

Southern Upland NEWS

Newsletter of the Southern Uplands Partnership

Seventh Edition: Autumn/Winter 2001

CONFERENCE REPORT

THERE WERE SOME STARK facts for delegates from across the region attending the recent Southern Uplands Partnership conference at the Crichton Campus of Glasgow University.

"Upland farms are having to survive on an income of £300 this year", reported Jim Walker, NFUS president, and without a major shift in Government policy upland farming was not going to survive. He advised farmers that they too had to change. They had to get better at working together and at adding value. The world in which farms had to survive was changing too, with increasing demand for quality, higher specification, more competition and changing support mechanisms. South Scotland was likely to be additionally hit by changes to the LFA support scheme. He felt there was a role for the SUP to assist the change process and identify the shared ground.

There were also positive messages coming out of the conference. Henry Birch, Factor of Douglas and Angus Estates in South Lanarkshire, is developing a number of new initiatives on the estate, all designed to improve the living standards of families living and working there. "The main resource we have is the landscape and the natural heritage it supports and we need to find ways of adding real value to this resource" he said.

Chair of FWAG Scotland Michael Williams emphasised the opportunities that were out there if people were willing to think in new ways and work to add value to their existing resources - such as woods, buildings, habitats, existing small enterprises and the wide range of valuable skills that were often under-used.

Alex Fergusson MSP paid tribute to the way that farmers and the authorities had dealt with the FMD crisis and advised those who had been affected to take the opportunity to think hard before going back to pre-FMD practices. He suggested



that the Forward Strategy for Agriculture was valuable as a medium term guide but what was needed was a new approach now. He considered that the approach being taken by the forestry sector offered a useful guide to a way forward.

Jan Polley of SEERAD explained how the Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture set out a number of actions which, if implemented locally, would bring about lasting change in rural situations. Land Management Contracts would be a major part of this strategy, but these were still being developed and would not be available for a few years yet. In the meantime, local initiatives offered ways of addressing local needs since every area was different and should not be treated as if they were the same. She also emphasised that support systems were made available to assist change- not to maintain uneconomic businesses. Rural businesses had to be viable in their own-right.

Two projects from England were described. John Welbank of the Bowland Initiative explained their approach - a partnership project offering a one-stop-shop approach to rural business development. Ken Parker described an innovative project in the Peak District National Park where work was going on to see how farms might cope with enhanced environmental and business development grants and the total removal of production based subsidy. He also described a pilot Integrated Rural Development project carried out in the eighties which had been very successful in delivering added value (see below).

A number of workshop sessions provided an opportunity to address key issues in the Southern Uplands and discuss new ways of trying to tackle these. A working group is now being formed to take this forward and the proceedings of the conference will be published shortly.

CONVENORS COMMENT

"Doing nothing is not an option, but continuing as we were is not the way" - just one of the many perceptive and relevant comments made by speakers and delegates at the recent SUP Conference on Integrated Rural Development.

To quote:- "...we're running out of time..."; "...subsidies have undermined enterprise..."; "...entrepreneurs and innovators are stifled by bureaucracy..."; "...tackle planning in relation to the countryside..."; "...do not design projects to meet funding, encourage grassroots ownership and development of ideas - funds will follow...".

So What next? The SUP has convened a small working group to explore a range of ideas to inject

new life, new blood, new money into the rural economy.

The message from delegates was a clear call for practical solutions tailored to local needs in partnerships with agencies and Government but driven locally.

If you think you could contribute to this discussion please contact us by telephone, fax, email or letter.

Meanwhile watch this space for developments.

Barbara Kelly, Convenor



Two Villages Two Valleys Project

This project took place in the Peak District National park from 1981 to 1988. It focussed on two villages and two valleys chosen to represent the range of conditions found across the Park. The aim was put in place a programme of action that would support the local individuality of the areas, involve the local communities in considering their future and acting on their plans and to encourage actions that created benefits for social, economic and environmental interests simultaneously. The project resulted in the development of a trial Alternative Grant system which was used by 105 different recipients - a total injection of public funds amounting to over £500,000. Almost all the work was carried out by local people. 60 new full time equivalent (FTE) jobs were created and 24 different businesses used project grants. 43 community schemes were assisted and over half the eligible farms chose to participate. A report on the project is available from the National Park Authority and can be also be seen or borrowed from the SUP office.

