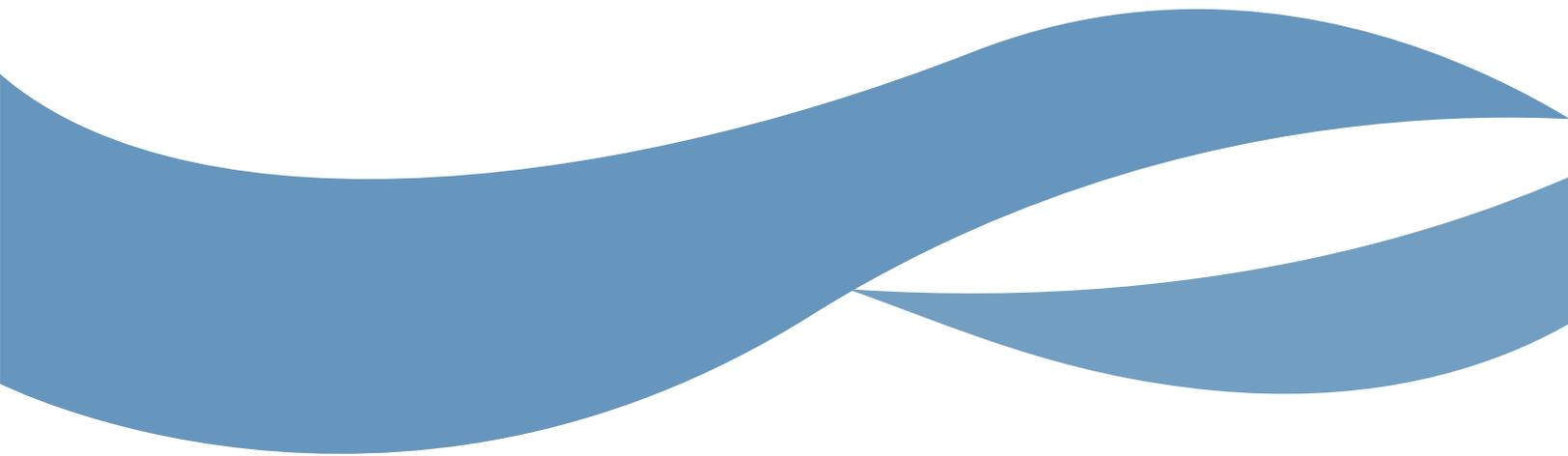


Regional Land Use Partnerships- Interim Report Response

07/08/2020

About Scottish Land & Estates

At Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) our work helps to ensure that rural Scotland thrives. We are a membership organisation for landowners, rural businesses, and rural professionals. We promote the wide range of benefits land-based businesses provide: tourist attractions, leisure facilities and landscapes enjoyed by the public, as well as housing, employment, tourism & enterprise and farming opportunities. We represent the interests of our members and wider rural Scotland to the UK and Scottish Governments to help ensure that policy and legislation reflects the unique requirements of rural Scotland and its communities.



As an organisation with a diverse membership involved in all aspects of land management, SLE are supportive of the potential Regional Land Use Partnerships (RLUPs) to provide integrated delivery of both Government policy as well as a thriving economy for Rural Scotland. In our discussion paper [#Route2050](#) , SLE outlined the need for this and the opportunities this approach could bring both in terms of delivery of output of food, drink and forestry products, but also natural capital and the emerging commercial opportunities in carbon markets. The principle of the right activity in the right place at the right time is one SLE firmly supports.

SLE also recognises the need for land management to contribute to ambitious climate change targets set by the Scottish Government which are time bound while also delivering benefit for local communities. Similarly, the opportunity afforded by the transition from the EU CAP system to a more specific package of measures for Scotland should not be missed to drive the economic, social and natural capital potential of Scotland.

SLE is therefore comfortable with the context provided for RLUPs and the opportunity they afford.

Functions

We agree with the need to prioritise opportunities for land use in specific parts of Scotland and that the use of public funding and support is the best way to achieve this. Encouraging and incentivising while still allowing individual businesses to make their own decisions will work well. RLUPs could be used to do this and enable the needs of local communities to be embedded within this process.

