



Borderlands Post-Conference Newsletter

July 2018





The first Borderlands Conference took place in Dumfries on Monday 18 June 2018 and gathered together more than 370 businesses, community groups and individuals with national and local politicians to discuss progress on this unique proposal.

The conference was addressed by Keith Brown MSP the former Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, and the UK Government's David Mundell MP, Secretary of State for Scotland and Jake Berry MP the Northern Powerhouse Minister. They highlighted the vital importance of this Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal for the future economic development of the area and its importance in complementing other initiatives such as the South of Scotland Enterprise Agency and North East of England and Cumbria Economic Partnerships.

The Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal has the potential to transform the economy of the area north and south of the border and there was keen interest in hearing how the proposal is being shaped.

Many attendees at Dumfries' Easterbrook Hall stressed their support for the progress to date and wanted to help shape how the proposal is further developed.

The clear takeaway for the five partner authorities was the high-level of interest across the region from individuals, business, public and third sectors.

Those ideas, experiences and views are now being used to inform development of the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal proposal as the case is built for investment by the UK and Scottish Governments.

The timescale is for the Strategic Outline Business Cases - the first stage in developing the Borderlands Inclusive Deal - to be submitted to the UK and Scottish Governments by the end of September 2018. It is intended that a further Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal Conference will be held in early 2019 to discuss the progress being made with the Deal.

Breakout Sessions

The breakout sessions at Easterbrook Hall were an opportunity for attendees to hear details of what's being proposed on each theme, to question the work to date and put forward their own views and proposals.

Discussion in all 16 sessions, two per theme, was lively with a wide range of input. Some delegates voiced specific thoughts on how aspects of the proposal should be shaped, others just wanted more information.

A summary of key points from each of the eight themes is shown overleaf.





Business Growth

The proposal is to develop an infrastructure and investment programme, to support the growth of local businesses, and to overcome barriers associated with the shortage of appropriate business premises.

The two proposed strands of support were welcomed. The Strategic Business Infrastructure Investment Scheme, and the Business Investment Scheme, aim to both encourage local business growth and attract new operators.

The challenge is to ensure that targeted priority locations are identified with market need in mind. Stakeholders were keen to ensure existing buildings not “fit for purpose” are brought back in to use as a priority rather than the development of new builds.

There was general support for a capital investment grant programme for SMEs with clear growth plans, thereby encouraging increases in productivity, diversification and higher quality job creation.



Digital

There was support for all three digital strands; further roll-out of superfast broadband so communities are not left isolated; hyper-fast connectivity to attract investment and enable businesses to increase their productivity and improved mobile coverage, highlighted as equally as important as the broadband infrastructure.

It was proposed the digital infrastructure should be presented as the enabler to many of the other themes and priorities within the Borderlands Deal - recognising the importance of digital to support the energy, skills, destination and business themes.

Ensuring provision of digital skills training for residents and businesses was flagged as important alongside the delivery of the infrastructure.

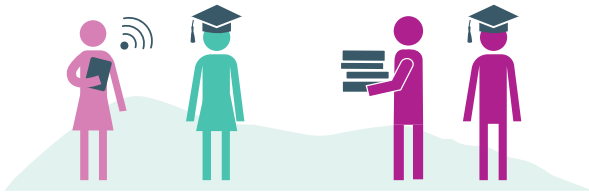


Rural productivity

Proposals were discussed to maximise potential opportunities across the Borderlands, to inspire and innovate in marine and land management.

The two workshops heard about proposals to create a ‘Natural Capital Testbed’ on a landscape scale and develop new ways of working; develop the concept of a ‘Smart Countryside Pioneer’ and a ‘Sustainable Produce’.





Innovation and Skills

The principal investment proposal from the work so far is the creation of a Knowledge Exchange Network (KEN). This would provide a dispersed set of venues all linked by hyperfast digital technology to better link Higher and Further Education to businesses and communities and to improve the access to STEM and digital skills learning.

There was a lot of support for the proposed approach with current initiatives cited that could form part of the KEN or add value to its operation.

