



Please note that the views expressed in this report do not necessarily represent those of the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE FROM PUBLIC MEETING FLIP CHARTS REPORT

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the formal output of the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting public meetings. The Inquiry held a series of public meetings during the summer of 2007 at which group discussions were held and points that participants wanted the Inquiry to take from the discussions were noted on flipcharts. These points are considered to be the formal output from the meetings. It should be noted that the flip charts are the agreed points made by particular groups. They do not cover everything that was discussed by the groups and they may not reflect the opinions of all participants at a meeting. Therefore, although this report attributes comments to meetings, the comments were made by a particular group at that meeting which may or may not reflect the meeting as a whole.

This report forms an important part of the Inquiry evidence and is being considered along with the analysis of responses to the Inquiry Call for Evidence, a public attitude survey of Rural Development and Crofting and other research.

2 BACKGROUND

The Scottish Executive announced its intention to create a Committee of Inquiry on Crofting in September 2006, Professor Mark Shucksmith was confirmed as its Chairman in December 2006, and its full membership was announced on 2nd April 2007. The Committee is to identify a vision for the future of crofting in contributing to:

- sustaining and enhancing the population;
- improving economic vitality;
- safeguarding landscape and biodiversity; and
- sustaining cultural diversity.

Key issues that the Inquiry is considering include:

- the economic contribution of crofter agriculture to the local economy, and the significance of current public support in that contribution;
- the extent to which occupiers of small farms and crofts generate income from sources other than primary agricultural production, and the availability of financial assistance to encourage that;
- the governance of crofting and crofting communities, including the opportunities arising from community ownership of crofting estates and other initiatives;
- the demand for, and availability of affordable housing generally in the crofting counties, and the role of croft house grants in contributing to local housing supply; and
- the market for crofts, in particular their availability for young people and new entrants.

2.1 Summer meetings

In order to meet its objectives, the Inquiry held a series of public meetings, as well as 'stakeholder' meetings and meetings with young people, to gather the views and opinions of those interested in crofting and its future. The meetings took place from

June to mid August, 2007. Attendance varied, with many meetings being well attended and a few less so. In total over 800 people came to the Inquiry public meetings. The locations of and attendance at the public meetings is presented in Table 1.

Meetings were advertised through 29 newspaper articles, 23 radio slots, and one TV programme. Additionally, approximately 20 – 30 letters per public meeting were sent to local organisations, voluntary groups and institutions in the relevant area notifying them of the meetings.

Table 1. Attendance at public meetings

Meeting	Number of people attending
Lewis	20
Harris	17
Benbecula	16
Barra	25
Skye	129
Poolewe	65
Lairg	67
Glenmuig	50
Oban	15
Inverness	35
Orkney	50
Mid Yell	32
Lerwick	70
Tiree	23
Islay	4
Arran	92
Grantown-on-Spey	40

At each meeting small group discussions were held and participants invited to discuss questions from the Committee's formal Call for Evidence paper (see Annex 1 for the list of questions), and to raise any other key issues. The number of questions considered at each meeting was dependent on the number of attendees and the interest they had in discussing various topics. The purpose of the questions was to stimulate discussion and some discussions ranged from the point of the question. This means that not all questions were equally discussed at each meeting. Nevertheless across all the meetings the full range of questions was considered by attendees. The meetings produced 154 flip charts.

At each meeting ground rules were set to encourage people to speak freely and openly. All journalists were asked to identify themselves and participants asked to agree that any comments reported from the meeting should not be attributed to individuals.

3 FLIP CHARTS

3.1 Summary

Population

Groups generally considered crofting to contribute to retention of population through access to land, although it was noted that, in areas where there has been significant amalgamation of crofts, this is no longer the case. In order for crofting to attract new entrants and retain people, participants thought that there needs to be affordable housing, access to existing housing/crofts, improved economic returns from crofting and better grant schemes. Most groups welcomed incomers, although generally only if they intended to work the land.

The environment

Most groups considering this question felt that traditional crofting activities were good for nature protection. It was suggested by some that crofting is less good for nature/landscape than it had been in the past due to changing agricultural practices and neglect of crofts. There were mixed feelings about agri-environment schemes, but also some anxiety about them coming to an end.

Crofting and culture

Most discussion groups felt that crofting did support culture through retaining traditions, supporting Gaelic, music and a communal way of life. People said that cultural benefits are being eroded by the free market and changing crofting practices, especially the decline in importance of the common grazings.

Crofting agriculture

Agriculture was felt to be important economically in most places, although in all places households were said to require other incomes. In many meetings it was felt that it could become more important in the future, either through developing niche markets or because food production globally will become more important and that good agricultural land should not be lost to development (housing). Crofting agriculture was said also to be important socially. Grant schemes were widely commented on. In general the move to non-productive subsidies was not welcomed and many schemes were found to be difficult to access or inappropriate for crofting, with the exception of the Crofters Commission agricultural grant schemes.

Alternative incomes

All meetings felt that incomes other than agricultural were necessary and could come from diversification and/or off-croft employment. In many places the fact that there were limited jobs was noted and, in particular, that there were not many part time or flexible jobs which are compatible with crofting activities. It was widely thought that there should be more support and incentives for diversification and less regulation and red tape.

Neglect and absenteeism

At most meetings groups felt that there should be stronger regulation to deal with neglect and absenteeism, but there was also the feeling that sometimes there are legitimate reasons for crofters to have to be away from their croft. Most felt that existing regulations needed to be better enforced and a few that regulations needed

to be reviewed. Subletting was mentioned as a solution as was additional housing to allow people to move off crofts but remain in the area. Several groups felt absenteeism and neglect could be dealt with locally.

Amalgamation and sub-division

Most groups felt that amalgamation and subdivision had a purpose to serve, but should not be used indiscriminately. Groups considered that decisions on subdivisions and amalgamation should be based on agricultural and social criteria, a planned approach, and taken locally. Amalgamation was said to increase croft viability but can restrict new entrants. It was felt that subdivision can be advantageous for families and can be the only way that young crofters can gain access to a croft, but can lead to crofts being too small.

Affordable housing

Lack of affordable housing was said to be a problem at all the meetings and more affordable housing was said to be essential for young people and the community. A lack of incomes for mortgages/deposits, less rental opportunity and high house/plot prices were reported. There was felt to be more demand for croft houses than other types of housing and, for some people, getting a croft is their route to suitable housing. It was said that the demand for housing also leads to multiple house sites per croft. Most groups felt that housing grants should more closely reflect construction costs, especially on the islands, and that loans should be introduced. It was also suggested that planning should be relaxed and that planners should work with local communities.

Croft sales

Most groups thought that crofters should not be able to sell their crofts to the highest bidder. Others felt that the right to sell to the highest bidder could not be removed but they did have reservations and felt that the right to sell should be regulated. There was general concern about decrofting for multiple house sites, the associated problem that crofts sell for development value and the subsequent impact of this on the community.

