

Rural Commission Final Report (Draft 1)

Introduction

The Rural Commission came into existence as a consequence of a motion passed by the General Synod meeting in June 2008. The preamble to the motion set the context for the study while the associated instruction specified the remit of the commission.

The Motion Agreed by the 2008 General Synod

"Synod notes with concern a series of recent proposals such as those which will lead to the loss of many rural post offices and the developing pressures on rural industries such as the EU's intention to conduct a major review of CAP which seems likely to reduce the average farming income by one third.

It is concerned that recent government reviews of rural communities in Scotland have been dominated by an excessive economic bias which is inappropriate given the breadth of the contribution, environmental and cultural which rural communities make to Scotland.

Synod believes that changes of this type are such that they will impact on the SEC and other churches and their ability to meet the needs of rural people and so that there is urgent need to assess the relationship between the church and those who live and work in such areas.

It believes that consequently there is a need to revisit the issues which were last considered by the SEC's Rural Commission over a decade ago.

Synod instructs the Mission and Ministry Board to set up a new Rural Commission with the following remit:

- to identify the major changes likely to impact on rural communities in the coming decade
- to assess where there is scope for the SEC both alone and working through the Scottish Churches Rural Group to act so as to mitigate the adverse impact of change
- to suggest what might be the most appropriate forms of ministry to meet the needs of rural communities in the future. "

The issues as they were seen at the time of the 2008 General Synod

- The Scottish Executive identify that 21% of the population of our country live in rural areas, which represent 98% of the land mass of Scotland. 6% of the population live in what are defined as remote rural areas which in turn accounts for 69% of the land mass. Rural communities are thus important to Scotland as a whole. They are even more important to us in

- the SEC as around one third of our congregations are situated in such areas.
- Many of the current key issues for rural communities are also important in urban areas but in rural communities they affect more of the population. Rural communities have been hard hit by the impact of rising energy costs. In most rural areas the option of taking the bus or train rather than using the car does not exist. Fuel has always been more expensive in rural areas and it has risen in cost more than the national average.
 - Food poverty is also an issue. The Food Standard Agency recently conducted a major study on the costs of eating a healthy diet in Scotland. Food supply in rural areas is dominated by small shops. Here the cost of a healthy food basket is £10 more than in our cities.
 - In 2008 we find our selves in a world where Rural Post offices could become a distant memory. The formula being used to assess Post Office retention is weighted against the rural sector. Post Office closures have however been seen by some churches as an opportunity to take over the running of post offices and increase community involvement. The closure legislation makes it easier for community bodies to take on a post office role .
 - Despite recent rises in grain and milk prices Scottish farming, for long the engine of the rural sector, struggles. For many the single farm payment from the CAP represents over two thirds of income. Milk, meat, and until 2007 cereals, were all sold below the costs of production. The CAP has been reformed several times since 1993 most recently with the introduction of the Single farm payment in 2005. The CAP is scheduled for major review with implementation planned for 2013. A probable consequence of that review will be a reduction of CAP funding by 50% and thus a fall in farm incomes of one third. In addition, and perhaps most of concern, the need for the UK to have a food production sector at all has recently been seriously questioned by Government.
 - The rural sector is important to our heritage and to our total environment. It matters to our spirituality in the most basic sense.
 - Since 1993 Broadband has become a fact of life. Within a decade it will be responsible for delivering a range of services to rural communities. It offers to us the ability for churches to deliver something to those who live in isolated situations and for whom church attendance, at least at some times of the year is not possible.

The 1993 Rural commission

The current Commission is not the first time that our church has examined its responsibility for its rural churches and their communities.

At its meeting in 1993 the General Synod established a rural commission with the aims of

- examining recent economic environmental and social changes in rural areas,
- documenting SEC provision in such areas
- And identifying theological insights related to ministry in such areas.

The commission presented its final report in 1996.

The work of the 1993 Commission raised the profile of rural churches within our church, resulted in the setting up of a rural committee which in 2005 became the Scottish Churches rural committee and lead to new ways of working within our church such as ICM.

The membership of the 2008 Rural Commission

The members of the commission were

Rt Rev Mark Strange (Chair)

Rev David Atkinson (Secretary)

Martin Robb

How We Have worked

The initial phase

This involved the setting up of the commission, discussions with the Mission and Ministry Board, scoping the exercise and a web based consultation with members of our church as to the issues that the Commission needed to consider. Issues related to the work of the commission were also discussed with other churches through the medium of the Scottish Churches Rural Group. During this period we also took advantage of events arranged by other organisations such as the Gifford lectures in Aberdeen University give on the subject of natural theology by Professor Alister McGrath, the Scottish Governments First Rural Gathering held in Perth, the opportunity to talk to the leaders of all political parties and including the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs Richard Lochhead and the heads of bodies such as the Food Standard Agency at the RHAS show in summer 2009, the launch of the Care farming Initiative and the Scottish Governments Food and Drink Leadership Forum. From this the actual agenda that the commission would consider was identified. It was agreed that these issues could best be explored through the medium of a series of conferences which would allow the commission to bring together experts in particular areas and those in our church and other churches who wished to discuss these issues.

The conference phase.