A forum entitled 'Beyond Foot and Mouth - Ways Forward for the Scottish Economy' was recently hosted by the Edinburgh Centre for Rural Research. A wide range of organisations and individuals contributed to the forum, giving their own perspectives on the impact of Foot and Mouth disease; these included the British Geological Survey, whose scientists had provided advice on appropriate areas for mass burial sites, SEPA, who advised on pollution threats and control throughout the outbreak, the Royal School of Veterinary Studies and SAC, whose field staff were involved in identification of the disease, removal of infected animals and checking that farms were clear of infection, the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, who became involved in animal welfare issues arising from the outbreak, and, of course, farmers and landowners who had been directly affected by the outbreak.

Presentations were made by the livestock, tourism and food industries and opportunities for diversification were discussed. The key messages that came through from speaker after speaker, from whatever sector they represented, were the need for integration, marketing, quality products, diversification and to learn lessons. These themes will not be unfamiliar to those who attended the Partnership's own conference in October. The underlying message was that there is only a narrow window available to seize the opportunity for change and that this window is closing all the time as farmers start to restock - action is needed now from politicians, policy makers and practitioners if this opportunity is not to be missed.

SUP PROJECT NEWS

Red Squirrels in South Scotland - a new threat?

The red squirrels of South Scotland are now experiencing their second year of support from Robin and Sarah - the intrepid Conservation Officers. There has been good and bad news recently for the species. It seems last year was a good breeding year with many reports of increased numbers and sightings of ever-so-cute squirrel kittens. However on the down side, the first record of parapox virus in Scotland has been recorded from a grey squirrel in the Borders. The project has put in place a widespread screening programme for the disease and it is worrying that it has already been found. This disease is fatal to reds, and if it is being spread by greys, it could pose a serious new threat to the species. Sarah and Robin are always keen to hear about sightings of squirrels of either



species, especially where reds are regularly seen. There is also an ongoing need for fresh bodies to allow monitoring for parapox virus, so if you happen upon a dead squirrel please give them a call. Robin is on 01387 860442
Sarah is on 01750 723446

TWEED TRAILS



Tweed Trails – Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Paths for All Partnership and SNH as part of the Tweed Rivers Heritage Project phase 2, Vyv Wood-Gee has been on contract working with a range of partners to develop detailed proposals for multi-use routes in the Borders and links to similar routes in England, Dumfries and the Lothians. Solway Heritage have developed similar proposals centred around Ae and Annandale. A submission for European funding has been made under the SUP banner, the outcome of this will be known by January. There is increasing interest in the development of a network of horse-riding routes throughout the region so that local riders and visitors can enjoy our wonderful countryside. If this market can be developed, there will be opportunities for upland farms and communities to offer support-services such as bed and breakfast and overnight stabling and thus attract new income. Scottish Borders Tourist Board have offered administrative support to the project for which we are most grateful.

Biodiversity on the Edge

A revised bid for HLF funding was submitted at the beginning of October and we are hopeful that we may soon get support for the creation of three posts in the Uplands working to promote key habitats and species such as the black grouse. The relatively dry spring last year has had a positive effect on grouse and partridge with many shoots reporting their best seasons for many years. However black grouse numbers are still very low and will only recover if efforts are put into improving habitat.

Interestingly, the Heather Trust is advising managers of well stocked moors which have been un-shot or under-shot this year (because of FMD) to encourage keepers to “catch, kill and market every bird they can lay hands on” to reduce red grouse numbers and so avoid build-up of disease which will otherwise reduce next years’ numbers.

SSERC?

South of Scotland Nature?

Environmental Information for All?