Community ownership

Community ownership was generally supported in the Western Isles where it was said to have brought benefits, but there was less support elsewhere. Regulation was felt to be needed regardless of whether the landlord was a community or an individual and most groups felt that individuals should retain the right to buy under community ownership.

Important aspects of crofting

The strength of and sense of community engendered by crofting was widely mentioned as an important aspect of crofting, as was the way of life and the importance of livestock. Maintaining and passing on skills and traditions were also important to some as were the cultural and environmental benefits of crofting.

Interest in becoming a crofting area

Participants at the Grantown-on-Spey and Arran meetings were interested in achieving crofting area status for a number of reasons. A matter of justice was mentioned – people thought that small landholdings of similar nature to crofts should

be allowed to be registered as crofts. The right to buy and associated ability to borrow for investment in the croft, as well as to address housing problems through creating crofts and decrofting house sites were also noted as attractive features of crofting.

3.2 Discussion of issues

Question 1: how can crofting contribute to population retention or growth in remote areas? What do you think would help attract new entrants/and or retain people?

Flip charts addressing this question were produced by groups at the Grantown-on-Spey, Inverness, Orkney, Tiree, Islay, Arran, Poolewe, Lairg, Benbecula, Harris, Mid Yell and Lerwick meetings.

How can crofting contribute to population retention or growth in remote areas?

Groups at Grantown-on-Spey and Poolewe considered that crofting contributes to retention of population through access to land. The Islay group noted that crofting can be a tool to keep families on the land and can act as a base from which to work and expand. In Skye it was said that crofting contributes to tourism which creates jobs and retains population. The contribution of crofting was questioned at Lerwick where it was noted that there are few opportunities to obtain crofts and those available are increasingly expensive. In Inverness the benefit of retaining people was questioned and contrasted with crofting holding back change. In Orkney, it was said that in the past crofting contributed to population retention by supporting people, but since amalgamation of crofts and farms it has been difficult to access land and/or houses. In Lerwick the potential conflict between land use and population was noted.

What do you think would help attract new entrants/and or retain people?

A number of points were made addressing this question including providing more affordable housing, and access to existing housing/crofts, the economics of crofting and better grant schemes.

Easier access to land was put forward at Orkney, creating more crofts (Inverness, Lairg, Skye) and removing the right to buy on new tenancies (Lairg). It was noted at Tiree that there should be more affordable housing in general and that land should be more easily available for housing (Poolewe, Lerwick), but not the best arable land (Lerwick). Parents building on their croft to encourage inward migration by family members was noted at Tiree, removing the need to decroft (Benbecula) and better housing grants (Benbecula, Lerwick).

Linking the price of crofts to profitability of agricultural activities was put forward at Lerwick. The Grantown-on-Spey, Orkney and Lerwick meetings noted that, for crofting to be economically worthwhile, there needed to be diversification opportunities. That there also need to be other jobs available was highlighted at Grantown-on-Spey, Benbecula, Mid Yell, Lerwick and Poolewe.

The Crofters Commission should take a more active role, eg making people keep to their 5 year plans, was noted at Skye, and tightening up on absenteeism and unworked crofts were mentioned at Tiree and Skye. Better grant schemes and assistance were mentioned a several meetings. Skye wanted good grant schemes to keep crofts active such as RSS (Rural Stewardship Scheme) and Lerwick wanted

targeted funding. The Tirie, Mid Yell and Lerwick meetings wanted retirement schemes. Incentives for young people was mentioned (Benbecula, Poolewe, Lairg) and a new croft entrant scheme (Skye, Orkney). Lastly, information, education and extension were mentioned as being helpful in maintaining people and attracting new entrants (Lairg, Mid Yell, Lewis, Poolewe).

Would it matter if new people came from outside crofting communities?

Most groups welcomed incomers although, in general, only if they intend to work the land. A balance between locals and incomers was thought to be a good thing at Lairg, new people if they are *'coming for the right reasons'* (Poolewe) and people who will work the land (Orkney). The Inverness groups thought it more important to have someone who would work the croft in the traditional manner irrespective of whether they were an incomer or local person. In Lerwick, participants wanted preference to be given to crofters who would live on or near the croft and actively work on it. Here an individual's attitude was seen as more important than where they come from. The only group who appeared less open to incomers was Tirie where it was thought that only people from crofting backgrounds should be given crofting tenancies.

Question 2: What impact do crofting activities have on the landscape and on nature?

Flip charts addressing this question were produced by groups at the Grantown-on-Spey, Inverness, Islay, Barra, Poolewe, Lairg, Benbecula, Skye, Lewis, Glenuig, Mid Yell and Lerwick meetings.

Most groups making points on this question felt that traditional crofting activities were good for nature protection: crofters have experience of *'managing land to protect habitats'* (Grantown-on-Spey), *'We did it for nothing'* (Lairg), *'Crofting is the sustainable way of looking after the environment'* (Benbecula), *'the kind of agriculture that the world wants for delivering public benefits in addition to food'* (Islay), *'crofting provides diverse landscape with a wide range of fauna, flora'* (Glenuig), cultivation *'encourages small birds and animals'* and discourages ticks (Poolewe), and *'Crofting has created the landscape that people now enjoy'* (Lerwick). The Barra meeting felt that *'crofting fits with nature, if done properly (and) is used extensively'*, and there is therefore the need to encourage land use, retain the skills to work the land, look after livestock and understand nature. The Lerwick group felt that the value of crofting to the environment was not fully appreciated: *'Value of current land management is not understood by .. public (and) would soon be missed if not there'*. The Lairg meeting raised the question *'who evaluates the environment?'* and that birds and wildlife appear more protected than people, although it is the people that sustain life in rural places.

It was suggested that crofting is less good for nature/landscape than it had been in the past: *'Crofting is good for landscape and nature but used to be even better'* (Lerwick). Linked to this were several comments relating to the negative effects of reduced livestock: *'Without traditional crofting/farming ... - without grazing animals – the birds and wildlife will disappear – its already happening'* (Inverness). Participants from Poolewe linked lack of stock on the hills to overgrown bracken and heather and

regeneration of birch as well as lack of food for foxes and sea eagles. The value of stock on the land was also mentioned at Lairg, Skye and Lewis. The lack of infrastructure, such as an abattoir, was linked to reduced stock (Skye). The need for control of non-native plant species and red deer was raised at Skye. Dereliction was thought to be bad for nature/landscape (Lewis, Mid Yell) but could be avoided through encouraging diversification (Mid Yell). Building houses on good croft land, taking it out of agricultural activity, was said to be negatively affecting nature and landscape (Poolewe, Skye). The importance of re-seeding crofts to keep them looking good was raised at Poolewe: *'far better than a croft full of rushes and dead grass'*.

The size of croft units was linked to their nature/landscape value: *'the larger the croft units become, the further away from traditional agricultural practice and the less environmentally friendly'* (Lerwick). Fair Isle was given as an example of the only Shetland community that has not had amalgamation and it has *'high environmental value'*.

