

Consultation Title: Consultation on a new Enterprise Agency for the South of Scotland

Date: 07/06/2018

To: Citizen Space

From: Scottish Land & Estates

Telephone: 0131 653 5400

E Mail: gavin.mowat@scottishlandandestates.co.uk

Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) is a member organisation that uniquely represents the interests of both land managers and land-based businesses in rural Scotland. SLE has a number of members with interests the South of Scotland and we therefore welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

Specific questions

Q1. Do you agree with our ambition outlined above?

As a 'once in a lifetime opportunity', SLE considers that the ambitions could be more 'visionary'. Key to this more visionary ambition is the opportunity to consolidate funding support under the Agency, thereby simplifying the current economic development support landscape which is seen by many as unnecessarily bureaucratic and confusing. The Agency must act as an enabler to clear roadblocks that deter investment – it should not seek to micromanage individual sectors.

The ambitions outlined at 2.5 are generally agreeable. In the first bullet point SLE agrees that it should be an ambition to create businesses with increased productivity, but we consider this could be strengthened by including an ambition to see an increase in value added productivity. It is our view that adding value to what is produced will enable the aims of investment in innovation, further delivery of good employment conditions and higher wages to be achieved more readily.

We agree with the ambition for a skilled workforce with both skills needed now, and the ability to develop the skills needed for the future. Access to a skilled workforce is a key barrier to many of our members' businesses and the ability of any future agency to enable training facilities to be located nearer the source of employment would be welcomed. However, wider issues of access to broadband and affordable and regular transport links will also need to be addressed if young people are to be encouraged to stay in the region and become that skilled workforce.

The third bullet also relates to young people being attracted back through available opportunities and the South being a place where people want to live. Transport, broadband, access to facilities – these are all key to making a place attractive to want to live in and therefore we consider the agency should have a role as a statutory consultee in the

planning system. Creating opportunities for young people means enabling and empowering businesses to do so.

We agree that communities should be better equipped to play a greater role in the economic, social and environmental success of their area. This should be done through investing in sustainable community initiatives which can demonstrate sound business planning – thereby making communities more resilient.

Taking a holistic look at barriers to inclusive growth and tackling and addressing them is a fair ambition to include. While much of the aspirations that have already been mentioned will help in achieving this, our members also note that the provision of housing should be considered an important economic activity relevant to achieving these aims.

A consistent ask from SLE members is that this new agency brings with it flexibility to meet new challenges and changing demands and that decisions made by the Agency should not get overly bogged down in bureaucracy.

Q2. What would you like to see for the South of Scotland?

SLE has a diverse membership with many different interests across the South of Scotland. Given that, we consider it appropriate to restrict our comment here to general points rather than specific desires – those we can leave to individual members to articulate.

Broadly speaking we would like to see wider prosperity with an economy based on a rich diversity of resilient sectors that can cope with new challenges. In delivering this, the Agency must bring flexibility to its delivery of funding and support for local businesses of every shape or size.

More specifically, SLE considers that traditional land based sectors to be the bedrock of the South's economy and as such they should be adequately supported by the Agency as a priority so that they may continue to survive and thrive. The consultation notes that "young people are less likely to stay in or move to the South of Scotland than they are other parts of the country" and SLE members in the south would like to see this change. To achieve this the area needs attractive places as well as attractive opportunities.

Q3. What are your ambitions for the future economic success of the South of Scotland?

Similarly, keeping to general terms, SLE would consider support from a flexible Agency delivering economic success to a diverse mix of thriving business that create opportunities for young people in particular. Success could be measured by an increase in value being added locally, for example a company using local timber to construct bespoke huts for farm diversification into tourism.

SLE agrees with the 3 general aims of the Agency as outlined at 3.2. However, the first bullet could be re-phrased to place the emphasis on supporting a diverse and resilient economy that delivers inclusive growth.

Q4. What are the strengths you would like to see the Agency build on?

SLE was pleased to hear the interim South of Scotland Partnership recognise the importance of traditional sectors such as farming, forestry, tourism and hospitality at the

consultation events. For our members, these, and other land based businesses, should be central to the work of the Agency. Employment opportunities in many rural areas in the South are hard to come by so supporting these sectors which rely on the one ever present asset – land, is vital (especially with the uncertainty of Brexit looming). By enabling and empowering these traditional sectors, there are positive knock-on effects for other areas, for example more opportunities around innovation in energy (anaerobic digestion, district heating etc.) arise, as do opportunities for other industries such as logistics, construction and life sciences etc. SLE therefore considers land based businesses to be the key area of strength in the South of Scotland that the Agency should build on.

Our members are also active in supporting education and training initiatives for school children and those in further education, including outdoor education, leadership and confidence building, food, farming and horticulture etc. This is an area that will require particular attention from the Agency if it is to successfully tackle the problem of retaining and attracting young people to the area.

Q5. What are the economic challenges you would like to see the Agency address?

The overarching challenge is to encourage the expansion of existing businesses and bring new businesses to the South of Scotland in a period of economic austerity – the Agency should provide an active supporting role.

Access to skilled workforce is a problem for many SLE members in the South. To retain or attract workforce there needs to be access to broadband, transport, education and training, housing, facilities and more besides. The rural nature of the vast majority of the region can weaken the business case for broadband providers or universities to make capital investment in infrastructure to provide facilities, for example, and this is where the Agency can deliver additional support.