A series of three conferences were held. In identifying speakers for these events emphasis was placed on having many from organisations with whom we might wish to continue to work in the future i.e. SCVO or members of the Mission and Ministry Board's or the Faith and Order Board's subcommittees or their Diocesan equivalents. The programmes for these events is given as appendix 1
The first of these conferences aimed to obtain foresight information on the major issues which will determine the shape of rural communities in 15-20 years time. All of the speakers were from secular and government bodies. This event was

held in partnership with the ACTS Rural Committee. It was held in Edinburgh in December 2009 and attended by around 65 people representing many of the major Christian denominations active in Scotland. The proceedings are available via the ACTS website.

http://www.acts-scotland.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=307:rural-futuresa-look-towards-the-rural-world-of-2025&catid=67:project-news

This event was aimed primarily at providing the material needed to meet the first of the instructions to the Commission i.e. documenting the changes which were likely to drive the viability of rural communities in the next decade or so. Carrying out this fact finding in partnership with those from other churches provided a shared basis of understanding so as to aid future co-operation. In the following text references to material from this event is given under the title of "Rural Futures" Given the foundation nature of this event its proceedings are summarised as Appendix 2.

The second aimed to examine how the church would need to change its ways of working if it was to accommodate the issues identified in the foresight exercise. This event was held in Inverness in February 2010 and attended by around 30 people. This event was aimed at providing the material needed to meet the third instruction to the commission and to identify specific areas for change. Material from this event is referenced as being from "Rural Church". Proceedings from this event will be available in advance of General Synod

The third aimed to look at the options available for our church in developing new partnerships with non church organisations so as to take ahead and action areas of opportunity identified by the previous events. As with the foresight exercise, most of the speakers at this event were t from non-church led organisations. This was held in Inverurie in March 2010 and attended by around 40 people. This event was aimed at supplying the information needed to achieve the second instruction to the commission developing partnerships. Material from this event is referenced as being from "Rural Church Partnerships." Proceedings from this event will be available in advance of the general Synod.

The programmes for all three of these events are listed in Appendix 1.

The summation phase

The information gained from the conferences and the suggestions made by those who attended those events have been used to produce a document which summarises what we have found and the actions which we suggest are now needed for our church to take forward these issues. In addition the proceedings of each of the conferences will be made available as a document summarising the presentations given and made available via appropriate web sites.

How Rural is Scotland and what makes Rural Distinct

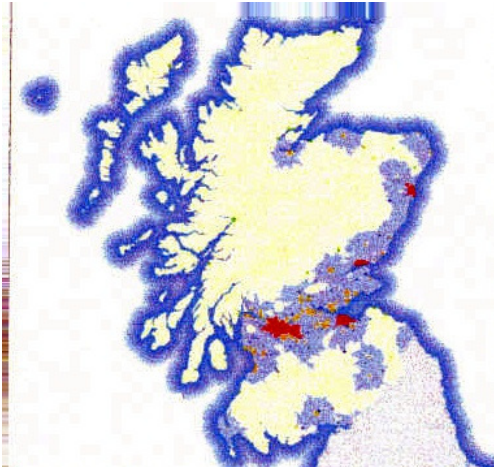


Figure 1 The map of Mainland Rural Scotland based on a Scottish Government urban rural classification (From Scottish Government's Rural Scotland Key Facts 2009)

Scottish Rural Geography

The above figure shows the mainland of Scotland and some of the western islands. Areas coloured purple are areas classified as accessible rural while the yellow represent what is classified by the Scottish Government as remote rural. This is clearly most (94%) of the land. The basis of the Government's classification is related to distance from major centres of habitation as this influences the ease or difficulty of providing services such as schools or hospitals and what is needed in respect of communication links. Rural Scotland is however home to almost 1million people or almost 20% of our population. On the basis of the proportion of our land area which is inhabited by a significant proportion of our total population we can conclude that most of our land mass and a significant proportion of our population are rural.

Rural Demography and Characteristics

Despite this and for the purpose of this exercise it remains important to ask whether either the geographic issues which relate to rural living or social and sociological issues mean that rural life is sufficiently removed from urban living so that our church needs to plan separately for such areas.

One of the key supports for the need to plan separately for rural is that the Scottish Government does precisely that and that it documents on an annual basis the various ways in which remote and accessible rural areas differ from the rest of Scotland both in terms of demography and the needs for and the provision of services. The 2009 edition of the Scottish Government's Rural Scotland Key Facts identifies the following as significant differences between urban and rural in areas where the differences are likely to have impact on the working of our church.

- Rural is the part of Scotland where during the past decade the population has been increasing most rapidly; over 5% in remote rural and over 10% in accessible rural. Most of these increases are due to migration from elsewhere in the UK particularly by those in the 25-60 age groups. Compared with those who live in urban areas rural Scotland has more people in the over 40 year age group. It is losing many more in the 16-24 year age group than is the case for urban areas. Life expectancy is higher for rural areas. For the period to 2030 rural areas will show the greatest increases in population. Data on this is presented in Rural Futures (pp5-8)
- Almost 1 in 2 people in remote rural areas and over 1 in three people in accessible rural areas is engaged in some form of voluntary work compared to a smaller % in urban areas. Households in accessible rural areas are more likely to recycle than those in the rest of Scotland.
- A higher proportion of houses in rural Scotland are rated as poor in energy efficient terms compared to urban areas and a corresponding higher percentage of households are classed as being in Fuel Poverty. Households in rural Scotland are more likely to have home internet access than the rest of Scotland but for many this will not be via broadband.
- In remote rural areas only 38% of people are within 15 minutes drive time by public transport from a GP, 63% from a post office and 20% from shopping facilities. In Rural households higher proportions have access to a car and around a third of the rural population spend £100 or more a month on fuel compared with 23% in urban Scotland.
- The public sector is the largest employment sector (19%) in rural areas but to a lesser extent than in urban areas (26%). Other major employment sectors are Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (14%, urban 0%) and Tourism via hotels (10%, urban 6%)

What then is rural?