While this project still lacks a really good name, it is a really good concept and development is ongoing. The idea is to establish a centre in each of Borders and Dumfries & Galloway where environmental data is gathered, collated, verified and stored. From these centres, anyone would be able to access the information (although sensitive information would be restricted). This would be run as a business in that data would be provided to the commercial sector for a fee, and data would be managed on behalf of agencies such as SNH and SEPA. It would also be a public service, giving communities access to information about their local environments. There would be strong links to educational institutions and the public will be encouraged to become part of an environmental monitoring network, reporting sightings of species and learning about habitats, geology, meteorology etc.

Solway Heritage produced a report on the feasibility of the project earlier in the year and since then details of the necessary IT requirements and a project brief have been produced. It is hoped to hold a seminar before Christmas to sell the idea to key partners before making a bid for funding early in 2002. We gratefully acknowledge ongoing financial support from SEPA, Scottish Borders Council, SNH and D&GC for development work with this project.

Competition

A years free membership to the person who comes up with a really good name for an Environmental Resource Centre. Entries to the SUP Office by the end of January 2002 please.

SMALL WOODS

A working group with representatives of the Enterprise Companies, Forestry Commission, Borders Forest Trust, Local Authorities, the private sector and SNH has met a number of times recently to look at establishing a project to improve the advice available to owners of small woodlands. A business plan is now being written and this will be followed by a bid for funding - probably early next year.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION TRAINING

Sponsored by the Rural Challenge Fund, Scottish Enterprise Dumfries & Galloway, SNH and Buccleuch Estates, the SUP recently organised a training weekend on community consultation techniques. This took place at Whithaugh Park in Newcastleton and was run by the staff of the Borders Rural Resource Centre project. Those attending the course had a wide range of experience, from community development workers, community council members and environmental project staff. One of the aims of the project was to see whether well-tried consultation techniques could be applied to land-use issues. The consensus was that this was possible, but that community concerns tended to be more issue-specific and that care had to be taken in approaching communities with the aim of "getting something from them" rather than helping them determine their own priorities and planning their own courses of action. Generally the course was very well received and everyone gained from the weekend.



Photo courtesy of A. McCormick Collection

Cultural Heritage of the Uplands

ALYNE JONES,

A LOCAL CULTURAL HISTORIAN WRITES:

"Over the past 20 years while collecting and recording the Cultural History of Southern Scotland, I am constantly reminded of the intimate knowledge which people had of their environment and the wisdom and knowledge carried down through the generations.

This information, which has been so generously given, encompasses all aspects of life, from food and weather lore to crafts and pastimes.

I have many accounts from hill shepherds who knew the ground their flocks grazed on intimately. Many knew the hills long before the blanket sitka spruce plantations and recalled the places where slow-worms, frogs and toads thrived and abundant supplies of blaeberrries could be found for the table.

I have also studied the lore of travellers and gipsies and have met and worked with a number of them, recording their songs and stories. Walking in the woods with a traveller and talking about the way trees would yield wood for different purposes according to the season, I realised the extent of the knowledge traditional travellers had of their environment. Where they made their camps was also where they made the

wooden flowers, cut from the elder or "bourtree" to sell at fairs and around the doors. They coppiced woodland, cut willow in such a way that it yielded a good harvest for basket making. They gathered heather and birch for besoms and made creels for the fishermen.

The balance of agriculture and nature with the inevitable problem of vermin control was assisted by the snaring rabbits which were then traded for their meat and pelts.

Modern technology has made it possible to digitise this Indigenous Knowledge Archive and to make it available electronically. A sample from the Archive can be seen by visiting Scran's Web site at www.scran.ac.uk

Consultations can be arranged on any aspect of this work which will assist eco tourism projects concerning landscape, landuse, cultural history and folklore of Southern Scotland.

To enable wider access to this information from my archive I have published 2 books which are available from

The Galloway Tryst, PO Box 7556, Dumfries, DG2 9YA, or email: gallowaytryst@yahoo.co.uk, tel. 07801 669912".