Other broad challenges that should be considered by the Agency include, the impact of the loss of LEADER schemes to rural projects, and the impact Brexit will have on farm support in particular. The Agency will have a key role to play in enabling businesses affected by these changes to diversify and become more resilient.

The Agency needs the flexibility to target support in areas where there will be gaps in the future. Much of these challenges outlined are linked to the planning system and SLE would therefore like to see the Agency become a statutory consultee on major planning decisions where necessary.

Q6. What currently works well in the South of Scotland?

Entrepreneurs in the South of Scotland have successfully used the land asset in the area to create employment opportunities and prosperity in the region. For example, traditional sectors such as forestry and fishing are well known throughout the country and beyond. This success and promotion has been down to the energy and dynamism of those individual businesses building on their natural assets.

Q7. What would you add or take away from the potential activities that the Agency could carry out across the three areas:

a) Drive forward the economy;

This should be a crucial element of the Agency's work. SLE broadly agrees with the

points raised in 5.9, however, we consider that ensuring greater value is added to local productivity should also be included.

b) Sustain communities; and

SLE agrees with the points in 5.11

c) Capitalise on people and resources

SLE agrees with the points in 5.14 and we believe that the points in 5.15 are crucial in attaining the Agency's goals. SLE believes it would be worth explicitly stating broadband and mobile coverage would be a focus improving the digital economy.

Q8. What would you prioritise as the key areas of activity for the Agency?

In broad terms, for SLE members the overarching priority for the Agency should be in driving forward the economy. There should also be a focus on developing and retaining a skilled workforce in the area. This work should include the points covered in 5.9 and 5.14 as well as a commitment to increasing value added productivity, but the activities noted in 5.15 will be key in delivering all areas of work. In relation to this, some of our members highlighted the poor condition of the main A roads as a key area that needs urgent attention.

SLE considers that the new Agency should prioritise championing the cause for the South of Scotland to get some form of 'assisted area status' within Scotland or the UK context (as is afforded to Highlands & Islands by EU, for example). This is particularly important as Brexit is likely to impact heavily on the South of Scotland with its largely rural dependant economy.

Q9. What specific things could the Agency do to help you, your business, your sector or your community?

Given the wide range of businesses and sectors our membership represents, SLE is not in a position to answer this directly.

Q10. What could the Agency do outwith its boundaries working with other local authorities or with agencies like Highlands and Islands Enterprise to support specific projects which benefit the South of Scotland and with national agencies?

Ideally, the Agency will not work in isolation on any issue that has the potential to impact or be impacted on by any other area. Key areas of co-operation should be sought, for example, with the Borderlands Initiative and Edinburgh, Glasgow and their respective surrounding areas. Partnership working should be encouraged between the Agency and other organisations such as Scottish Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council and Visit Scotland. Whilst we encourage partnership working, for the avoidance of confusion it should always be clear that the new Agency will be the place to go to for funding or support.

Q11. Which option, either from the list above or your own suggestion, do you think offers the best way to ensure the Agency is accessible to all across the South of Scotland?

Services should ideally be delivered through a combination of a hub and spoke model and digital delivery of services where possible (recognising the intermittent nature of access to broadband).

Q12. Which criteria should be used in researching a decision about the location of the Agency?

See above comments on connectivity in relation to digital delivery of services. The 'hub' should be in central location which is considered accessible by as large a population as possible. The 'spokes' should cover areas that would not consider the 'hub' accessible.

Q13. If you were to use the services of this Agency, what factors are important to you in terms of reaching it? (This might relate to the location itself, to transportation links, or to proximity to other services, or digital delivery, for example.)

N/A

Q14. What sort of people should be on the Board of the Agency and what sorts of skills and experience should they have?

The board should comprise a wide range of people with largely private sector experience that reflects the diverse nature of the economy of the South of Scotland.

Q15. We know that young people are less likely to stay in or move to the South of Scotland than they are other parts of the country. Do you have any comments on things the Agency could do to meet the interests of children and young people?

This is key to the future success of the region. Land based businesses must be supported in the delivery of opportunities for work/apprenticeships for young people. As mentioned above, SLE members are active in supporting education initiatives including the work of RHET (Royal Highland Education Trust) who facilitate farm visits, classroom speakers, resources, projects and events etc throughout Scotland.

Q16. In delivering opportunity and growth in the South of Scotland, how can the Agency:

- Promote equality for people who share one or more protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010;
- Combat discrimination; and
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not?

No strong view on this.

Q17. Do you have any other comments on how the Agency might address specific needs?

No additional comments.

Q18. We want to make sure that the Agency works effectively with a wide range of key stakeholders/partner agencies to ensure that inclusive growth also enables

positive social and environmental outcomes. Do you have any comments on how this should work in practice?

No strong view.

Q19. Do you have any other thoughts on powers that the Agency will need?

As previously suggested SLE is of the opinion that the Agency should be a statutory consultee in planning process and it should fully participate in the strategic and local development planning stages. This will enable the Agency to better address the issues raised in 5.15 of the consultation such as supporting the development and regeneration of towns and town centres.

Q20. Is there anything else you wish to say about the operation of the Agency?

N/A