was supported by separate teams looking at arrangements in the Highlands and Islands and Lowland Scotland. This approach worked well and ensured that the views and expertise of a wide range of interests could be drawn upon. The very limited amount of EC co-financing available to the Scottish Rural Development Plan – only €273m from 2000-2007 – led to the decision that the plan should concentrate on a limited range of measures, in particular agri-environment, forestry, and support for agriculture in Less Favoured Areas. Other measures facilitated by the Rural Development Regulation have been paid for from national funding outside the Objective 1 area. These include the Processing and Marketing Scheme and the Farm Business Development Scheme, also developed in conjunction with the major stakeholders.

EC assistance for Rural Development Regulation measures has also been channelled through the Highlands and Islands Special Transitional Programme. We are pleased with the integrated way that we have been able to take forward schemes that form part of the Highlands and Islands Special Transitional Programme. New schemes in this area have been designed, delivered and monitored as part of the wider partnership programme. These include the Agricultural Business Development Scheme and the Crofting Communities Development Scheme.

We have continued that partnership approach in delivering specific schemes. For example, our agricultural development and diversification schemes (the Agricultural Business Development Scheme and the Farm Business Development Scheme) are operated in conjunction with the relevant external stakeholders. Applications for diversification grants under those schemes are assessed by locally based project assessment committees. This ensures that projects are in line with local strategies, can meet local priorities, and are assessed with local expertise. Farming industry representatives are an integral part of these committees and, although they elect not to comment on individual cases, they play a significant and welcome part in all policy discussions.
- The **Scottish Forestry Strategy**, published in November 2000, sets out (in five strategic directions) 23 priorities for action in working towards a vision that, ‘Scotland will be a land of fine trees, woods and forests which strengthen the economy, which enrich the natural environment and which people enjoy and value…’. From the outset of the process, integration was written in as a core principle (the overarching one is sustainability) and it was recognised that ‘forestry must fit in well with other rural activities in Scotland, such as agriculture, conservation, deer management, fishing, recreation and tourism’. The delivery of the strategy is in the hands of many stakeholders, the Forestry Commission and departments of the Executive, industry, public agencies, the voluntary sector, and communities, and each priority has a named champion. By cross referencing the priorities into the strategies, corporate plans, and actions of other organisations, we are able to maximise the contribution from sustainable multi-benefit forestry, for Scotland. We have been working through many different networks and forums, encouraging shared solution, e.g. through the work of the Timber Transport forum, the Forestry for People panel, and the Forest Industries Development Cluster. We are setting up the Scottish Forestry Forum to bring the different stakeholders together: government, industry, environmental and social interests to keep the delivery of the strategy under review, and (in time) to prepare for the next strategy.

- Following from the recommendations of the Land Reform Policy Group, the Executive funded a **study to investigate the scope for streamlining and integrating different schemes** supporting land uses which have substantially similar objectives. The conclusion of this study was that there is relatively little duplication between schemes in the sense of having more than one scheme serving exactly the same objective. The full report of this study, by Cardiff University Department of City and Regional Planning, was published in 2001.

- On the **economic development** front, the Executive stated in *Smart, Successful Scotland* that rural development is a priority for the Enterprise Networks. Both Scottish Enterprise and Highland and Islands Enterprise and their networks of local enterprise companies are already engaged in rural development, and are taking a broad approach to facilitating economic development in these areas. Scottish Enterprise has a Rural Policy Group with a role in ensuring that Scottish Enterprise anticipates and develops responses to rural issues, in the context of its overall Network Strategy. Over the coming year, the Group will be focussing on building a greater understanding of challenges facing rural Scotland, and ensuring that Scottish Enterprise Network planning and funding processes can take account of these challenges. In the Highlands and Islands, the actions of the Highlands and Islands Enterprise Network have contributed towards a steady increase in the area’s population - 13 per cent - in recent years, with an accompanying 47 per cent increase in jobs. This means more people are living and working in the Highlands and Islands – even in the most remote parts – and they are now benefiting from higher incomes in real terms.

In addition to these examples, there are numerous other ways in which we ensure that an integrated approach is taken to rural development, ranging from the structures I have already described, through specific policies and programmes, down to the operation of our NDPBs and agencies. For example, Community Planning and Local Economic Forums are mechanisms for bringing together local partners to promote joined-up working and an integrated approach to local development, while Initiative at the Edge and Local Rural Partnerships are promoting a similar integrated approach to rural development at a more local level.

I hope that this evidence demonstrates that the Executive remained firmly committed to rural development. I would be happy to discuss this with the Committee in more detail as your inquiry.
progresses. However, in the meantime, if the Committee would like any further information or clarification on anything mentioned in this letter, I would be happy to respond.