Agri-environment schemes were mentioned at many meetings. Participants at Grantown-on-Spey were positive, saying that schemes had paid a high proportion of incomes because crofts are larger and have environmental assets. In Barra they have been effective in preserving Marram grass sea defences. At Lerwick, ESA (Environmentally Sensitive Area) schemes were said to make the difference between profit and loss. The Islay meeting noted that agri-environment schemes help hold up livestock numbers and maintain habitat. Concerns about the end of the schemes were expressed at Islay, Barra and Mid Yell, where this was linked to change in landscape *'less diversity, more sheep'*, in contrast to concerns in other areas. At Lerwick the possibility of regressing to over-grazing of inbye and under grazed common grazing was feared. Environmental schemes were criticised as being too blunt, not reflecting local circumstances or size of crofts (Grantown-on-Spey and Lairg) and being limited, too restrictive, competitive, and demanding crofters to *'twist the croft round to get into the scheme'* (Lairg). In Orkney the point was made that QUANGOS have power but not always the knowledge to make local decisions about precise management, for example, how much and when land should be grazed by sheep. The relevance of diversity of areas was raised in Lewis where participants also noted the need for education for effective uptake of schemes. The possibility of the Government providing incentives for environmentally friendly crofting was suggested at Lerwick.

Question 3: Does crofting support diverse cultures, including the Gaelic language?

Flip charts addressing this question were produced by groups at the Grantown-on-Spey, Inverness, Islay, Barra, Arran, Poolewe, Lairg, Benbecula, Skye, Harris, Glenuig, Mid Yell and Lerwick meetings.

Most discussion groups felt that crofting did support culture (Grantown-on-Spey, Poolewe, Lairg, Benbecula, Skye, Mid Yell and Lerwick) in various ways, although noted as not unique in doing so (Glenuig). The ways in which crofting was said to contribute to culture were:

- ‘*Crofting is a cultural landscape*’ (Benbecula), ‘*crofting is a cultural activity*’ (Lairg).
- Family lines retain traditions (Glenuig), sense of identity (Grantown), and continuity of population (Arran) which retains people in remote rural communities, keeping traditional cultural activities alive (Lairg).
- Gaelic has been supported (Skye, Poolewe, Mid Yell, Lairg, Lerwick) by keeping people in the communities (Lairg, Skye).
- Crofting has supported music (Poolewe, Mid Yell).
- Crofting has supported culture through the crofting way of life (Grantown-on-Spey), communal working (Poolewe), involvement in the crofting community (Skye, Glenuig), strong sense of community and inter-community dependency (Lairg), and community relations (Barra) which also make it a socially important activity (Barra, Grantown-on-Spey).
- Specific agricultural activities were noted as being culturally important – home kill on Mid Yell and sheep caas (gathering), show trials, spinning, knitting, shared machinery, and small projects (Lerwick).

At two meetings groups concluded that crofting did not support diverse cultures. In Inverness it was felt that crofting gave a sense of belonging to an agricultural community, but this did not constitute culture. In Harris it was concluded that cultural diversity is associated with other factors such as migration and population change, with depopulation being key, and that the decline in gaelic and decline in crofting were ‘*intertwined*’.

Cultural benefits being eroded by the free market was noted at Skye and, on Arran, the loss of culture due to locals being out-priced and the high proportion of holiday homes was noted. Also the decline of the common grazings which were the ‘*heart of the community*’, threatened by changing crofting practices and falling population, was noted as significant in Mid Yell. A number of factors reducing crofting’s cultural value were noted at Glenuig: reduced participation in crofting because of need for outside employment which is sometimes away from the croft, change in lifestyle aspirations, and tendencies towards multiple croft holdings.

Question 4: How important is crofting agriculture to you economically? How important do you think it will be in the future as agricultural subsidies change? Are there other changes ahead which you think will affect crofting agriculture?

Flip charts addressing this question were produced by groups at the Inverness, Barra, Orkney, Tiree, Arran, Poolewe, Lairg, Skye, Lewis, Harris, Glenuig, Mid Yell and Lerwick meetings.

How important is crofting agriculture to you economically?

Agriculture was felt to be important economically in some places, although in all places households were said to require other incomes: ‘*It was never intended to be self sustaining and that is still the case*’ (Skye). At several meetings it was felt that crofting agriculture could become more important in the future, either through developing niche markets or because food production globally will become more important and good agricultural land should not be lost to development (housing) (Oban).

In Poolewe agriculture was said to be of vital importance, being the main source of income and there being few alternatives. In Lerwick agriculture was said to contribute between 1/3 – 1/2 of household income. It was also noted at Poolewe that agriculture contributed to visitors and tourism and thus supported the community as a whole. Agriculture was also said to be very important on Coll and Orkney, although very sensitive to the price of livestock (Orkney). The '*imbalance between cost and production*' was remarked on (Orkney and Lairg) and the increasing costs of feed and haulage (Tiree) and freight (Benbecula). Returns were said to be the lowest in their (group participants') lifetimes (Skye) where 46 years ago, the sale of one lamb provided a week's wages and in Lairg it was suggested that new markets need to be created to get an economic return from produce.

It was noted that, as well as costs, livestock restrictions have a disproportionate impact on crofters (Lerwick), excessive documentation requirements have led to a reduction in livestock (Inverness) and new legislation on transport and tagging has led to additional burdens (Lerwick). Decline in agriculture was said to be leading to lack of investment in crofts (Tiree) and to loss of skills (Orkney). In Lairg it was said that diversification encouragement had been bad for crofting; that skills are being lost; and that in order to maintain agriculture, active crofters need to be encouraged and supported, there should be effective rules to prevent crofts being sold out of crofting and subletting should be made more secure. Lerwick noted the issue of house sites being sold on prime land which affects agricultural potential.

Some groups commented that agriculture is not important economically, but has other values. In Inverness it was thought that crofting was a lifestyle choice and it may or may not earn an income from agriculture. At Genuig: '*crofting isn't paying at the moment*'. On Harris it was said that crofting agriculture is not important to individuals, but crofting activities in a community were important to the area economy. In Mid Yell crofting agriculture was said to be important as the '*backbone of the crofting community and to fill the freezer*'. In Lewis it was said that there was a need to create and identify markets for agriculture and also that agricultural activities should be promoted as generating social benefits - the 'glue' - and that communities benefit from active crofting.

How important do you think it will be in the future as agricultural subsidies change? Are there other changes ahead which you think will affect crofting agriculture?

The likely importance of food production in the future was remarked on in Orkney and Tiree and the potential to develop niche markets for local and sustainable food was noted in Skye, although it was also noted that initiatives around local food production are hampered by red tape (Inverness, Arran), and the lack of a slaughter house (Skye).