This can be delivered by using RLUPs as an administrative centre to provide a focal point in each region, we do-not envisage the RLUP taking on a farm advisory service role of delivering specific business advice. While not perfect the Farm Advisory Service (FAS) currently works well and having a degree of independence allows greater uptake, with land managers having the choice of which advisor and which particular skills they require to aid their business. There would be value in FAS and RULPs working together to ensure available knowledge and skills training is clearly sign posted and accessible to all land managers. Similarly, it is important that RLUPs remain lean in their structure and have a focus. By adding a variety of services and other roles this could dilute the work they do.

SLE has long advocated a mix of public and private finance in particular with the development of ecosystem services and natural capital in terms of Private funding, we agree RLUPs can work as a focal point to bring together land managers with similar interests along with private funders who wish to fund their work. This will be an important role in achieving landscape scale management and consistency. However, we believe RLUPs should not become involved in the financial transactions themselves. This could create major issues in terms of contractual obligations for long term natural capital projects. Dealing with this would require a substantial

administrative capacity, which in turn then uses up the resources which cannot then be used to fund projects. By playing an advisory role, but without being involved in the transaction, balances this role well.

Statutory Footing

SLE does not believe the RLUPs require a statutory footing. If there is an overburdened statutory requirement it could hamstring the RLUPs from proving their worth, particularly given the tools to enable change will likely be limited to pilot projects in the initial years to 2024. Similarly given the role being advisory, it is difficult to define exactly what statutory powers an RLUP would have without straying away from this advisory role. Creating change through consensus and trust would seem a logical and more powerful method of working.

Geography

This is crucial to the success of the partnerships; the areas need to be easily defined and its inhabitants feel an affinity to it. Local Authorities would be a relatively easy way of implementation, however there are wide ranges of land use and need within them, they are not designed to reflect the needs of land use. Thought would also need to be given to areas where land management crosses over boundaries. In theory it is possible for two areas to work together, however the reality may well be a doubling of the administration required and an over burdensome reporting requirement with two sets of priorities.

Where there is work already ongoing to establish Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) as part of the implementation of the Planning Act, it would make sense to dovetail this work by using the same geographic areas as the foundation of the RLUPs. However, this becomes problematic when there are inconsistencies in RSS delivery, for example, some may be on an individual local authority basis while others could be across multiple authorities or regional groupings. There are also difficulties with piggybacking on the planning system, for example, the RLUPs are intended to be reviewed every 5 years yet much of the plan-making within the planning system is moving to a 10-year cycle.

A catchment scale approach would seem a good fit, as a way of both delivering the desired changes and also of enabling local buy in and control of the partnerships.

Governance

SLE is supportive of the model of including government, sectoral expertise as well as community members. The sectoral expertise will be the most important factor within this however to provide practical knowledge and understanding and ensure that proposals are workable and goals achievable. We note the sentence “this may include people actively involved in land management”, a small change but this should read “must include people actively involved in land management.”

In terms of representation, it would be helpful to have membership organisations representing land managers and other main stakeholders involved in the national steering group. However, this would be less vital on a local level as it is important that each area has its own identity and not simply the same lines taken by national representative organisations. Working with organisations to identify candidates with the right skills would be welcomed.

The interplay between national and regional priorities will be vitally important, being able to give regional groups autonomy whilst ensuring the sum of these groups reaches the national requirements will need careful consideration.

Advice & Delivery

We support the outline of “Regional Land Use Partnerships to include a “brokerage role in building relationships with land managers, communities and interest groups to stimulate and guide action and delivery.” This can be done with the help of targeted public funding.

A point which was raised on the recent webinar was that of a need for a dispute resolution procedure. SLE believe that a properly working RLUP should not need this. It perhaps needs to be outlined, in addition to what the RLUP will do, what types of things the RLUP cannot and will not do. Namely enforce changes in business practices on land managers. Given the role of the RLUP as a broker and advisor, rather than an enforcement body, there should be no need for dispute resolution. What will be required are good people and communication skills to ensure all voices and points of view are given a fair hearing, ensuring that differing opinions can be brought together and work for mutual benefit. This will then allow land managers to make an informed choice in terms of the interests of the community and the support available, which can be weighted towards agreed land management activities outlined by the partnership board. This again highlights the need for a mix of skills and interests within the partnership board.

Conclusions

SLE is supportive and indeed excited by the potential of RLUPs to work with land managers to enhance both their business and the role of land management for natural and social capital. The interim report makes many good points and looks to be heading towards a workable and successful model. There are some however some issues, such as the geography and precise role of the RLUPs where thoughts need to be developed further. SLE is happy to contribute or discuss this at any time.

For more detailed information

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