ROSS FINNIE
INTRODUCTION

On 26 March 2002, the Committee agreed to send reporters to Colonsay as part of its inquiry into Integrated Rural Development.

Clerks subsequently arranged the fact-finding visit, in conjunction with the Argyll and Bute Council. The purpose of the visit was to hear at first hand the problems faced by remote island communities. In this respect, reporters note the logistical problems involved in travelling to Colonsay; with only 3 ferries per week (in the summertime) and only one of these being a day return (on Wednesdays).

The Reporters therefore visited Colonsay on Wednesday 22 May. The ferry departed from Kennacraig at 8.15am, stopping at Islay before arriving on Colonsay at 11.50am. The ferry returned at 6.00pm, arriving at Kennacraig at 9.45pm.

Attending the visit were:—

Alex Fergusson, Convener
Jamie McGrigor
Rhoda Grant
John Munro
Jake Thomas, Assistant Clerk to the Committee, accompanied the Members.

VISIT SUMMARY

On arrival, the Committee received a tour of the island from Kevin Byrne, who acts as Piermaster and school bus driver. He also holds numerous other jobs on the island and it soon became apparent that many of the islanders have several jobs in order to earn a living.

The reporters visited Colonsay House and met Alex Howard, the Laird who owns the island. They then visited the local school, where there are 11 pupils and stopped at the Publishing house on the island run by Georgina Hobhouse. Following this, the reporters met in the hall where all island residents had been invited to meet with them over lunch to express their views on the problems particular to Colonsay. Around 20 people attended. Visits to the post office and shop and the café, May’s Pantry, were also undertaken, with a final stop at the hotel before departing back to the mainland.

The reporters wish to note their appreciation of the efforts made by Deirdre Forsyth in facilitating the fact finding visit and thank the people of Colonsay for their warm welcome.
Issues

Transport
Unquestionably the main barrier to integrated rural development was seen as the lack of transport to and from Colonsay. Residents believe that the island is the least supported of all of the Western Isles in terms of the ferry service (a view supported by the Master of the Caledonian MacBrayne ferry). People cannot arrive or leave the island easily; for example, a hospital visit or an appointment with a bank manager in Oban requires a 3 day round trip.

Locals are able to purchase a book of tickets for the ferry, but the discount is minimal. Residents suggested that a smaller, passenger-only ferry, dedicated to Colonsay, should work alongside the current service, which could be more frequent (to Oban). Residents wanted to see any such service substantially subsidised for residents of Colonsay.

The local bus service is unsubsidised, and residents want to explore funding under the rural transport fund. Also, they note that the passenger service vehicle test has to be carried out on the mainland (at a cost of £300, not including the service) which can prove prohibitive.

This also means that children attending secondary school have to stay in Oban for the week, returning only at weekends. In the winter, they are away for 6 weeks staying in a hostel. Many parents find this unacceptable and people have left the island as their children approach secondary school age.

Freight
Freight was the second major concern to islanders. The cost of an articulated lorry undertaking a return trip from the mainland is £700. This cost is passed on in the cost of goods, and services on the island. For example, the cost of transporting one bag of shopping is £6, which can prove prohibitive.

Approximately £5000 can be added onto the cost of building a house in freight charges alone. Residents suggested that there could be a concession akin to the existing “straw and animals concession” in order to help reduce costs.

Housing
The lack of suitable housing was another important issue raised. Although some new houses had been built, these were often used as holiday homes for tourists, which generate income for the Laird. Seven of the better quality farmhouses are now being used as holiday homes, and these generate greater revenue than rent from island residents. Locals were concerned about the poor quality of the housing that they live in, and the lack of available housing for them to move into.

The Council is looking at taking long leases on estate houses to bring them up to standard with a view to renting them to locals. It is also looking at ways of creating new crofts, which can offer access to land, and housing for new tenants, and it is understood that the Laird is assisting in this.
The cost of building a house is very high (freight) and the cost of land itself (up to £20,000 for a plot) was seen as another obstacle to this process.

**Services/Communications**

Residents were concerned by a lack of access to services on the island – from banking to repairing vehicles (which involves an expensive trip even before any servicing is carried out). The island is reliant on the Caledonian MacBrayne ferry service, and if there is bad weather, this exacerbates the problems as ferries can be cancelled. There have also been issues with delivering supermarket orders to the ferry.

Even telecommunication problems cannot always be resolved quickly, as there are no BT staff on the island and therefore there are delays in repairs to the system. Any emergency services take time, as everything is dependent on the ferry service, however islanders still pay for these services, (for example the cost of Helpcall is £3 per week).