Grant schemes were widely commented on. In general the move to non-productive subsidies was not welcomed and many schemes were found to be difficult to access or inappropriate, with the exception of the Crofters Commission agricultural grant schemes. There were mixed feelings about agri-environment schemes.

At Poolewe it was noted that any reduced support will impact on the viability of crofting and result in landscape changes. In Lerwick it was thought that change in support may alter the character of agriculture, but agricultural activity would continue. Lerwick participants were worried about the scoring system for LMC (Land Management Contracts) and that the CCAGS (Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme) might be rolled into LMC. The Lairg and Islay meetings voiced concern about the threats to stock reduction from decoupling. The Islay group noted that this is affecting the critical mass of livestock, making it harder for those remaining in livestock farming. The Barra group made the point that single crofts can be too small to support the livestock units required by the LMCMS AHW (Land Management Contract Menu Scheme Animal Health and Welfare option). In Inverness and Poolewe it was said that livestock would disappear without livestock grants but also that livestock can pay with good management. The potential for croft land to be improved with funding was raised in Tiree and Orkney, better grants were requested with stronger support for agriculture – more money, less red tape, assistance with fencing, re-seeding and buildings.

Several groups commented on the non-production oriented subsidies and their effect. *'Agriculturally can make more money by doing nothing'* (Orkney), future support schemes are not designed to support agriculture (Harris), they act as a disincentive to land use (Islay), and subsidies should be targeted at production rather than non-production (Lairg, Oban). It was mentioned at the Lewis meeting that reduction of grants should be linked to assistance to diversify.

Support for agriculture and appropriate schemes were widely commented on. Most people wanted more support and payments were said to be vital, influencing what is economically produced on a croft (Poolewe). It was felt that subsidy measures should be crofter friendly, accessible and should not be scaled down agricultural grants (Oban). At Poolewe it was said that grants should be deregulated and the current system of prior notification means that crofters can't take advantage of opportunities as they arise. It was noted at Mid Yell that LFA (Less Favoured Area) needs to be delivered through better area targeting and at Islay that LFA should be linked to activity. Tiree commented on the declining subsidies and that agri-environment schemes should benefit all sizes of croft. Mid Yell said that agri-environment schemes should be regionally targeted and noted that schemes coming to an end had made a substantial contribution to crofting but it was impossible for crofts to compete in competitive schemes. The Inverness meeting observed that environmental schemes appear to be more attractive than agriculture. It was not clear if this referred to being attractive to crofters or policy makers. The lack of availability of grants to new entrants and owner occupiers was commented on (Skye, Lewis, Inverness). At Mid Yell it was thought that the Crofters Commission should have a greater developmental role.

CCAGS was said to be very important (Tiree, Skye, Lairg) but on Tiree it was said that 90% funding was required rather than the current 50%. On Orkney and at Lairg it was said that CCAGS shouldn't be means tested for owner occupiers and on Islay it was noted that the need for three quotes and payments up-front make it less useful. The livestock improvement scheme was also said to be important on Skye although on Barra it was thought to not be as good as it used to be and noted as being more expensive. Mid Yell wanted both these schemes to be ring fenced and

made more accessible. Other schemes were said to be complex and often inappropriate to crofting, involving much paper work for very little return (Skye) and difficult to access and complicated (Grantown-on-Spey). The Islay meeting said that schemes need to be appropriate to small units, allowing for low levels of expenditure, involving minimal levels of bureaucracy, and be suitable and realistic for remote and island areas.

Question 5: Do you think that it is a good thing that crofters generate more income from sources other than agriculture? Is this adequately supported?

Flip charts addressing this question were produced by groups at the Grantown-on-Spey, Inverness, Barra, Orkney, Tiree, Arran, Poolewe, Lairg, Benbecula, Skye, Lewis, Harris, Mid Yell and Lerwick meetings.

All meetings felt that incomes other than agricultural were necessary. Incomes could come from diversification and/or off-croft employment. In Inverness it was felt that *'crofts are there to provide a house rather than an income'* and that people can be too well off to bother crofting. At Glenuig it was noted that crofting was never intended to provide a full income and at Grantown-on-Spey that the nature of income sources had changed from many seasonal jobs to steady employment. The Forestry Commission were noted as a previous good source of 'crofter friendly' employment (Inverness). In many places the fact that there were limited jobs was remarked on and, in particular, the Poolewe meeting noted that there are not many part time jobs and the Lewis and Lerwick meetings that there are few flexible jobs which are compatible with crofting activities.

Most groups felt that there should be more support and incentives for diversification (Barra, Orkney, Skye, Benbecula). It was noted at the Benbecula and Lerwick meetings that schemes need to be flexible, provide better support for young entrants (Benbecula) and should be tied to working a croft, but without the need to commit to long term/large plans (Mid Yell). At Glenuig it was felt that diversification into non-agricultural activities should be on the poor land with good land retained for agriculture and growing crops.

There were a number of comments from various groups about factors affecting diversification. The lack of borrowing capacity faced by tenants was raised at Inverness and Arran. At Glenuig it was suggested that there needs to be more support for diversification and, at Skye, a more holistic approach to support provision of public goods. The lack of support for horticultural development or local food processing and marketing was raised at Glenuig. At Barra it was noted that building grants are vital for many diversification enterprises. The predominance of capital grant funding rather than revenue was said at Glenuig to be the cause of financial problems. It was suggested that investment in tourism should be targeted geographically to reflect local opportunity (Barra).

Too much regulation and red tape was raised at Barra and the Lerwick meeting noted that regulations stifle ideas. It was raised at Skye and Lairg that a reduction in transport costs would benefit all businesses.

The Benbecula meeting had found community development schemes helpful, such as, fencing beach areas and tourism. Raising awareness about opportunities on a township basis, training and education were suggested as useful at Skye. Lastly, the use of on-line marketing (Orkney) and having broadband (Skye) were thought to provide new opportunities.

Examples of ideas for diversification were:

- Crofters should have access to and control over the sea and have community quotas to provide an alternative income (Orkney).
- Renovation of farm buildings and development of tourist related enterprises, (but it would need financing) (Tiree) and property letting/tourism (Oban).
- Environmental diversification into biomass production, woodland creation (Oban), wind farming (Skye, Barra, Orkney, Lairg) and low mileage/carbon footprint goods (Lerwick).
- Locally produced foods (Barra), local cooperatives, making better links between suppliers and the market (Lerwick) and farmers markets. But grants are needed to butcher /prepare produce (Lairg) and there are restrictions on home kill (Lerwick).
- Niche markets very useful, but difficult to sustain (Orkney).
- Fish farming (Skye).
- Tourism, weaving, horticulture, (Barra) and use of poly tunnels (Lerwick).

Question 6: Should there be stronger regulation of land use to prevent neglect of crofts or absenteeism? How do you think appropriate use of croft land should be secured?

