

Scottish Rural and Island Parliament (SRIP) Statement from 3rd Nov. Session

Community-led local development (CLLD) is an approach refined in Scotland that brings local people together to decide how they can improve their area. They do so through Local Action Groups that address the most pressing economic, social, and environmental priorities for their area, and use local knowledge to tackle them within a structure of Local Development Plans.

The current network of 20 Local Action Groups (LAG) across Scotland has 257 Members, many of whom are volunteers, is a key tool for delivering economic development, that is unique to Scotland within the UK. It has been built on the legacy of LEADER EU funding that over 30 years delivered over 6,000 projects across rural Scotland, resulting in well over £500 million in investment in community development with over 3,000 sustainable jobs created. Since leaving the EU the network has demonstrated its resilience and sustainability by adapting and surviving. Our impact would be significantly enhanced by an ability to plan over a multi-year period where the added value would foster capacity building within our rural communities.

Each Action Group includes representatives from community (Community Trusts, local groups) non-agency (including business, agriculture, land management and third sector organisations) and agency (local authority, park authorities etc.), and allows each group to take a broad strategic perspective on where investment is required, where it will have greatest impact and achieve the best economic and community outcomes.

This bottom-up, partnership-based approach to rural development empowers people of all ages to work individually or collectively to make positive changes. Each group can work individually focussing on their local area or in cooperation, where combinations of LAGs work together to deliver projects over larger, more geographically dispersed areas and even trans-national cooperation building on wider European experience. The staff network that supports the LAGs is the enabling force that creates our ability to work locally, nationally and cross-nationally.

Harnessing the creative and imaginative resources within communities ensures better value and more sustainable outcomes. The added value of this the local decision making, based on partnership is the ability to deal with and respond to a wide-ranging and evolving agenda. We do not work in silos like most others delivery structures. Because of this broad-based approach, although we are locally based, we can have a more strategic approach to issues.

The network is a resource that can have a key role in delivering in a changing environment with a broad range of expertise that can be used for a whole range of delivery objectives such as the implementation of Policy, ensuring the intended impact of Legislation is delivered, supporting Planning objectives and providing an integrated delivery system for Rural Delivery Plan. This provides a strategic framework that almost no other organisation has the capacity to do. Our unique selling point is combining in depth local knowledge with a broad range of expertise from community, agency, and business backgrounds. We mobilise enthusiastic resources, animate a

wide spectrum of projects and energise communities. This mechanism is an essential resource for the development of sustainable rural communities.

We are also a youth development organisation. The senior Action Groups support, train, and mentor the Youth Groups. We have built on previous youth strategies and expanded youth engagement through our support. It is a structure that will embed a younger perspective into the Community led decision and provide a voice for their concerns.

Our strength is the broad spectrum of expertise and experience over a broad range of activities, it is a network that has strong existing links to Europe that can build on ideas and good practice from across the EU.

The network is a strong stable resource for sustainable economic delivery in rural Scotland.

We have demonstrated our resilience over the past three years by nurturing the flame of local economic development and with some support we are ready to for it to burst into life and deliver sustainable economic development throughout Rural Scotland.

Small investment leads to major change. For Example:

- Initial support for the Wigton Book Festival
- Initial support for Loch Rynie oysters

These are only two of over 6,000 initiatives supported by Local Action Groups throughout Scotland.

Douglas Johnston
Local Action Group Chair Group