In most sectors of activity rural differs from urban by degree rather than in absolute terms. The role of agriculture forestry and fishing is one of the few absolutes and so the buoyancy of rural areas will be affected in a significant way by any changes in the flow of income into these sectors such as by changes to the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). However a number of the areas where rural differs from urban in degree are among those likely to be significantly affected by Climate Change Legislation and by increases in the costs and availability of Energy. The current impact of remoteness can be illustrated by the following figure from the Food Standard Agency which shows the location of most food stores in Scotland with Super markets indicated in red. This closely parallels the Scottish Government's Urban Rural map. The distances involved and the distribution of population have inhibited the major supermarkets from populating many of our rural areas. If the supermarkets find such areas unattractive then life and associated costs will differ from that of most of our population and other organisations such as ourselves will experience many of

the same issues in attempting to serve such communities and like the retail sector we will need to devise different approaches.

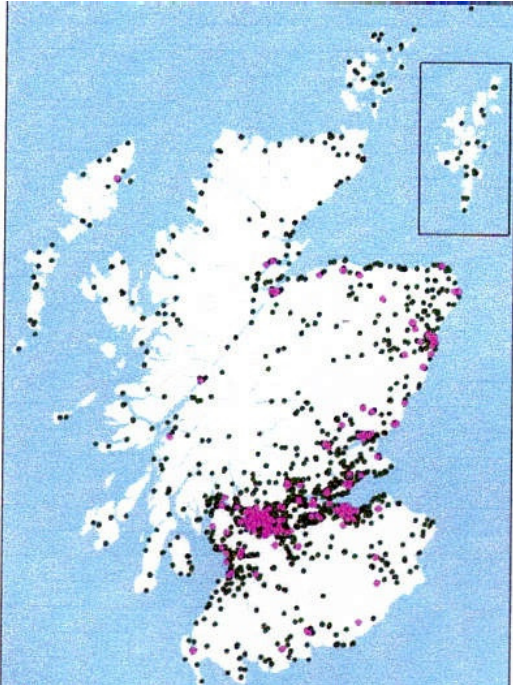


Figure 2 The distribution of different types of retail outlets in Scotland. (From the Food standard Agency)

The above facts are not the only difference between urban and rural. Important differences can be identified in the question, why are increasing proportions of our population; and of those migrating from elsewhere in the UK, choosing to come to live in our rural areas? Landscape and land use are absolute distinctive elements and give rise to a distinctive spirituality and also much which represents the basis of Natural Theology a subject recently reviewed by Rev. Prof Alister McGrath in his 2009 Gifford Lectures (A Fine Tuned Universe, Westminster John Knox Press). Unequivocally rural areas are dominated by clear evidence of God's Creation and by clear evidence of the presence and workings of natural forces. Clear evidence of human impact is limited. It matters that we plan to help those in rural areas with the difficulties which are a consequence of rural life but the impact of the key geographic features of the rural environment have potential to help us in mission planning for Scotland.

At a time of falling Church numbers (our total members in 2008 were 33.0% lower than those in 1991 and communicant numbers 23.0 % lower) but a remaining high interest in spiritual issues this represents a positive basis for a future church mission focus. It is this positive opportunity which has been the principle driver of the work of the commission. Rural areas represent an important mission field for the church but also provide a distinctive means of

feeding the spiritual needs of our whole population. As the Director General for Rural Futures in the Scottish Government said at the first of our events "Governments supervise regional economies that link rural suppliers with urban consumers so that the real need is for proper joined up strategies for whole regions so that both urban and rural people can benefit from what the other provides" (Richard Wakeford, Rural Futures, pp17-18) The challenge to our church must similarly be to get the best from this joined up approach.

The Rural World of 2025

The Rural Futures conference documented many of the changes we expect to occur in the coming decades. The principle issues identified and which seem likely to have an impact on how we need to prepare for the future were the following:

People in the rural community

- Over the next 10-20 years the population of Scotland is expected to continue to grow but with much of that growth occurring in Rural Scotland, especially accessible rural areas.
- The increase in the rural population will be both by migration and to some extent associated with a fall in the population of urban Scotland. While the population of Scotland as a whole is expected to grow by 0.5% that of accessible rural areas should grow by 2.0% and remote rural areas by 1.3%. Over the period to 2030 Perthshire and Aberdeenshire should grow in population by around 30%.
- There will also be significant changes in the make up of both urban and rural populations. In all areas the % of people in the 0-15 and 25-44 age groups will decrease. The % in the 45-59 and 60+ groups will increase especially in rural areas which will also see high levels of migration of those aged 16-24. In Aberdeenshire Argyll and Dumfries over 50% of household in 2030 will be headed by someone over 60. (Rural Futures, pp6-8)
- Volunteering is well established in rural areas with there being more volunteers and more voluntary organisations per capita than in urban areas. Most voluntary organisations are rooted in and responsive to their communities and play a key role in service delivery and advocacy. Networks whether analogue, such as village meeting places, or digital such as broadband are critical to the sustainability of rural life. (Rural Futures, pp 65-72)
- As a result many of the most promising targets for growing the church will be in some of our rural charges.