Flip charts addressing this question were produced by groups at the Grantown-on-Spey, Inverness, Barra, Orkney, Arran, Poolewe, Lairg, Benbecula, Skye, Lewis, Harris, Glenuig, Mid Yell and Lerwick meetings.

At most meetings groups felt that there should be stronger regulation and action should be taken if crofts are neglected for a long time, but there was also the feeling that sometimes there are legitimate reasons for crofters to have to be away from their croft. Most groups felt that existing regulation needed to be better enforced. The Inverness and Glenuig groups said that Crofting legislation should be reviewed. In some areas, absenteeism was said not to be an issue (Barra, Orkney, Lerwick) although neglect was (Lerwick). Neglect was noted on Arran where lack of interest in renting farms has led to many old derelict tenant farms.

It was said that all absentees should not be treated the same, absenteeism should be reviewed case by case (Grantown-on-Spey, Glenuig) and there should be negotiated agreements for absenteeism without confiscations (Benbecula). It was suggested at Glenuig that the definition of 'absentee' crofter should be revised to take account of modern day commuting distances. Several groups felt that absenteeism was often related to jobs/economics (Barra, Grantown-on-Spey, Inverness) and if absent crofters have made arrangements for their croft to be used, it may be wrong to penalise them (Grantown-on-Spey). It was noted at Glenuig that neglect is very difficult to define and at Inverness that it can be difficult to prove due to conflicting requirements of different agencies. For example, it is difficult to

distinguish between neglect and set aside (Lairg, Arran). SFP (Single Farm Payment) has led to reduced stocking densities (Arran, Lerwick) which some might construe as neglect. This makes it difficult to force someone to assign for neglect. It was felt at Barra that it might be more straight forward where it is evident that there is no 'intention to croft'. At Skye a harder line was taken and it was thought that crofters should have the responsibility not to neglect and that this should be defined and enforced.

At Lerwick it was noted that the Crofters Commission have been unsuccessful in regulating, leading to speculation and inactivity. The following suggestions were made about regulation: the Commission needs to apply current regulations (Oban, Lairg), tenancies need to be worked (Glenuig) and linked to agricultural use (Mid-Yell), plans agreed with the Crofters Commission should be implemented and monitored (Grantown-on-Spey, Poolewe, Harris), there should be a 5 year probationary period with substantial financial penalties (Poolewe) and there should be a tougher attitude to absentees (Lewis).

The Poolewe meeting noted that absenteeism is only a problem if the land is not being used and subletting was seen as a good solution at Barra, Lewis and Inverness. It was noted on Harris that lets should be secure and long term and at Inverness, that if they are unofficial/seasonal they preclude access to funding and reduce incentives to invest in the land (Arran).

There were several comments relating to making housing available to enable croft occupiers, who do not wish to work the land, to access alternative accommodation. New housing in crofting townships was suggested on Lewis. On Skye it was suggested that tenants should be allowed to decroft one house site to enable the land to be passed on to the next generation while the older generation could stay on the croft (and this limit would also serve to reduce assignments/sales value). In Mid Yell it was suggested that the ability to decroft a little bit of land with the house site is needed to provide a small plot with the house.

Several groups felt that absenteeism and neglect could be dealt with locally, in agreement with the township/grazings committees (Barra, Poolewe, Lerwick) and local authority (Lewis). At Skye it was felt that legislation should be strengthened and enforced through a collective approach between the Crofters Commission, Land Court, Local Authority, planners and crofting townships, especially regarding assignments. In Harris it was felt that the Crofters Commission should direct assignments based on criteria weighted according to community interests (Harris).

A number of other points were made. At the Oban, Inverness, Lairg and Lerwick meetings the need for incentives for good land management was raised and at Inverness and Mid Yell it was noted that assignments, which currently require approval of landlord and Crofters Commission, should be made easier. Lairg noted that the Crofters Commission should have rights over the landlord to implement conditions over the neglect of crofts. Community ownership as offering an opportunity for dealing with absenteeism/neglect was mentioned at Lewis. At Orkney it was suggested that less regulation of tenure would free up opportunities and sensible rent levels would help issues of neglect/absenteeism. It was observed at Oban that a strong local economy appears to reduce absenteeism and neglect. At

Lerwick it was suggested that resources could be used to support someone to work neglected land and persistent neglect could be tackled with enforced subdivision.

Question 7: Should amalgamation, multiple croft holdings and/ or the sub-division of crofts be encouraged? Should there be any limits on these?

Flip charts addressing this question were produced by groups at the Grantown-on-Spey, Inverness, Barra, Islay, Arran, Poolewe, Lairg, Skye, Lewis, Glenuig, Mid Yell and Lerwick meetings.

Most groups felt that amalgamation and subdivision had a purpose to serve in some circumstances, but should not be used indiscriminately. The point was made that although both can support active management (Poolewe), neither should be necessary if crofters receive adequate targeted support (Lerwick). It was noted at Poolewe that amalgamation can give economies of scale which can enable one crofter to '*provide infrastructure for smaller holdings*'. On the other hand, it was mentioned at Skye that it concentrates land with fewer people. At Inverness it was said that decisions on subdivisions and amalgamation should be based on agricultural and social criteria. At Oban, that the size of crofts is important and there should be a planned approach to amalgamation/subdivision. At Lerwick amalgamation was thought to be good if endorsed by the local community, but can be ruinous where demand exists amongst the young (Lerwick, Tiree, Arran). At Inverness it was noted that '*there are tensions re amalgamation ... effect on viability of school, services etc*'. At Oban: '*multiple croft holding is detrimental to crofting and the crofting community and can negatively affect population stability*'. Strong feelings were voiced about croft collecting which appeared to be a pejorative term – it '*should not be allowed*' (Barra), '*kills communities*' (Lerwick), and confounds aspiring entrants and affects assignation fees (Tiree).

On the other hand, it was felt that amalgamation can be positive for agricultural viability (Arran, Lairg, Skye), providing economies of scale (Poolewe), increased grazing if soumings (entitlements to common grazings) are low (Barra) and can lead to better use of land (Skye). In Lewis it was felt that there should be a limit on the number of holdings an individual can tenant as it restricts others' opportunities. In Mid Yell it was said that, unless there is demand by others, there should not be an upper limit on the number of holdings being held, providing they are being used. It was also noted in Poolewe and Mid Yell that instead of formal amalgamation, unofficial arrangements can work well and the flexibility of dividing units again is retained (Mid Yell).

It was noted at Glenuig that subdivision has advantages for families and can be the only way for young crofters to gain access to a croft, but can lead to crofts being too small (Skye). Several options were put forward to regulate subdivision. It was felt at Lewis and Lairg that there should be a minimum size for sub-division depending on the use being made of the land or the region. At Glenuig, a maximum number of times that a croft can be subdivided to avoid exploitation was suggested with each unit having to be at least 5 acres to create a viable croft. At Lerwick it was said that the number of homes on a croft should be limited.

Question 8: How serious are problems of access to affordable housing in the crofting communities? What are the impacts on the demand for crofts and croft land (whether inbye or common grazings)? How helpful are croft house grants, rural home ownership grants, housing association lettings, etc.? What do you think should be done?

Flip charts addressing this question were produced by groups at the Grantown-on-Spey, Inverness, Barra, Orkney, Tiree, Islay, Arran, Poolewe, Lairg, Benbecula, Skye, Glenuig, Mid Yell and Lerwick meetings.

Lack of affordable housing in the area was said to be a problem at all the meetings. It was also noted that people's expectations have changed regarding quality of housing (Orkney). At the Grantown-on-Spey meeting more affordable housing was said to be essential for young people and the community. A lack of incomes for mortgages/deposits and less rental opportunity was noted at Orkney, Arran and Lairg. High house/plot prices were reported at Arran, Poolewe, and Skye. Jobs were said to be more important than housing at Lairg and of equal importance to housing for population retention on Unst and Fetlar (Mid Yell).

It was said at Poolewe that locals can not afford to buy the 'affordable housing' that is built and lack of housing leads to difficulties for young people to settle in or return to an area or buy a croft (Benbecula, Skye, Mid Yell). Another consequence, noted at the Poolewe meeting, was that the demand for housing also leads to multiple house sites per croft (with loss of in-bye land).

There was felt to be more demand for croft housing than other types of housing in Lairg. It was noted on Barra and Mid Yell that, for some people, getting a croft is their route to suitable housing, with people buying crofts who only want a house. It was thought on Orkney that crofting can help gain access to house sites and planning permission but noted at Oban that it should not be seen as the only solution to affordable housing.

How helpful are croft house grants, rural home ownership grants, housing association lettings, etc.?

A number of comments were made regarding grants and other schemes. CHGS (Croft House Grant Scheme) was said to be too low and needs to reflect the cost of building in local areas (Grantown-on-Spey, Islay, Mid Yell) which are very high (Lerwick). It was suggested at Lerwick that the previous CBGLS (Croft Building Grant and Loan Scheme) should be maintained and linked to active land use. In several meetings (Grantown-on-Spey, Barra, Poolewe, Lairg) it was suggested that a loan should be introduced so that crofters would not need to decroft. The need for a grant to renovate old houses was suggested at Grantown-on-Spey. The Lerwick and Oban meetings suggested that grants should be the same for owner occupiers and tenants. At Poolewe, it was suggested that eligibility to CBGLS/CHGS should be opened up to include key workers.

The Grantown-on-Spey meeting suggested that RHOGS (Rural Home Ownership Grants) needs to be more flexible to allow suitable house types. At Poolewe it was said that RHOGS were more useful if you own a plot and, at Lerwick, that they

should be promoted for non-crofters. The Orkney meeting said that anyone receiving a grant towards house building should have more restrictions on resale. Lastly, it was noted on Arran that housing associations have difficulty getting suitable land.

What do you think should be done?

Several groups commented on suitable sites for housing and felt that housing should be on the poorer land where possible (Oban, Lairg, Poolewe, Lerwick, Genuig). On Skye it was suggested that new crofts for locals should be created on common grazings and grazings committees should have power to make house sites available. On Barra it was noted that townships should make decisions about releasing land for an existing crofter to build a house and also that there needs to be an incentive for crofters to release common grazing land for housing and/or crofts. It was felt on Orkney and Arran that planning needs to open up and, at Oban, that decrofting should not automatically lead to planning consent and planners need to look harder at land use. The Poolewe meeting noted that lack of services and infrastructure, particularly water, stifles development and there needs to be community input to Scottish water plans. It was also said by the Poolewe meeting that grazing committees, community councils and planning departments should work together to address housing needs and that locals should be prioritised on housing lists. It was noted at Skye that the Crofters Commission should enforce regulations to free up unused houses and, at Lairg, that there should be regulation to curtail asset stripping. At the Islay meeting the creation of new crofts on Jura was welcomed and it was felt that they were important to help people onto the housing ladder, to sustain the population and for the economy.

Question 9: Should crofters be allowed to sell their crofts, or croft land, to the highest bidder? Do you think croft assignments and sales should be regulated, and, if so, how?

Flip charts addressing this question were produced by groups at the Grantown-on-Spey, Inverness, Barra, Tiree, Islay, Arran, Poolewe, Lairg, Benbecula, Skye, Lewis, Genuig, Mid Yell and Lerwick meetings.

Some groups thought that crofters should not be able to sell their crofts to the highest bidder (Barra, Arran, Oban, Skye, Lewis, Harris). Others felt that, although they had reservations about the right to sell to the highest bidder, it could not be removed (Poolewe, Lerwick). In Barra it was noted that local people are often unaware of sales until it is too late and, although there is local demand, local people can not afford to buy tenancies/crofts. In Harris, 'indigenous crofters' were said to be abusing the system and asset stripping. The Tiree and Lairg meetings thought that crofters should be allowed to sell their crofts on the open market, if it was regulated by existing Crofters Commission powers (Tiree). At Lairg the point was made that removing the right to sell on the open market traps crofters, not allowing them to move elsewhere. At Oban it was observed that crofters see crofts as assets.

Lairg participants noted the situation that local people are unable to afford to access a croft but older people are unable to afford to vacate a croft. Creating new crofts, for rent only, was seen as potentially easing this situation.

There was general consensus against multiple decrofting. Grave concerns were noted about the speculative value leading to decrofting for multiple house sites (Poolewe, Oban, Skye); the associated problems that crofts sell for development value (Lerwick); that land goes out of crofting (Oban); the impact on the community and way of life (Poolewe); and '*crofts being lost to the wrong people*' (Poolewe). It was also noted at Lerwick that selling off croft houses leaves crofts with no house. At Islay it was said that new crofts, bought for 15 times the annual rent, had been sold for £300,000 which did not encourage the landlord to create more holdings. Removing the right to buy was suggested as a way of addressing this.

Do you think croft assignments and sales should be regulated, and, if so, how?

All meetings felt that sales need to be regulated. At Poolewe it was noted that the present system was failing through ineffective regulation. It was felt that tenancy assignments must be linked to use of land (Tiree, Benbecula, Harris) and reclaimed where they are abused (Inverness, Lerwick) or have a probationary period (Tiree, Benbecula) and should be effectively monitored (Poolewe, Lewis, Harris, Glenuig). It was noted at Lerwick that the price of crofts can not be justified agriculturally. At Barra, it was said that the price should be based on rent, which Skye participants thought should be in line with the income potential of the croft.

It was said at the Skye and Glenuig meetings that loans should be made available for crofter housing to prevent the need to decroft. Barra participants noted that a burden could be placed on the sale to discourage speculators.

