

# Rural Wisdom in Scottish Borders

## Information note December 2018



## About this note

- This is an update on Rural Wisdom and the work that is planned for early-mid 2019 in Scottish Borders.
- It is a note from the Get Together on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2018 at the MacArts Centre in Galashiels.

## What is Rural Wisdom?

Rural Wisdom is a 5 year community development and shared learning project based at Outside the Box that explores the impact of community-based activities that are led by older people living in rural areas. It has been designed to benefit people across the UK. The project is funded by Big Lottery as part of the Accelerating Ideas programme and runs from 2017 to 2022.

These are the outcomes Rural Wisdom aims to achieve:

- More older people, and a more diverse range of older people, have a stronger voice.
- Older people have the opportunity for more social connections in their communities.
- There are more activities that are led by older people and are co-produced in the community, and older people get support from them.
- People of all ages are part of creating communities that work well for older people.
- Older people in rural areas are contributing to local and national policies and initiatives.

There are 4 elements to Rural Wisdom.

- Working alongside people in local areas in Scotland and Wales, to encourage more community-based supports and local services that are led by older people, and take forward other issues that are important to people living there.
- Networks in Scotland and Wales, to bring together people from any area who are interested and want to share what they are doing.
- Linking up with people in other parts of the UK who are interested in these issues.
- Evaluating the impacts of what we do.
- Outside the Box leads the work in Scotland and co-ordinates the overall project, Volunteering Matters Cymru leads the work in Wales and the National Development Team for Inclusion leads the evaluation work.

The locations in Scotland for the first stage of the project are the area around Aberfeldy and Kinloch Rannoch in Highland Perthshire, the Brechin and Edzell area in North Angus, and Eaglesham and Waterfoot in East Renfrewshire.

The first areas will now support the new areas that begin in 2019. People in Borders and Moray asked if they could be the Rural Wisdom Stage 2 areas and we are starting to talk to people here about how Rural Wisdom can work in these areas.

In Wales, the first areas are Leeswood and Pontblyddyn in Flintshire and the area around Milford Haven in Pembrokeshire. People here will be supporting the new areas in Wales.

## **What we have been hearing so far?**

The areas in both Scotland and Wales are very different from each other but common themes have been coming through from every area.

### ***Where people live***

Older people in rural areas are proud of where they live. They want to be part of making this a great place for them and for other people in that community, both now and for the future. Older people are making a contribution in their communities and they want to continue as they have more health problems and other difficulties. We have been sharing experiences and ideas on ways for older people to keep taking on informal and formal volunteering roles, and ways to encourage younger people and people who are new to the area to get involved.

Transport is an issue for people in every area. There is limited – and sometimes no – public transport and it becomes even more of a problem for people who are not able to drive. But some areas have a good range of community transport options and people in other areas are exploring new options that are a mix of community transport and contributions from other partners.

Keeping local shops going is important. But some older people are finding it harder to get there or get round the shop or get shopping home. Few shops in these areas will deliver shopping, so people turn to on-line shopping from supermarkets. But this puts the local shops at risk, which is not what people want. People want to be part of finding a solution to this situation and local businesses are working with older people in social areas to find new approaches.

Housing has a big impact on whether people can stay in the place they know as their circumstances change. Some places have a good mix of housing and in other areas people are looking at how to create more options. Problems here contribute to rural areas declining while getting it right helps make them flourish and be sustainable.

### ***Being heard***

People are weary of formal consultations, especially when they don't hear what the outcome was and nothing seems to happen as a result. But they are happy to have tea and a blether when they can talk about what is good about their area, what works well, what could be better and how they can contribute to making it happen.

We have been trying different approaches to meeting people and hearing their views and experiences. Public bodies and other voluntary organisations are finding that the points we are hearing helps them too, as it brings out issues and ideas that are not heard through other routes.