BUSINESS PLAN

As you may gather, the Partnership is involved in an increasing number of projects and initiatives and our core resources are now stretched to breaking point. We hope to approach Europe for further core support through Objective 2 funds early next year and to facilitate this a business plan is being produced. We hope this will be completed shortly and if you would like a copy please let us know.

Soapbox

Cllr John Elliot considers our response to the siting of windfarms.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLIERS are required to source 5% from renewable energy production by 2003 and 10% by 2010. Energy developers are looking around Britain to see where this can be achieved most economically. Wind power is currently the cheapest form of renewable energy, and the place for a wind farm is where there is plenty of wind all year round, but not too many wind farms already. The Southern Uplands are just such a place, although some will argue we already have too many wind power "industrial sites". It is not surprising then to discover that there are a number of new proposals for wind farms being considered in the Scottish Borders and Dumfries & Galloway. There is no need here to go into the pros and cons of these applications - each of which involves the production of a comprehensive Environmental Statement - since each will be considered on its merits. However there are issues which should be aired more widely.

Although there are local authority "strategies" for wind farm developments, these tend to identify areas where such developments are preferred or areas where existing sensitivities preclude them. It is left to the developers to decide which sites to choose. There is of course a danger that an application for a site that can only take say 8 turbines could, if approved, prevent the development of a nearby site which might accommodate 28 turbines. This is because wind farms have a cumulative effect on the landscape - one in a landscape might be tolerable whereas two would be less acceptable and three could be too much. The possibility of future schemes is therefore determined by the first few that get approved. While this makes sense in terms of minimising the impacts on the landscape, it makes no sense in terms of maximising the generation of renewable electricity in a given area, or in terms of maximising local economic benefit.

How can we maximise the benefit to the local economy of such developments? At present a

landowner who agrees to have the wind turbines on his or her land gets rent and possibly another payment related to profit. The community - those who have to get used to the wind turbines in their midst - are often offered a support fund. This can be used to plant trees in key locations to screen the turbines from sensitive sites, to improve village halls, or for other community facilities or environmental improvements. While this is admirable the benefit to the local community is insignificant in relation to the benefit to the developer and to the electricity company.

There are alternative models. A developer in mainland Europe has agreed to provide the local community with a limited amount of free power on a metered basis. When the community uses more power than the agreed limit a red light shows in each house and stimulates the residents to try to reduce consumption. Once the usage is less than the agreed limit the light changes back to green and charging stops. Thus there is a real incentive for everyone in the community both to accept the wind farm and to reduce electricity consumption which is what we should all be trying to do.

In the South of Scotland we are currently completely reactive to the demands of the developers. They decide on the site, they approach the landowner and the local authority, and they decide on the funds that may be available for the local community. Could we not be a little more proactive? Why cannot landowners work with the local community and together review the local area and decide where it might be acceptable to have a wind farm? Once this is agreed wind energy developers could be invited to bid for the site, bidding both to the landowner and to the community. This would reduce conflict over planning applications and increase the benefit to the landowner and to the local community from a wind farm development.

Snippets

Shame . . .

A number of birds of prey have been found poisoned in the Southern Uplands recently with cases near Castle Douglas and Stow reported in the press last week. This behaviour has been condemned by everyone including the Scottish Landowners, SNH, the RSPB and the Police. It should be condemned by all those with an interest in sustainable land-use. Such behaviour is not only illegal but also highly irresponsible in that children and pets could easily be harmed and it also very short-sighted. The potential economic value of our natural heritage, and our rare bird species in particular, is just starting to be recognised. In Wales, "Red Kite Country" is a major attraction and brings measurable benefits to the local economy. Funds have recently been earmarked to develop a number of nature based tourism initiatives which could bring real economic benefits to this area. At a time when wildlife watching is becoming as popular as gardening and cooking, we need to be "selling" the region as a place where wildlife is respected and where there is a good chance that it can be seen, live, by visitors. We urge those who are carrying out these illegal activities to think again for the benefit of everyone.