Local involvement was advocated at several meetings. The Lairg meeting noted that local crofters should regulate assignments and sales. At Barra and Benbecula it was said that non family assignments should go to people on a waiting list and the Crofters Commission should direct assignments on basis of recommendations by townships. A moratorium on decrofting for multiple house sites was advocated at Skye, and Lerwick and Glenuig wanted a limit on the number of house sites per croft. At Lairg it was said that the sale of a maximum of two plots should be allowed, limited to poor land or ruins. Several comments were made on planning: tighter planning policies to protect croft land were suggested at Skye and at Lerwick that the Crofters Commission should be statutory consultees on planning. The benefits of development on common grazings land, where money would be spread around shareholders with no harm to crofts or community cooperation, were noted at Lerwick. Provision for retirement through a pension was also mentioned at Lerwick, as this would remove the need to realise the croft value.

Question 10: How do you think land reform, and the community ownership of crofting estates in particular, will affect crofting in the future? Does community ownership alter the need for regulation of crofting in any ways? Do crofters need protection from community landlords, as they did from private landlords? Should crofting tenants of community landlords retain the right to buy?

Flip charts addressing this question were produced by groups at the Grantown-on-Spey, Inverness, Tiree, Arran, Poolewe, Benbecula, Skye, Lewis, Harris, Mid Yell and Lerwick meetings.

How do you think land reform, and the community ownership of crofting estates in particular, will affect crofting in the future?

Not many groups remarked on this aspect of the question. The group in Harris said that having a community landlord was much better for the community. It gives confidence back to the community, is open and transparent, has engendered trust and holds a development fund for community projects. In Lewis it was said that the effect had been positive with the community owning all assets. In contrast to this, reservations were expressed about community ownership at several meetings. In Tiree it was noted that they were not in favour of community ownership, at Grantown-on-Spey that they had concerns regarding wider community involvement, and at Lerwick, where there are a high proportion of owner occupiers and people are more 'independent minded', they would be worried that community owners would dictate what crofters should do. In Skye it was said that there was no appetite for community ownership. The Skye meeting also commented that where individual rights are given greater sway it can be a '*recipe for disaster*' whereas when community powers are greater, matters tend to be resolved more easily.

Does community ownership alter the need for regulation of crofting in any ways?

At all the meetings recording comments on this question, it was felt that crofting would still need to be regulated regardless of who the landlord is.

Should crofting tenants of community landlords retain the right to buy?

Most groups said that crofters should retain the right to buy (Inverness, Arran, Poolewe, Skye, Lewis, Lerwick) if regulated (Arran, Poolewe). However, at the Oban and Glenuig meetings it was felt that there should be no individual right to buy on community owned areas. On Harris it was questioned whether there should be a right to buy at all. At Oban it was suggested that locals should be given first options on assignments.

Question 11: In the light of these issues how do you imagine crofting in the future – say in 10 or 20 years' time? Do you think crofting will be different from now, for example in the balance between agricultural and non-agricultural activities/ income? What would you hope crofting to be?

Question 12: What changes do you think would help to bring this about? For example, should there be changes in the way crofting is regulated? Should there be changes to the Crofters Commission? Should there be changes to existing grant regimes?

The responses to questions 11 and 12 are presented together because of the link between them. They are also presented per meeting so that each area's vision is presented as a whole.

Grantown-on-Spey

Crofting in the future:

- Crofting is based on agriculture but also other income.
- There is no distinction between owner occupiers and tenants in terms of grants.
- Branded niche products such as National Park beef produced.
- If agricultural subsidy is removed, the change will be dramatic.

What is needed:

- Improvement in economic returns of agriculture and support for diversification.

Inverness

Crofting in the future:

- Use is made of the common grazings, eg for housing.
- Agricultural activities are important to communities, but declining due to fewer active crofters.
- Crofts that are not worked could be considered social housing.
- If current levels of de-crofting continue, *'the lights will go out'*.

What is needed:

- The right to buy should be re-examined.
- There needs to be less regulation and more freedom for local communities to be involved in decision making on non-contentious issues.
- Assignations of crofts should be based on use of the land.
- Regulation needs to be simple, clear consistent and attend between market forces and individual needs.

Barra

What is needed:

- The Crofters Commission should have stronger regulatory powers to enforce the prevention of selling of assignations and selling sites to private developers.

Tiree

Crofting in the future:

- Crofting will still be a main industry and agriculture an income earner.

Arran

Crofting in the future:

- Sustainability and self-sufficiency in food produce.
- Hope that Arran will have crofting and associated way of life, work and housing.

What is needed:

- A subsidy towards transport of agricultural produce.

Poolewe

Crofting in the future:

- Crofting moves away from livestock and produces more crops such as vegetables.
- Better utilisation of the hill ground.
- Concern about the loss of collective crofting activities.

What is needed:

- Crofters Commission needs to be more accountable, communicative and consistent.
- Grants should be means tested for tenants as well as owner occupiers, and non-agricultural and agricultural grants need to be more flexible.
- There should be follow up of new crofters to make sure that they are actively using the croft.
- Encourage young crofters and enable them to stay/return through affordable housing.
- Employment opportunities created on a township basis.
- Flexible crofting regulations.
- Community cohesion and activities with mutual benefit to be encouraged.
- Society needs to value local produce more.
- Incentives to sustain the crofting way of life.
- More appropriate regulation by SEPA, ERAD etc.

Lairg

What is needed:

- Good jobs to subsidise crofting.
- Crofters Commission enforcing legislation and conditions on use of crofts to prevent escalating prices.
- Greater cooperation amongst Government agencies.
- Elected member of crofting communities in Crofters Commission and maintain presence of Crofters Commission in crofting counties.
- Challenge and update case law in the land court.
- Enforced working of crofts.
- Crofters Commission using a map based system.
- Not too many policy changes.
- Remove means tested loans / assistance.
- More funds to support rural development.

- Making links with other services, for example maternity services to support young entrants.

Skye

Crofting in the future:

- Active crofting townships with good collective structures, backed up by solid infrastructure, support mechanisms & services, (e.g. water, sewage, slaughterhouses, producers association) which enable growth and sustainable communities.
- Crofting land being maintained in good environmental and agricultural condition, even if not actively worked.
- Crofting to have a good mixed diversified base with both agricultural and non-agricultural uses.
- A strategic approach taken regarding the use of “poor” agriculture land for a range of development purposes or forestry etc.
- Affordable housing to be available.
- Communities to be vibrant with more younger people on crofts.
- Fear that crofting set to disappear under housing which is unaffordable to local people.

What is needed:

- Crofters Commission to be restructured and 50% of membership to be elected from crofting townships.

Glenuig

Crofting in the future:

- Increased role of home food production.
- New sheep stock clubs as community approach to sustainability.
- Start up grants for new entrants returnable if not successful and new entrants age limit 60 rather than 40.
- Environmental balance maintained by traditional crofting practices.
- Fear speculation, asset stripping and over development.
- Fear breakdown of crofting townships due to dominance of non crofters.

What is needed:

- Young entrants to prove that they want to croft, not merely to speculate.
- More township control over outline planning and development.
- Landlords, Crofters Commission, Scottish Executive, Land Court to have a central database of information and croft history.

