

McCracken, D. 2021. Radical change needed on land use economics. *Press & Journal*, 30<sup>th</sup> August 2021.  
<https://www.pressreader.com/similar/282114934672086>

## Radical change needed on land use economics

I have been involved in a wide range of discussions over the years about the type of land use change we need to see in Scotland if we are to stand any chance of achieving Net-Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.

The Scottish Ecological Design Association (SEDA) is a network of around 350 members which links those seeking ecological information and services with those who provide them.



They aim to share knowledge, skills and experience of ecological design, encourage sustainable thinking and promote environmentally proactive behaviour.

Earlier this year, SEDA hosted a series of six online Conversations to establish a new vision for land use in Scotland. Each focused on a different aspect of how land is used, and how it could be better used, in Scotland.

Collectively, these Conversations addressed topics such as biodiversity, food production, renewable energy, health and well-being, with the aim of identifying opportunities for cross-sector initiatives which deliver across a wide range of policy areas.

I worked with SEDA colleagues to produce a report – published last week – which provides an overview of the discussions and debates during these events.

One of the recurring themes which struck me was how divorced current farming and forestry policies are from the wider needs of rural areas and wider rural communities.

Both are major land uses but they actually support relatively few jobs locally, and too often communities feel disenfranchised from decisions about land use in the landscape around them.

In fact what we need in our rural areas is more opportunities for new and innovative businesses to become established, either drawing on existing resources in the landscape or having the ability to create and manage those resources themselves.

Indeed, given how sparsely populated much of our rural areas are then rewilding, reforestation and re-peopling should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Rather, we need to consider how best to obtain multiple benefits for local communities and the environment from these approaches.

Hence, much more coordinated policymaking is required to promote better, more productive and more financially rewarding uses of the land, skills development, job creation, re-peopling and community building.

That begs the question as to whether Scotland's Land Use Strategy - and the work of the new Regional Land Use Partnership pilots - will help address all of the recurring themes which arose in the 6 Conversations?

The conclusion in the report is that the strategy in isolation will not be enough to tackle the many and varied 'elephants in the room' identified through the SEDA Conversations.

This is particularly true of those not directly related to, or influenced by, land use policy with a capital 'P', but nonetheless heavily influenced by the land uses they promote.

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If the strategy is not enough on its own, what more needs to be done to move from simply talking about the need for land use change in Scotland to actually facilitating it on the ground?

An unequivocal message from the 6 Conversations is that there is a need for radical change in how Scotland's land is used and in how it supports local, regional, national economies and food systems.

It is also clear that a 'single policy, single outcome' approach does not address the needs of rural areas. What is needed urgently is cross-sector policies which are integrated and can deliver across a broad set of issues.

SEDA hopes that the Conversations will move the debate out of the silos of traditional entrenched thinking, opening up new ways of discussing the opportunities for increasing economic, social and environmental benefits from changing patterns of land use in Scotland.

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