Rural Partnerships in D&G

Four new partnerships are being established in the former districts of D&G. We hope to be able to play a role in at least two of the four as they become established in the next few months.

Solway Recycling is now offering a collection service for used, baled feed bags, nylon nets and pallet covers - targeting fish farms in particular. Contact them for further information Tel 01387 730666 www.solwayrecycling.co.uk

Funding News

Bids have been submitted for Leader+ funds to come to both D&G and Borders. Both Local Action Groups hope to be awarded funds to support projects that deliver added value to natural and cultural resources. The outcome of the bids is due to be announced in December and all being well there will then be funds available to support innovative projects across the region.

Local Funds to help communities with local action

The **Scottish Borders Community Support Fund** is now open for applications from constituted community-based projects. Up to 90% funding can be provided to a maximum of £5,000 or 100% grants to £500. Information is available from the Rural Resource Centre, Tweed Horizons, Newtown St Boswells, Melrose TD6 0SG. Tel. 01835 824125.

In D&G the **Community Fund** is available to community groups for projects between £1000 and £25,000. Contact Darren J Burns, Fund Coordinator, Dumfries & Galloway Community Fund, c/o Community Resources, 118 English Street, Dumfries DG1 2DE. Tel. 01387 260070.

Fresh Futures. Part of the New Opportunities Fund, this fund scheme is now available for community projects which seek to improve access to green spaces or to promote sustainable practices such as energy efficiency, sustainable travel or waste minimisation. The fund aims to contribute 30% towards a total project cost of between £3,000 and £50,000. Visit the website at www.nof.org.uk

A LOCAL GREEN LABELLING SCHEME?

The SUP was established to promote sustainable land-use with the aim of keeping people living and working in the Southern Uplands of Scotland. As part of this it has been seeking ways of adding value to existing products produced in the Southern Uplands.

The prime assets we have in the Southern Uplands are the high quality landscape, the cultural and the natural heritage. At present, there is no "badge" or "label" available to mark these products which come from or are associated with those "green" businesses in the Uplands which care for and work to enhance these assets. These include farms, tourism-based and other small businesses, community enterprises, etc.

National guidelines are being developed to address the need to encourage good practice through recognising "good" businesses and, through national accreditation of some sort, allowing them to gain competitive advantage and an increased market share for their products. This might be through "kite-marking" products or business activities and promoting the meaning of the mark widely. Such a national scheme is some way off and will need to be trialled before it can be widely applied.

There is some private sector interest in green labelling and this offers scope for developing a scheme around some core businesses. We believe that we can get a local scheme started in the south of Scotland in the near future which might serve as a precursor to this national scheme. Clearly some sort of standard needs to be agreed at the outset, and only those businesses that meet this minimum standard would be eligible to join. It is envisaged that over time the qualifying threshold would be steadily raised – so as to push standards and maintain the credibility of the scheme. Hopefully there will be further news on this next time.

THE SMALL PRINT

May we remind members that subscriptions run from January to December each year. Ideally we would like you to pay by standing order since this saves both you and ourselves the hassle of remembering to renew.

During the FMD disaster we offered farmers a reduced membership rate of £5 which would run through to the end of 2002. This offer closes at the end of December 2001 so if you wish to take advantage please send in your subscription soon.

At the last AGM it was agreed that we should offer a new category of individual life membership for £100. This would certainly reduce administration and might make your loved-one the perfect Christmas present . . .

Call the office if you require an application form.

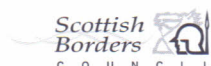
NEW ADDRESS

SUP The Partnership is now well-established in a new office at Lindean Mill - between Selkirk and Galashiels. Please note the address is now Studio 2 Lindean Mill, Galashiels, TD1 3PE and the phone number is 01750 725154. email is as before piptabor@sup.org.uk

The Southern Uplands Partnership

*A partnership of all those who want to see people
living and working sustainably in the Southern Uplands.*

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SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE



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