## ***Social spaces and keeping connected***

Access to local halls and other spaces for community groups to meet and run activities is becoming an increasing problem in some places. The charges for publicly-owned halls have had big increases in some areas and many groups there cannot afford that. The result is no or fewer community-led activities, which leaves older people and others more socially isolated. We are working alongside local people to find ways to solve this – finding more income for community groups and looking for ways to talk to the organisations that manage halls about their charging policies. In other places, village halls are sharing what they are doing with neighbouring communities, to give people more choices and help keep the halls viable.

Shops and business such as cafes and post offices are also important as another type of social space, which is another reason why people want to see them continuing.

A priority for many older people in rural areas is being part of creating more activities that bring together the whole community, where people get to know each other and enjoy doing something together. We have been developing new activities that bring together people of different ages, including film projects, dances, crafts sessions and learning sports.

## ***Getting support***

There are some great new approaches getting going in rural areas for people who need care and support. There are also people who are struggling to get support when traditional ways of organising services are not working in rural areas. This includes people not being able to get the information and advice they need to even get started talking about the support they need.

In Perthshire there is a spin-off project to develop a new approach to providing independent information and advice to people living in rural areas, which is getting fully underway in early 2019.

One of our key aims is to share all the great approaches that are being taken with the other areas and the rest of Britain and to work alongside people and communities to tackle the issues and learn what works. People from Scotland are going to a workshop in Pembrokeshire to share what we are each doing, and we regularly sharing examples to a network of rural communities across the UK.

## **Discussion**

People at the Get Together session thought much of this rings true for the Borders also. We also talked about solutions to challenges that people here are finding which could be shared with other places.

- Services are based in Galashiels or other main towns and it is often difficult for people from outlying areas to attend these services – same challenges

here as in the other rural areas, including appointment times that don't take account of where people live and how they travel.

- NHS medical appointments take up so much of the available community transport that not much capacity for social use of the transport in the way that was originally intended. But people are working on solutions to the problems.
- Many of the village halls are under used currently and it is difficult to sustain all the buildings. Some places are more active with a good range of community activities, and there are opportunities to do more.
- More work, support and conversations are needed to ensure we can keep people with higher needs in their own communities rather than taking them to new environments.

People thought we need to ask different questions, to get different conversations going and open up different solutions. What do you do during the day? How do you use your buildings? What will help older people and families cope and have a good life?

There are ways in which Rural Wisdom can complement and support activities and planned developments in Borders.

- Some communities are looking at new developments based around a place – resources and activities that work for the whole community. Rural Wisdom can be part of the conversations about what will work for everyone there.
- There are ideas from the work that Outside the Box is doing through Food Buddies and Happiness Habits.
- The Recovery College and Rural Wisdom can work together to look at what supports the mental health and wellbeing of older people in outlying areas.
- It's always worth revisiting ideas that worked well but ended when funding ran out, or which worked in one area but did not spread. Can we revisit and tweak any ideas or initiatives to make them work well today and in the future?
- It would be good to have more opportunities to share what people are already doing and planning. The current arrangements focus on the way public services are organised which encourages some conversations about what happens in Localities but misses what is happening in other parts of Borders. Rural Wisdom can bring together people from across Borders as well as supporting what happens in local areas.

## What's next?

We have a 6-9 month period when we talk to different groups, communities and people in Borders who have an interest in making communities better for older people. By summer 2019 we will review what we have heard and decide how rural

Wisdom can work in Borders - if we focus on one area in the same way as for the Stage 1 areas, or if we do it differently here. We can be guided by the people living and working in the Scottish Borders.

There are lots of good things happening in the Scottish Borders we would like to hear about and share with other communities.

Please invite us along to groups, meetings, events or anything you think will help us speak to the right people.

### **Contact**

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### **More information**

There are updates from the other areas and activities in the Rural Wisdom project.

Useful publications include:

- An initial report from each area, describing what we heard
- A Year On update for each of the Scottish areas
- Tips for getting people involved
- Newsletters and updates, for example on Housing and on Transport issues in Highland Perthshire, and on the development of ideas around an Information Hub in Brechin.

[www.otbds.org](http://www.otbds.org)

[www.ruralwisdom.org](http://www.ruralwisdom.org)