The role of the rural community and rural areas

- By 2030 there will be a need for a world wide increase of 35% in the quantity of agricultural products. This will need to be produced with a reduced output of green house gases and using a very similar land

area. There is an opportunity for rural Scotland to play its part in increasing its contribution to global food supply particularly as we expect to experience fewer of the downsides of climate change and in addition so that our projected population rise does not result in additional food being drawn to us from areas of greater need. (Rural Futures, pp10-12)

- The production of energy with a limited carbon footprint will become increasingly important. Sources of renewable energy are found primarily in rural communities especially in relation to wind and small scale hydro. There is also potential for an increase in forestry. (Rural Futures, pp16-17)
- Soil carbon reserves in Scotland represent almost 70% of the UK's total. In addition Scotland has around 1,000,000 ha of blanket bog which represents a further store of carbon. Managing these reserves is important and vital to Scotland's response to Climate Change. (Rural Futures, pp38)
- The rural landscape is home too much of our biodiversity. For Christians there is a moral duty to safeguard a significant element of God's creation. Biodiversity is both culturally and spiritually important. It is a major contributor to quality of life and vital to what are now termed ecosystem services. Currently protected sites cover 1.04 million ha, 13% of our land area. There are government targets for halting the loss of biodiversity which are unlikely to be met as a result of underinvestment and adverse development. As a result there has been a continuing decline in farmland birds since the 1970's. (Rural Futures, pp38-41)
- In the past rural areas have been significantly affected by the political process and by economic forces but with relatively little influence on either. The future development of rural business's will require legitimate investment in physical infra structure and IT networks and major efforts to connect rural and urban developments and to see the importance of regional development. (Rural Futures, pp17-19)
- There is a real role for the church to act as an advocate for the people of rural areas and for it to use its diocesan structure as a means of urging the wisdom of joined up urban –rural planning (Rural Futures, pp19)

The Challenges Facing Rural Communities

The changes identified above are both a mixture of factors which have been working over recent years e.g. the loss of young people from our rural communities and factors which are gathering increasing prominence e.g. the impact of Global Climate Change. While there are changes which seem likely to

result in problems there are others which seem likely to be the source of good news. The good news issues are dealt with in a later section of the report. Many of the challenging issues will have an impact on the whole of Scotland but some, because of its rural significance i.e. the implications of remoteness and hence the need to travel by car will have a particularly significant impact on rural communities. The key issues identified and which seem likely to lead on to indicating the need for how we provide church for rural communities were the following:

- There will be a series of major challenges to the way that rural industries work as a consequence of Climate Change. (Rural Futures, pp 11,28-33)
- Climate change will affect land use, especially in relation to the extent of afforestation and flood protection. There is a key role for the church to help put such actions into the context of the care of creation. (Rural Futures, 12-15, 36-38)
- An increasing scarcity of energy and the need to reduce carbon generation will affect both the ways in which we manage facilities and the potential for travel. If we are not to have to build around 50 new power stations then by 2050 we need to have reduced our energy use by a third. This can only be done by improvements in the energy efficiency of buildings and by significant reductions in all forms of travel. This will have a particularly harsh impact on rural communities (Rural Futures, pp 32-34)
- The farming industry which is currently under major financial pressure is likely to come under further pressure in 2013 as a result of the reform of CAP. It also faces major challenges related to Global climate change which seems likely to have a particularly heavy impact upon farming both in relation to the changed climate in which farming will be done and in making its share of changes so as to reduce carbon release. (Rural Futures, pp45-51) The church will need to provide support from those who are adversely affected by such changes. This support will be in relation to helping those facing and often adverse and radical change and helping an urban public to understand the place and contribution of new developments such as those related to biotechnology, changes in the visible landscape, the types of farming systems being practiced and the use of immigrant labour. (Rural Futures, pp 51-53)
- There are a significant number of environmental challenges related to the protection of biodiversity and carbon storage. How funding to rural areas from Government and EU should best be directed is a major issue; most current funding is directed to intensive agriculture. A different distribution of current funds could aid the delivery of environmental goods but potentially at the expense of food production which currently receives 68% of EU funding. Currently 9% goes to agri-environment schemes. There is poor correspondence between the distribution of red listed birds and the parts of Scotland which receive most EU funding. (Rural Futures, pp40-43)

The Challenges for Rural Church

The ways in which we seek to organise our rural churches will be influenced by our vision for the mission of the rural church. This includes issues related to church buildings but more challenging issues linked our role in communities and training for a changing mission task. It certainly will involve being seen to meet a series of environmental challenges, identifying our selves with local concerns and making a series of positive connexions with the community and ecumenically. Context and relationships are critically important. Diversity is a significant feature of rural. There is diversity in relation to the people, communities, culture, landscapes, economies, remoteness and religion. It is also important to identify some of the "elephants in the room". The largest of these are "Will there be a church here in 2025?" and "How can the church refind its place at the centre?"

Being at the centre of the community.

- We need to help promote the positive case for a vibrant rural community. The products from rural industries, e.g. Food, are important to those who live in urban areas. Urban Scotland needs Rural Scotland and should be content to see it's infra structure funded. (Rural Futures, pp18)
- The church needs to develop its social role and to serve the whole community but in doing this it must be more than just a new civic centre. However the ability of the church to be used as a community facility will be important. This may include the use of the church as a post office or a shop or as a social meeting place. It matters to ask what our church building says about what we believe about our God.(Rural Church:Eunson)

Equipping for future ministries

- The training needed by those who aim to have a ministry, lay or ordained, should cover some of the key issues related to the distinctive attributes of rural areas identified earlier in this report and particularly to issues such as the problems encountered by those who in later life move from urban to rural situations and the associated problems for the community in receiving such migrants who may come to reside in dormitory areas.(Rural Church:Eunson)
- Our theological institute (TISEC) has the potential to provide specific training for those who will minister in rural areas and currently has a significant focus on the ecumenical issues which are an important element in working in rural areas. The future role of TISEC has to be seen in the context of what constrains its ability to function in a wider rural context. The major constraints are meeting the needs of a valid academic frame work, the needs of the Anglican Communion and resources. The increased use of electronic technologies which is covered later in this report is likely to help to eliminate some of our current constraints. (Rural Church: Fuller)

- The rural context questions what we see as the role of the clergy today and how we see them as making a real difference. The isolation which is a feature of rural life can lead to limited support and to burn out. There would seem to be a real need to refind and to apply Moses (Exodus 18, 13-27) model of team working which will include a priesthood of all. An important element of this is the appreciation that volunteers are not staff and so it matters to clarify expectations and period of working. The role of the vestry in all this may need to be revisited. (Rural Church:Eunson)

Appropriate Liturgies

- Many of our small churches have their worship organised on the same basis as large churches or Cathedrals rather than taking advantage of the opportunities presented by serving a dedicated small community. This is particularly the case in respect of music. The rural situation will necessitate serving visitors as well as the indigenous population.(Rural Church: Paton)
- Where a number of churches are served by a single priest there may be advantage in having only occasional Eucharist's with most worship being services of the word and lead by appropriately trained lay leaders. This approach builds on the intimacy which is possible in small congregations. The place of and role of extended communion in the rural context needs to be reconsidered. (Rural Church: Paton)
- The rural situation helps an emphasis on the seasons of the church, events in the national year such as the start of the school year, exam time, mothering Sunday, holiday time and distinctive rural events during the year such as ploughing, sowing, rogation, harvest etc for which modified liturgies exist but may not be easy to find. (Rural Church: Paton)
- Developments in IT could help the provision of worship for those who are unable to travel to church either because of adverse weather or in the future because of restrictions on travel resulting from the cost or the availability of fuel. (Rural Church: Paton)

Resource use

- Environmental issues will be increasingly important in the rural agenda. Churches need to consider what they can do using their properties. Actions could include small scale wind power generation, carbon capture through perennial vegetation and aiding wildlife through appropriate land management. (Rural Futures, pp44)
- An increasing scarcity of energy and the need to reduce carbon generation will affect both the ways in which we manage churches e.g. heating, timing of services and the potential for travel to church. Different types of church activity e.g. more house church like formats, will be important. We make need to make provision for local people from out

- with individual denominations.(Rural Futures, pp34-35)
- The church will need to continue to be active in the Food Security and related debates. (Rural Futures, pp9-10)
- Tourism has the potential to bring new people, particularly as visitors, into our churches. As a means of developing our evangelism this needs to be explored. The churches have the potential to act as local visitor centres. (Rural Futures, pp51-52)

Using New Technologies

The use of new technologies such as broadband was raised in a number of the presentations we heard at all three events and so it seemed appropriate to deal with some of the issues in a distinct section. Broadband is available over much of Scotland but not always as a high speed service and not always in our more remote areas (Rural Futures, pp67-69) At best it can be the "death of distance leading to the end of peripherality and the development of a less urbancentric nation. The key issues which emerged in our discussion were as follows

- At the moment not every one has access to broadband. It will be some time before this is remedied.
- Web sites represent a good means of providing information and linked to discussion vehicles such as "blogs" can be a means of real discussion. Analysis of visits to web sites can provide guidance as to what interests its community.(Rural Church: Piper)
- Web sites can be used as a means of facilitating prayer and bible study
- The social software which is available currently has potential to reduce isolation, to provide mutual support to aid the sharing of ideas and even the building of real relationships. It is important to remember that around half of those in the 15-25 year age group know their best friend only through social networking.
- Voice over internet can provide a medium for small groups and meetings, home communions and even Sunday services. (Rural Church :Ross)

The Opportunities for Rural Communities and their Churches

The foresight exercise we conducted identified a number of ways in which there would be good news for those who live in rural communities. Rural areas can offer the wider community a sustainable supply of quality food, clean water supply, renewable energy, ecosystem services such as the ability to sequester carbon, a whole range of cultural assets and a good environment for an ageing population. As a consequence of population growth and climate change all of these seem likely to be increasingly valued. (Rural Futures, pp5, 20-21) Achieving this will be helped by the remaking of urban rural connections an area where the church can play an important role. All of the above seem in addition to

provide a basis for all to appreciate the importance of God's creation and of a spirituality which links to that. The principle areas of opportunity identified for both church and society and it seemed inappropriate to separate these were:

Planning our future

- The changed planning system both makes it easier for churches to become involved in and to take a leadership role. The planning concept of the valley section which links urban and rural in joined up planning is important. Taking advantage of planning opportunities needs churches to show that there is real value to be had by whole communities if planning permission is to be granted for new church buildings or a church development. Currently churches are regarded as being bad neighbours. Taking account of the opportunities requires us to accept an advocacy role in relation to the planning process.
- It is important the churches should understand how the planning system works as it will influence potential new church developments. To compensate for the downsides which are a result of any change it matters that churches understand the importance of community links. (Rural Futures, 22-26)

Partnerships in relation to the environment

- The environment and Green issues are a major area of debate in society. They are the source of many of the challenges to rural communities and rural church but they also offer the prospect of making links with others in society who share our concerns relating to respect for creation and our concerns about ecological issues on a global basis. There are real opportunities to develop our links with environmental faith groups such as "a Rocha" and "Earth Abbey" and to develop an approach to oikos which links economy, ecology and ecumenism (Rural Church Partnerships: Murray)
- There is currently potential for the church to move beyond a tick box approach to dealing with the environment and to focus on ecojustice, creation or ecotheology. (Rural Church Partnerships: Murray)
- The potential role of rural areas in relation to being a significant source of renewable energy in the future should give these areas the opportunity to have a significant voice in the energy debate. The church has an important part to play in this area. In the past the CofS Society Religion and Technology Project with its ecumenical basis exercised such a role. Changes to the SRT Project in recent years have precluded this role. There remain important points to be made. Free market economics alone will never be able to adequately address the environmental or human issues related to energy supply. There is need for major changes in our use of energy but for these to occur people will need real incentives which will need to be applied at points of use. (Rural Futures, pp27-35)