However, two fundamental guiding principles were reinforced. Firstly, the curriculum and specialisms developed for the network need to be business-led and driven by robust evidence; and secondly, to raise the aspiration and ambition of the future workforce, clear career pathways need to be established with our network of schools.

Energy

There was a lively and informed discussion on energy generation and utilisation in both sessions with strong endorsement for a Borderlands Energy Company. Participants agreed that strategic energy master planning would bring real substance to the ambition of building a distributed energy system with both private sector and community-led energy projects.

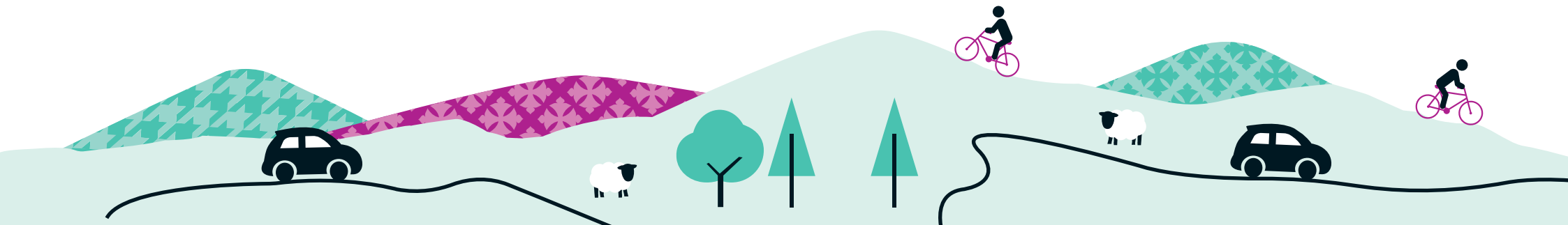
In addition to feasibility studies around hydrogen production and recycling bovine waste to produce methane, there were proposals to examine energy from waste, both domestic and from the forestry industry. And also the use of tidal power to produce energy. The critical role of a smart network was also highlighted.

Transport

Transportation is a priority issue. Key investment needs are in western Dumfries and Galloway for A75 and A77; timber transport routes; harbour investments in Maryport, Stranraer and other ports; the Carlisle-Settle railway line and connectivity around Berwick-upon-Tweed. It was considered stronger advocacy was needed to ensure relevant projects featured in both Governments' transport strategies.

Innovative ideas were raised on a Borderlands transport ticket covering bus and rail services and a replacement Borderlands rural public transport network.

Fast charging for electric vehicles is needed especially on major routes but this will require Phase 3 electricity. Also, standardised charging points are required as there are incompatible varieties at present and practical experiments to develop charging provision in residential areas.





Quality of Place

Key elements that attendees thought contributed to the quality of places included strong transport and digital connectivity; ensuring support for families; vibrancy for young people; recognise the abilities and skills of older people; available affordable housing; removal of barriers to growth of micro-businesses; and capitalising on natural assets for economic development, such as food production.

A measure of success would be the next generation in the Borderlands region having the same standard of living and opportunities as those in major cities.

There was considerable support for repurposing town centres to be more attractive. Each is distinctive and requires different solutions which take account of environmental features, such as rivers. It was considered a community-focused approach was needed for their development with a wider range of activities beyond retailing. These include culture and creative industries, business and employment, accommodation for young and old and community services.

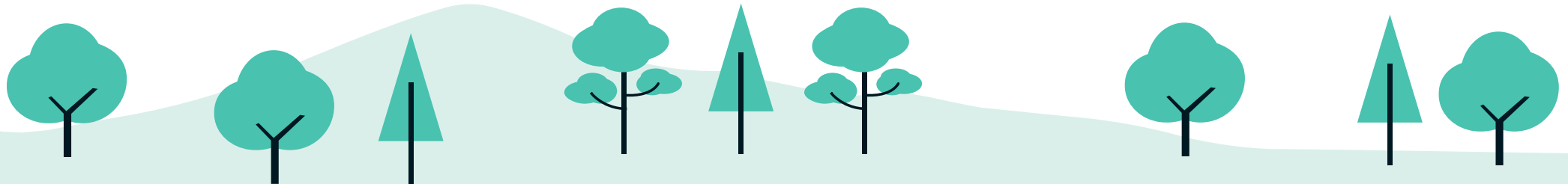


Destination Borderlands

Maximising the appeal of the Borderlands as a place to visit and live was a key discussion. Stakeholders agreed that it's important that we raise the profile of the Borderlands and keep our workforce here to support the visiting population.