Lerwick

Crofting in the future:

- Local high quality fresh food production for local marketing.
- More diversification into crops, vegetables and tourism, as well as livestock.
- Active crofting generating economic activity.
- More recognition of crofting activities which are good for the environment, culture and heritage.
- More young people.
- Decent quality rural employment.

- Better regulation.
- Community ownership (minority of the group opposed and see question 10 where Lerwick group was not in favour).

What is needed:

- Good agricultural land not to be built on.
- Value of crofts and assignations to be linked to improvements/investments, not to the open market.
- More face to face accessible information on regulations.
- Support to make it affordable for young people to take up crofting.
- Production subsidies for finished products and marketing.
- Continuity of locally appropriate environmental management support.
- Crofters Commission enforcing regulations and involvement of Crofters Commission in planning.

Mid Yell

What is needed

- Crofters Commission should have a stronger development role

Orkney

What is needed

- Cross cutting issues of communication – passing information to the right people, making links and working in partnership with housing and other services.

Question 13: What is it about crofting which is important to you? Please tell us what features of crofting matter most to you and why.

Flip charts addressing this question were produced by groups at the Grantown-on-Spey, Lairg, Benbecula, Skye, Lewis and Glenuig meetings.

Strength of and sense of community were mentioned by most groups (Grantown-on-Spey, Lairg, Lewis, Skye) generated by working together, a sense of belonging - *'don't own the land it owns you'* (Lewis) and continuity with a home for the family (Lairg). The importance of crofting for its unique way of life was mentioned at Glenuig and Lairg, and that crofting needs to be preserved for future generations was mentioned at Glenuig. The Benbecula meeting noted crofting to be important as a good way to bring up children and a valuable concept of living. The Skye meeting valued crofting as being organic, healthy and retaining population. In Lewis it was valued for being healthy and outdoor with challenges, rewards and a sense of purpose.

The importance of livestock was mentioned at Grantown-on-Spey and Benbecula: *'keep you in the area'* (Grantown) and gives people something to do - *'anchors them in place'* (Benbecula). Working the land and active land management were mentioned at Poolewe and Lairg. That crofting is small scale and low intensity and has local and environmental benefits was said to be important at Grantown-on-Spey,

and Benbecula. That it maintains the skills of low-input farming was mentioned at Grantown-on-Spey and Poolewe.

The importance of crofting supporting population retention and continuity, through some crofts being passed down through generations, was mentioned at Glenuig. Passing on land, skills and investment to the next generation, were mentioned at Lewis.

Further aspects felt to be important were that crofting provides security of tenure and enables the tenant to build a house (Glenuig), the resilience of the people (Grantown-on-Spey), crofting culture (which attracts tourists) (Grantown-on-Spey, Glenuig) and heritage / culture of land and environment and the strong local food economy that is associated with it (Skye).

Additional question: Interest in becoming a crofting area

In two of the public meetings, Grantown-on-Spey and Arran, participants were asked to discuss if and why they were interested in becoming a crofting area.

Participants from the Grantown-on-Spey meeting identified several areas as being of importance:

- Security of tenure linked to preventing unscrupulous behaviour by landlords, the perceived freedom to use the holding as the tenant sees fit, and the ability to borrow money.
- A matter of fairness – small holdings of similar size and nature to crofts should be allowed to be registered as crofts.
- Access to the right to buy.
- Perceived potential to ease housing shortage and provide affordable housing – *‘real benefit of crofting tenure so the next generation can build a house and to encourage investment in holding’*. It was also mentioned that crofting should not be seen automatically as land for housing by planners.
- Ability to create croft tenancies and attract young families.
- Being part of the *‘crofting community’*. Linked to this were other comments *‘identity, anchors community, stronger sense of community’*, *‘people working together’*.
- Other perceived benefits and aspirations of what would be different included environmental benefits, better animal welfare, maintaining culture, good local food, benefits to local trades and services, and *‘vision’*.

The main issues mentioned by the participants at the Arran meeting were:

- Retaining rural communities and linked to this the importance that crofts go to young people.
- The right to buy, both as security against which to borrow and the possibility of buying a *‘house site’*.
- To address the low cost housing problem was given considerable emphasis both through the ability to decroft for a house site and through creating new crofts (which was contrasted to the current situation where no new tenancies are created). There was the recognition by some that planning also played a

role and this would need to be relaxed in order for housing aspirations to be met.

- To address the injustice felt due to Arran being left out - '*not Highlands and Islands and not mainland*'.
- Access to support schemes.
- Security of tenure (only mentioned once) and interest in different types of ownership/tenancy such as the son being the owner and the father the tenant.

ANNEX 1: The questions

Question 1: How can crofting contribute to population retention or growth in remote areas? What do you think would help attract new entrants and/ or retain people? Would it matter if new people came from outside crofting communities?

Question 2: What impact do crofting activities have on the landscape and on nature?

Question 3: Does crofting support diverse cultures, including the Gaelic language?

Question 4: How important is crofting agriculture to you economically? How important do you think it will be in the future as agricultural subsidies change? Are there other changes ahead which you think will affect crofting agriculture?

Question 5: Do you think that it is a good thing that crofters generate more income from sources other than agriculture? Is this adequately supported?

Question 6: Should there be stronger regulation of land use to prevent neglect of crofts or absenteeism? How do you think appropriate use of croft land should be secured?

Question 7: Should amalgamation, multiple croft holdings and/ or the sub-division of crofts be encouraged? Should there be any limits on these?

Question 8: How serious are problems of access to affordable housing in the crofting communities? What are the impacts on the demand for crofts and croft land (whether inbye or common grazings)? How helpful are croft house grants, rural home ownership grants, housing association lettings, etc.? What do you think should be done?

Question 9: Should crofters be allowed to sell their crofts, or croft land, to the highest bidder? Do you think croft assignments and sales should be regulated, and, if so, how?

Question 10: How do you think land reform, and the community ownership of crofting estates in particular, will affect crofting in the future? Does community ownership alter the need for regulation of crofting in any ways? Do crofters need protection from community landlords, as they did from private landlords? Should crofting tenants of community landlords retain the right to buy?

Question 11: In the light of these issues how do you imagine crofting in the future – say in 10 or 20 years' time? Do you think crofting will be different from now, for example in the balance between agricultural and non-agricultural activities/ income? What would you hope crofting to be?

Question 12: What changes do you think would help to bring this about? For example, should there be changes in the way crofting is regulated? Should there be changes to the Crofters Commission? Should there be changes to existing grant regimes?

Question 13: What is it about crofting which is important to you? Please tell us what features of crofting matter most to you and why.

Arran and Grantown-on-Spey are not crofting areas but were visited by the Committee because of the strong interest they had shown in becoming crofting areas. Therefore there was an additional question for these meetings: Why are you interested in becoming a crofting area?