Tourism as an approach to mission

- In 2009 11.2 million visitors came to rural attractions in Scotland an increase of 2.8% on 2008. Over the period from 2000 to 2009 the numbers visiting rural places of worship increased by 11% compared with an increase of 9% for Scotland as a whole. This represents a real means of increasing the impact of the church but to be effective it needs to be considered as a real part of mission. Currently there are major issues related to places of worship being closed at times when visitors would like to make use of them. (Rural Futures, pp 53-57)
- There is a significant renewal of interest in pilgrimage as both a type of tourism and as an expression of spirituality. While historic built settlements commonly represent the start and completion of a journey much of a pilgrimage will be through rural areas and thus can require the provision of facilities by rural churches. A New exercise which involves the publication of maps of traditional pilgrimage and other rural routes and which is backed by Scottish Government should help both the regeneration of traditional routes which may have fallen into disuse and the establishment of new routes on the basis of a traditional long distance footpath. (Rural Church Partnerships: Cooke)
- In addition to long distance paths which may take a day or several days to cover there is also interest in journeying over a more limited area and distance so as to connect with God's Creation. We heard of the paths created on the Falkland estate in Fife which allow the visitation of historic buildings, walks with stops to reflect on particular ideas and the experiencing of natural features such as water falls as part of an approach to experiencing spiritual values through nature. (Rural Church Partnerships: Stuart)

Working with Others

One of the key elements which have come from the rural commission process is the identification of the need for the church to work both with other churches and with secular and commercial bodies and the willingness of many such bodies to work with the church. Some of the areas which we were able to identify during our work are detailed below:

Working with other Churches

- There are currently a number of examples of good practice in relation to working, in rural areas, with other denominations. Good practice exists both in relation to specific projects and more general examples of working together. During the work of the commission we heard of several of these which we suggest could provide useful models for work elsewhere. Specific examples include:

- The "Two Loch's Project in Lochaber involved 10 churches from 3 denominations coming together to provide and to resource a Christian youth worker the high school which served that area. (Rural Church: Rivers)
- Banff Churches together was an example of several churches from five denominations joining together in an area of above average unemployment and below average incomes to develop a joint approach to community involvement and worship. To date this has involved a shared web site, joint approaches to the press, joint approaches to and involvement in community activities and a co-ordinated approach to community worship occasions such as Holy Week, Remembrance Sunday and Seafaring Sunday. (Rural Church: Woodside)

Community issues

- Although the rural environment provides a good environment which is conducive to health there are a number of real health issues which link to age, isolation and to remoteness. Many of these relate to mental health. While initiatives such as Care farming show that being and working in the rural setting can help with stress and mental health issues the isolation which is also a feature of rural can accentuate other forms of stress related illnesses. Our own point of view affects what we see hear and do in a major way. There is a particular need for church to be involved in both re-active and pro-active pastoral care. There is a place for church to both work in partnership with the health service but also to act to help change unreasonable circumstances as it is an inability to cope with these which results in stress and to a personal feeling that they are "different". Christian theology which emphasises interdependence challenges views of the role of the individual. Rural Church Partnerships: L. Murray)
- The rural churches potential contribution to faith and community can help to meet two of the needs related to well being, the need to believe that my life has a purpose and the need to belong. This challenges us to identify whether our church building and our church community help to meet this need in our communities. Through doing this we can help to address issues related to inequality and suicides which is especially high in rural Scotland. (Rural Church Partnerships: L.Murray)
- There are also issues linked to poverty. This is a primary concern of RSABI, formerly the Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution with whom the church has had links since its formation in 1897 as a way of helping agricultural workers prior to the introduction of state pensions. RSABI provide financial help to those from land based occupations but they also increasingly provide friendship and regular visits i.e. pastoral care for those in the 70-90 age groups. (Rural Church Partnerships: Rennie)
- Education is critical to allow our heritage to help with preparation for the

- future. In rural areas many children need to leave their home area for education and perhaps to receive an education which does not sufficiently honour their rural or island heritage. This has been identified as a real problem for the Crofting counties. Crofting Connections is a programme which aims to develop the links between schools and our Crofting heritage. The components of the programme which relate to history, community, environment and language all provide areas where the church could develop its connections with Crofting. (Rural Futures, pp 58-64)
- Ministry training in our churches needs to include training for work in rural communities which must include an understanding of activities such as Crofting and of how it would be most appropriate for the church to engage. (Rural Church: Fuller)

Involvement with business

- Housing is both a social issue and a business. Housing associations are run as businesses but for social reasons and are a major player in the provision of housing for those needing a home. As part of the work of the commission we heard of the work of Albyn Housing Association who are one of around 200 such associations active in Scotland and most of whom are charities working under the same rules as apply to Building Societies. Albyn manages over 2,500 properties for rent and has a further 200 properties in shared ownership. Shared equity schemes are important for first time buyers in rural situations In rural Scotland homelessness is frequently hidden as rooflessness is a small proportion of the total but there are many in unsecure, overcrowded or bad accommodation predominantly as a result of the breakdown of relationships. The ability of housing associations to help the rural homeless is restricted by the availability of land for building small housing complexes. A potential role for churches is the release of land not required for this purpose. However there is also a need for the churches to help in lobbying for such approaches to meeting the needs of the homeless and to the running of Homelessness Sundays.(Rural church Partnerships: Nairn)
- The rural Post Office has traditionally been a place of meeting for rural communities and the basis for providing a range of other services for both the local community and for visitors. In recent years as a financial economy Government has closed many rural Post Offices on the basis of a % of the population formula which tends to work against the rural situation. As a result of such closures it has become an option for Churches to provide a home for Post offices as a service to the community. Examples of churches where this has occurred provide helpful guidance to where this is appropriate and to how it might be done by others.(Rural Church partnerships; Davidson)
- Food is one of the essentials of life. It is something which provides a clear

connection between creation and our faith. However food is more expensive in rural areas and not uncommonly of indifferent quality. As with Post Offices this is a need which Churches can help to meet by working with organisations such as the Co-operative Group who have extensive experience of community retailing. Current schemes both allow access to discounted food purchases for community groups such as churches and help in setting up community retailing enterprises. (Rural Church Partnerships: Justad)

Continuing relationships with others

- Those who attended the various conferences organised as part of the commission have been enthusiastic about the opportunity to meet and to discuss issues related to the rural situation. There is a clear role for the church in continuing to provide such opportunities.

Conclusions and Resolutions for General Synod

In its work the Rural Commission has identified a range of both challenges and opportunities for our rural churches. It would be fair to say that we began our work impressed by the problems which seemed likely to beset our rural communities but during the course of our work we have been able to identify so many opportunities both for the church to meet real and significant needs and for real growth in both numbers and impact and so we complete this task with a sense of genuine excitement as to the opportunities for mission that rural Scotland provides.

Resolution 1 Synod accepts the report of the rural commission and commends it to its boards and committees and to Diocesan mission Committees for further study

Resolution 2 Synod asks the liturgy committee to investigate the feasibility of pulling together into one place liturgies, especially those related to the word, focused on natural and rural seasons as a means of providing a resource for rural congregations.

Resolution 3 Synod mindful of the significant changes with a major impact on rural societies which are likely to occur in the foreseeable future requests its representatives on the Scottish Churches Rural Committee to keep it informed of those developments likely to need action by the SEC.

Resolution 4 Synod conscious of the need to continue working with other denominations requests the Scottish Churches Rural Committee to consider the value of running an annual conference dealing with emerging rural Issues

Resolution 5 Synod conscious of the developing interest in rural pilgrimage requests its members on the Scottish Churches Rural Committee to encourage that committee to make the development of rural pilgrimage one of its priorities for action.

Resolution 6 Synod commends to rural charges the importance of identifying and documenting organisations active in its area with whom it should be meeting on a regular basis

Resolution 7 Synod requests the Ministry development officer to consider the ways in which training for those intending to work in rural areas might be most effectively provided.

Resolution 8 Synod recognising the importance of Broadband as a vital means of communication in rural areas requests the Mission and Ministry Board to urge upon Scottish Government the importance of having high speed Broadband links available to all areas of Scotland in the near future.

Resolution 9 Synod recognising the role which electronic communication could have in the mission of our church requests the Information and Communication Board to identify ways in which our churches might best be helped to use technologies such as Broadband in their mission works.

Appendix 1

The programmes of the three conferences held as part of the Rural Commissions work.

Rural Futures, 9th December 2009, 121 George St, Edinburgh

Opening comments Rt Rev Mark Strange, Bishop of Moray, Ross and Caithness

OUR RURAL WORLD NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.

Strategies for the Future Rural World. Richard Wakeford, Director General Rural Futures, Scottish Government

Planning for Rural Scotland 2010-2025

Veronica Burbridge, Royal Town Planning Institute in Scotland

BIG PICTURE ISSUES

Energy in 2025: what the world and Scotland *may* look like, in terms of energy use and supply

Donald Bruce, Edinethics

The Impact of Environmental Concerns on the Rural Landscape. Stewart Housden, Director, RSPB Scotland

RURAL ACTIVITIES AND EMPLOYMENT

Rural Futures – Looking towards 2025. What will farming look like?
Ken Rundell SAC Edinburgh

The Future Face of Rural Tourism.
Riddell Graham, Visit Scotland

FUTURE RURAL COMMUNITIES

Education as a Means of Integrating our Heritage into Planning for the Future.
Pam Rodway, Soil Association, Edinburgh

Networks and Connections in Rural Scotland.
Norman MacAskill, SCVO, Inverness

Being Rural Church in 2025, 20th February, Inverness.

Introduction to the day and key points from the "Rural Futures" Event

Liturgy.
Ian Paton, Old St Paul's, Edinburgh.

Church Structures.
Lisa Eunson, St Ternan's, Banchory, Aberdeenshire

Information Technology.
Cliff Piper, St John's Forres, Moray and Jane Ross, St Clements, Aberdeen

Training for Rural Ministry.
Michael Fuller. TISEC, Edinburgh

Ecumenical Issues.
John Woodside., Roman Catholic Church, Banff, Aberdeenshire and Jeremy Rivers, Lochaber, Argyll.

The Rural Church: Working in Partnership in 2025, 13th March, The Acorn Centre, Inverurie.

Introduction and review of the relevant key issues from "Rural Futures"

Green Theology. Richard Murray, St Anne's, Kemnay

Poverty and Health. Lorna Murray, Inverurie, (Faith group's representative with Choose Life) and Henk Rennie (RSABI).

Housing. Robin Nairn, Albyn Housing, Inverness.

Business. Nancy Davidson, Church of Scotland, Tannadice (Post Offices) and Tor Justad The Co-operative Group, Inverness

Pilgrimage Nick Cooke, Clear Services and Ninian Stuart, Falkland Estate, Fife.

Appendix 2

The principal points made by the papers presented at the Rural Futures Conference held in December 2009 were as follows:

Richard Wakeford: pp 3-21

- We have a tendency to focus on the negatives of rural living. – Everything is seen as a problem but there are many advantages and opportunities offered to those living rurally and we should try to adopt a more positive approach to rural life.
- While the world drives towards economic growth the feeling is often that people should move out of rural areas, but how would urban life survive without the essential rural input? Where would urban life be without its rurally grown vegetables, meat, water, energy? We should aim to get the rural area valued more in today's world.
- In the period since 2000 the general population of the country has increased with the biggest change seen in accessible rural areas. Looking at change by age shows people coming into these rural areas falling into the 'over 45' age group with younger (16 – 24) people leaving. This is most apparent in the Western Isles.

Food Challenge:

- The 2% increase expected in global temperature will effect food growth and production through floods and drought and other constraints are in measures to be more bio diverse which means restriction in yield and more animal disease. This delivers a huge challenge in producing enough food for all. As food prices continue to come down more and more work in needed to produce what we consume.

Climate Change

- Land use is likely to be restricted with climate change. While Scotland's climate is expected to improve in the next 20 years, what will follow from that is not good news. There will be heavier rain and more flooding. We can build on Fair Trade and we can plant and grow. We also need more people championing the rural scene. Economics tends to be based on

cities while politics tends to be rural or urban creating the foundations of misunderstanding as no one has the full picture.

Veronica Burbridge: pp 22-26

- Planning has a leadership role in the rural landscape through local government, development companies and government bodies. The new system on planning has made it easier for people to be involved in the processes along the way.
- The Scottish Planning Policy is to enable development in all rural areas which supports prosperous and sustainable communities, while protecting and enhancing rural quality of life.
- Many other planning issues are addressed in housing, energy efficiency, community services, regeneration, transport, protection of natural heritage and the historic and cultural environment.

Stuart Housden: pp 36-44

- Scotland is 90% rural and/or agricultural land. The support mechanisms in force for rural life have remained since the 2nd world war despite massive changes to the rural scene.
- The biggest challenge facing the rural scene is in climate change and tremendous effort will be needed if we are to achieve the less than 2% change in emissions target by 2010. Scotland's agriculture is a huge emitter of green house gases,
- One of the biggest challenges is water and flooding. We need to take on new ways to deal with drainage and flood prevention – we need a different approach to the way in which we deal with land.
- We have a moral duty to protect birds and wildlife, biodiversity is important. Many of the subsidies of land management support and related services go to the east of the country while most of the birdlife is situated elsewhere.
- Across Europe the money spent on rural development is interesting. Finland tops the list which Scotland comes last. Northern Ireland gets twice as much as Scotland. Yet Scotland has a rich biodiversity, with large areas of high nature value farmland. Funding will be further at risk after 2013 as the European finance is keen to cut the agricultural spend. Without funds land managers can't deliver environment management.

Donald Bruce: pp 27-35

- The ways in which energy is generated need to be rethought with an increased emphasis on the use of renewables which will have an environmental and visual impact. The Nuclear question can not be avoided.
- How we use energy is also important. Reducing the energy needs of buildings is important. This will be affected by the frequency of their use,

their design and decisions on temperature standards.

- Transport is a key energy user. The ability to travel is likely to decline over the foreseeable future.
- Co2 emissions from the use of energy will also be important and will change rural industry profiles.

Ken Rundle : pp 45-53

- A continual, relentless change in climate will take place over a period of time, season by season. It will become hotter and drier in the east and wetter in the west but Scotland will fare better than many being part of the 'northern arc' which spreads over Scandinavia but even this will bring challenging conditions.
- Much of Scotland's land is ideal for growing timber and a call by the government for more planting has been made.
- The world's grain stock are mainly in balance at the moment but it won't take much to change the balance either way. Volatile price increases and uncertainty is on the horizon.
- The control of flood water, temporarily using floodplains as just that – letting them flood to protect communities may become common but there may be a question about just how much land will be available for this.
- The changes will force lifestyle changes for everyone.

Scotland's rural communities are 98% white. Can the rural communities adjust to migrant labourers settling in their villages and communities?

Riddell Graham: pp 53-57

- Tourism brings £4.2 billion to Scotland's economy. It provides 200,000 jobs, 20,000 diverse businesses bringing opportunities for all and it has the advantage of being unable to be moved to a Mumbai Call Centre.
- The main attractions to Scotland are its scenery, its castles, churches and historic sites. The number of rural places of worship visited has gone up on the previous year.
- The impression given to the tourist is everyone's responsibility. Another disadvantage is the need to tell and sell, something we are not too good at.
- Lack of public transport in rural areas
- Rising fuel costs (especially in rural areas)
- Church buildings could be used for lots of community services. Scottish communities may need help to adapt.

Pam Rodway: pp 58-64

- The 2007 Highland Homecoming saw a project in Crofting Topics included in the project were:
- History of Crofting

- Food history – collection of local recipes
- Housing – looking at future housing
- Encouraging local awareness and a sense of pride
- Growing traditional crops and vegetables on crofts
- Fruit growing and gathering: Crofts rich in rhubarb and gooseberries
- Looking at sea crofts
- Language of the community, differences in local dialects
- Songs, Stories, arts, crafts, poetry and photography all locally sourced.

Norman MacAskill: pp 65-72

- Network connections are vital in rural Scotland. The Village Halls website supports those with problems in maintenance of their village halls.
- High Speed broadband connect is an essential tool for modern life used greatly by those living in rural Scotland, however, broadband coverage is essentially provided to urban Scotland on the central belt and the east. Many areas in the north and west have little or no coverage and it's ironic that those rural places that need the service most can't access it while those living in areas where access is not considered a lifeline have the best service. Barriers to access are not only in availability but also in training and support.