As well as combining our existing strengths on both sides of the border and connecting them, there was support for accessible and inclusive tourism and recognition of a need to attract millennials.

Other ideas discussed included the need for year-round tourism, a heritage festival and interest in ancestral tourism.



Key Note Address

Business leader Brendan Dick, the Managing Director of BT Regions and Director of BT Scotland, gave a keynote address to the conference. Here are some of his main points:

Vision

“To fundamentally change the success of Borderlands in the way we all aspire to will take 10/20 years and beyond, but it can be done. This project has got to be sustained because it will take a long time to deliver some of the capital projects that come through. The challenge is to have that ambition set and not let short term political challenges get in the way. We need to get above that because it would be too easy to get side-lined.”

Partnership

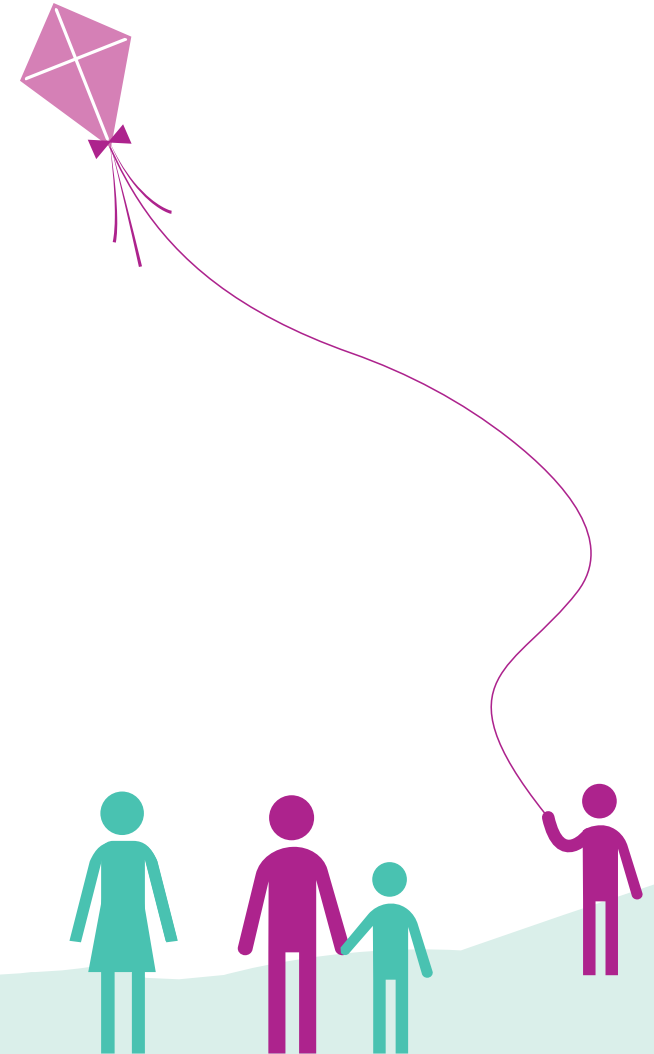
“What will make it work in my genuine belief is partnership between public and private sector and the third sector. Partnerships are successful because people have a joint interest in making them successful. It’s not about contracts, it’s not about the money, it’s about looking to the future.”

Investors

“So long as there’s that vision bound by a sound evidence base of what we can achieve, I do think the relationship with private sector investors can change fundamentally because they will want to come and invest.”

How businesses can be helped to help themselves

“The North Highlands Initiative was no more complex than bringing together small farmers in a collaborative way for them to access large supermarket chains. And it works. On their own they were never going to do it but coming together with a bit of support, that’s transformed their access to these markets and it’s continuing to be successful.”



Conference Q&A

Panel members were BT Managing Director Brendan Dick; Angela Cox, Borders College CEO and Principal; Dumfries & Galloway Council Chief Executive Gavin Stevenson; Carlisle City Council Chief Executive Jason Gooding and Northumberland County Council Executive Director of Place Paul Johnston. Chaired by Carlisle MP John Stevenson, the UK Government's Borderlands Champion. Here's a selection from the session.

Q: What exactly are we going to ask for?

Gavin Stevenson: It has to be inclusive growth for all our communities. We are now coming in to the real trading situation, we have to find something that will free money from Governments. A number of the themes are interlinked - the energy, the digital and the place - and without them being connected it will not be an inclusive deal.

Paul Johnston: We won't attract the funding to allow us to deliver all the projects in the first wave. But if we can demonstrate that we are credible and competent and transformational in the work we do, we'll attract future investment and use that to deliver a much broader package.

Jason Gooding: We are helping UK Government deliver on a manifesto commitment. We have been told quite clearly there's a willingness to do a Borderlands deal. Inevitably there will be some energetic discussions about priorities, resources and business cases because Government wants to back what it sees as 'winners' in terms of generating productivity.

Q: What is the timeline for the proposal and is this a once only chance that has to be achieved by a deadline?

Jason Gooding: Our aspiration is that we can get a heads of terms agreement in place to have something for the next budget.

I have no reason to believe that if we don't achieve that timeline that the opportunity of a Growth Deal is lost. I think there is wide recognition there needs to be different ways of thinking to rebalance the UK economy. And I think that is seen as far more important than trying to hit a particular deadline for a decision to be made.

Q: How do we look to the powerhouses to add even more value to what we can achieve in Borderlands?

Gavin Stevenson: One of the problems the region has had is that it has not had its voice heard. Last Monday we were down and met the Treasury minister, no City Deal in the past has met the Treasury at this point. We didn't just meet Treasury we met the Minister and he told us how his staff were there to open doors. I think that puts us in a different place for the future.

Brendan Cox: A key opportunity is to create conversations with potential investors out with Borderlands to come and invest in the area. The investment from both Governments is going to be a major kickstart for this but it is only the beginning of a journey that will never stop.



Q: The smaller voices may not be listened to as well as some of the bigger conurbations, will smaller representatives be heard?

Jason Gooding: We're always looking for ways to get better to include as many voices as possible in the decisions that are being taken for you. We are ramping that up now in the Borderlands Partnership and we need to get the governance arrangements in place to make sure the decisions are inclusive, the business cases are inclusive and those voices are being heard.

Rather than everything being decided over the next few months and then having a few projects locked in and saying, 'that is the Borderland Growth Deal and that's what we're going to deliver', we want programmes of funding in thematic areas which can be deployed according to the needs of communities.

Paul Johnston: We need to be better at ignoring administrative boundaries and thinking about the benefits that exist for individuals, for the places we represent. On the projects that we are developing we use the phrase 'Border blind' so we are thinking about opportunities across the wider area.

Angela Cox: We must try and not think about the barriers that are there and look at the solutions that we can collaborate on. I think the focus on inclusive growth is a really important one. Sometimes our most isolated communities feel they don't have the same opportunities as the bigger areas and this is about how we can deliver on that in different ways.

Q: In 20 years what do you want to see?

Brendan Cox: The Government funding is a kickstart. For me in 20 years, what good looks like is a region of the UK that is much more self-reliant.

Jason Gooding: Young people being born this week being optimistic about their future and proud of where they are and enjoying the fruits of our labour now in terms of a healthy economy.

Angela Cox: My dream would be to have an equitable skills offer across the five regions which is inclusive. Where young people want to stay because of the offer we can make.

Paul Johnston: To stop talking about gaps and be talking instead about the difference that has been made. Talking about the gains that are a result of the deals we will have struck by that time.

Gavin Stevenson: To be able to stay and input to the economy in a place I love and feel that I or my children never have to leave for opportunities.

Get Involved

Thanks again to everyone who attended and took part in the Borderlands Conference.

If you were unable to attend, copies of the presentations and video coverage are available at <http://www.borderlandsgrowth.com/Story-So-Far>

If you would like to discuss opportunities, ideas and possible working relationships, please email us at info@borderlandsgrowth.com



The Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal is being delivered by the following partners:

