ResULTS project: case study C, interview 204

Face to face interview with husband and wife community actors, conducted 27/2/19

Interviewer: I

Respondent: R1 and R2

I We’re looking at the food system in a very wide context, and we’re trying to understand where are the trade-offs and where are the pinch points in this, rather than just looking at crofters. That’s why I thought you’d be an excellent person to talk to. Is there anything in there you think we might be missing?

R1 It looks pretty full. I’m not a sheep person myself so I don’t have a great knowledge of it personally, but if there’s something else that comes out of the conversation I’ll mention it.

I’ve been here 33 years, was a lawyer, born in Glasgow so no upbringing in a crofting or agricultural community. Having said that, I lived in Aberdeenshire for a while, my father was a banker in a small agricultural area, they called them crofts but they weren’t technically crofts, smallholdings. And then working as a solicitor in [town 1] from 1985, involved in crofting law and crofting matters, so I had to learn the crofting setup and various things that go with crofting law like land court hearings or Crofters Commission hearings. I had to learn what ewes or outrun was or arable or that sort of thing, but I don’t have a working knowledge or any knowledge of how sheep and crofts work in terms of day to day existence.

I What was interesting from my point of view is your perceptions of how that fits into the community and the community resilience. We’re also interested in community and what happens to crofts and crofters, how that interacts with what happens to the community.

R1 The area of community in crofts being a realisable asset, I have experience in marketing crofts and the way in which crofting law restricts the free market of property, if it’s not Scottish freehold property, crofting is a particular things. There’s also other things that go with them in terms of winding up an estate, I’ve experience of cheap subsidies and how they’re transferred, and quotas. But I stopped being a solicitor about 15 years ago. I was in the community council as well, secretary of [area 13] Community Council, and we’ve been living in this community which is mainly, on the face of it agricultural but lots of other things.

R2 I suppose I grew up here and we had a cow and some hens, but we never had sheep. We had half a croft and got… That was almost 60 years ago so things have changed a lot in that time and I really didn’t know anything about what they did with sheep that was beyond my ken and still is.

I But you understand community councils, you understand how the community works. That’s the important thing. Lots of people talk to me about sheep and cows but not that many people understand how the communities work. If you wanted to talk about a resilient community, how would you understand that?

R1 I would see it in a wider frame just looking at it without any particular reference to sheep or cattle, a resilient community. Resilience is a fashionable word now in a lot of professions, you get it in the ministry, resilience, and it’s about wellbeing, about the ability to live well, to cope, coping mechanisms, the internal strength of whatever it is, its ability to repair itself, its ability to survive, flourish. Flourishing I think is the word to give it a positive spin, or just simply being able to exist at the other end of the spectrum.

I What makes it flourish?

R1 It would be the rich mix in this case of a diversity. Working well like any unit its resilience is being able to work according to its aims or its identity. What would you say?

R2 If we’re thinking of a resilient community you would need to have a spread of ages in that community. If it’s too old then they won’t be able to look after themselves as well as if you have a spread of ages, you would have to have that, and involvement, you would need to have people prepared to be involved with each other, and sometimes I think that’s getting slightly less than it used to be. There used to be a dependence on each other when there was more crofting but there’s less of that than, there’s still some community involvement, people with each other and people helping each other, whether just looking in on each other and checking they’re ok or whatever. Some people don’t take to do with community at all, but that’s because they’ve chosen that.

I So do people help them even though they don’t help others?

R2 There are some people who have moved into the community who don’t take to do with anything to do with it at all, they don’t come to anything, whereas perhaps we’re thinking of older folk who have been here, people will still help them.

I Does that play out in the community council, is it mostly people who are embedded here?

R1 There’s probably more now that are not from here, non-indigenous people, which would reflect the general population. As a solicitor and estate agent I saw over 30 years the vast majority of properties go to people coming in, non-indigenous people who want to come and live here. So I think socially there is an influx of people from afar, but it’s not just people from afar that are maybe not wanting to get involved, that I think is just a personal choice.

R2 And in the community council there’s a good mix of people who have been here for some time and people who, not so many recent folk who have come but there are folk who have moved in, there’s quite a good mix.

R1 I would think whether they’re from other places or here, it’s more a personal character trait as to whether they get involved or not, it crosses any geographical origin.

R2 That’s right, yes, there’s lots of folk who have come in who are involved. So you’re right, and there’s people who have grown up here who want nothing to do…

I How does that influx of newcomers accepting that some of them will be more willing to join in than others, does that have other impacts in terms of the resilience of the community? What I’ve heard said is that the problem with crofts is that they’re being sold for property development for incomers and local youngsters can’t afford houses, is that an issue around here?

R1 I’ve heard that before. I wouldn’t fully agree with that.

R2 I don’t think it’s really an issue here. Young folk who are here tend to maybe inherit crofts or others who don’t want their crofts maybe, I don’t know what they do but they do seem to sign them over to them somehow.

R1 I think it’s a slightly false premise to say that. It’s an easy sort of thing to say but the market is there, there are pure tenancy of crofts and the Commission administer that with regard to their rules of becoming a tenant, and also in terms of succession when a tenant dies. But there are ample other ways to get into the property market, you have the normal freehold properties, and a lot of properties that were crofts in the past have been decrofted so there is a market there, and there’s the social housing. And they can be subdivision of crofts, you can get house plots.

I I was interested to see whether the influx of newcomers was affecting the resilience of the community, either positively or negatively.

R1 It gives us a different character. It widens and broadens its opportunities.

R2 It does change it.

R1 It changes the dynamic of it.

R2 In my lifetime it’s changed the language, the base of the language, which is maybe a different thing altogether. When I grew up here virtually everyone would have been Gaelic speaking, and you knew who everyone was, whereas now there is more of a moving community.

I How many would speak Gaelic now?

R2 There’s still quite a lot. It’s hard to tell how many really.

R1 Maybe 30% of [area 13]. This area is traditionally the area where Gaelic is spoken in all of [area C], apart from maybe [inaudible] and [area 12].

I There seem to be three ways in which something becomes resilient, the first is you absorb change, so if you’re a croft and you have a bad year it means you have less money. The second is that you make some minor changes, you change a little bit and make an incremental change to try and adapt to whatever that change is, thinking sheep if it’s a bit colder you give them a bit more feed. The third one is transformative resilience, that you start doing something completely different or doing things in a new way or start growing a new crop, whether it’s tourists or whatever it is. Do you recognise any of those going on in the community?

R1 I think it’s recognised by here a lot, all crofters saying, and others, if it was just sheep, why are we doing this because we can’t get a living off it, or not a complete living anyway. I just don’t know about that.

I I was thinking more of the community. How does it change, you said there’s a community council, has that always been there or is there a new way of working within the community council, is the plan to get wind turbines and getting some kind of energy coming into the community? Just thinking about what does the community do to be resilient?

R1 This community there’s talk of setting up a community trust. Community trusts are a popular method of doing things now. The Community Council is more an administrative structure which can represent the community with regard to local authority matters like roads and housing, but it wouldn’t do anything in practice. But a community trust would for example maybe… There was a big meeting last year.

R2 …last summer, and lots of people of all, locals and newcomers went to that. There were a lot of folk there so there was a lot of interest. I’m not sure what stage it’s at at the moment.

R1 The idea to do things, because there’s a sense of a lack of facilities, a lack of everything in terms of infrastructure, or poor quality infrastructure.

I What would be the top priority facilities?

R1 Roads, the poor state of the roads.

R2 But a community trust wouldn’t do that.

R1 No, so I would be thinking of projects like…

R2 Like doing something down at [landmark 7]. And car parking at [inaudible] that sort of thing, and maybe something at the slipway at [landmark 8]. There was talk of a kick pitch for the youngsters as well. Maybe some more facilities round the village hall, they were talking of too because there’s nothing really there but the hall itself.

I Thinking about the crofters’ contribution to it. They’re often saying crofters are the backbone, if the crofters went then the community would disappear. I wonder the extent to which that’s still true in terms if they’ve got both a job and they’re doing their croft, how much time do they have to contribute to things like the community initiatives?

R1 They would have time. It’s down to inclination really. A small nucleus of people in any organisation tend to do things, so it’s the same with the community or the Church, it’s a small lot of people that seem to do things, whether it’s community or Church. The vast majority just maybe go along with it, but it’s usually down to a small number of entrepreneurial types who want to do things.

So resilience is a strange thing, people aren’t thinking I think we must become resilient, it’s just more a subtle term, they’re just trying to survive, some are trying to hold things together because that’s their inclination, they would like to contribute, and others are just happy doing nothing, and they might feel resilient as individuals. So community resilience is a matrix of individual and…

R2 Looking at the Community Council and those who would be involved with the community trust, some of them are crofters and some of them are not. I don’t think there’s a greater proportion of one or the other.

R1 No, I don’t think there is a sense if it’s crofters, they’re a constituency. They are in one sense because they have their crofts but they’re not thinking as a group.

R2 No, but they do have a cohesion. They maybe all order up their feed from one supplier so that lorry comes to deliver the feed and they all go over in tractors to wherever the lorry is, so there is a sort of community within a community for most of the crofters I think. If you think of…

R1 It’s interesting because not being a crofter person I don’t, I see it but it’s how you interpret it.

R2 And sometimes we don’t even see it because we’re not in it we’re not too much aware of it but I am sort of aware of connections that various of our friends have with each other, but we’re not part of that connection because we don’t have crofts. You don’t feel excluded because of it but there is that other layer of connection that they have. I suppose in a way that does make the community resilient because they know each other so well, should anything happen they all do pull together.

R1 Just the social structure, whether they’re crofters or not they would pull together, whether they’re actual tenants of a croft or whether they just have a house that’s just the way that they would operate. I suppose having sheep or being crofters it gives them a common…

R2 Just they have these connections when they all maybe do, or they help each other when they’re going to the sales, so they have that extra layer.

R1 That’s right, if there’s other folk that shared our professions or whatever we would feel close to them.

R2 Yes, I don’t think necessarily feeling closer but they do work together at these levels so there’s more contact, therefore when you have more contact between people then if there’s a time when you’re needing help you know the people you can rely on. It’s not exclusive, apart from that’s what connects them. It’s interesting when you start thinking about it.

I Do they gather sheep from the hill together?

R2 Not so much now. More now it will be ordering foodstuffs from the mainland. It used to be that they did a lot of work in the fanks together but I think there’s less of that now.

R1 I would say, my time working or just being here was that you sense the true crofting setup is a tenant and you have your own bit of land, maybe ten acres, but then you have a share in the hill area. I think the old style crofting would have been a lot more communal, when there wasn’t the right to purchase it you would work communally at various times of the year, putting the sheep out to the hill, helping with the peats. But I sense there that now they’re more individualistic in their working practices, they’ve maybe bought their croft, they get an apportionment of the hill so they can apply to get their own one-twentieth share or whatever. So they’re working much more as small farmers and the communality I think has really been diminished, diminishing. I think that is a difference from the old ways of maybe when you were growing up here.

R2 But still at times when something had happened to one of the crofters the others will just muck in [inaudible].

I You said when there was a fire everybody pitched in, did you have a big power cut for several days that they had at [town 2]? They have this big notice now saying if there’s a power cut longer than however long a hot soup will be provided in the village hall, do you have that kind of thing here?

R2 We were away the weekend that they were telling us about it. There has been a new resilience package rolled-out.

R1 I think our church hall is one of the gathering places, a bit like [town 2] hall, where people can gather.

R2 That big power cut, there was one a few weeks before the roll-out of [inaudible] but as it turned out it was fine so you go and check the older folk anyway, take your flask of hot water and things, people just do that.

I Because you know who the old people are?

R1 Yes, that has always happened. It’s by a section of the community, they would do that, but others wouldn’t think about doing that.

I You said a resilient community would have a diversity, what kind of diversity were you thinking of? You mentioned ages but are there other diversities that would be useful for resilience?

R1 We could do with a different skills base I suppose. I’m talking hypothetically, so that people can bring different skills and talents to make a community resilient.

R2 Definitely, I can’t think of something that might happen, it would be really good if you’ve got someone who can do things with their hands, or if it’s something else that happens it’s good if you’ve got someone who’s got some first aid knowledge. So, yes, different skills are really good.

I Would you go positively to making sure somebody had those skills as part of your resilience package?

R1 If you’ve got your health and your first responders, you have…

R2 Yes, but we’ve resisted that here for good reasons.

R1 There are local authorities and organisations that are involved in the community, like NHS Highland or the Highland Council.

R2 They have tried to encourage the first responders to be here but generally the community do not want to take that responsibility on because if you have first responders in the area it means that the ambulance do not have to prioritise as much as if there wasn’t anyone here at all.

I So you think you’d actually get a worse service?

R2 It wouldn’t be any better, and also the folk felt that taking on that responsibility for looking after someone who was maybe a close neighbour, if there was a bad outcome it would be very difficult to handle. So I think there was quite a strong feeling at the Community Council not to go down that route for these reasons.

R1 It is quite subtle in terms of resilience because the community there realises that if it did do that, and that might appear to be resilient then it might be a derogatory step because those that should provide it, like the statutory bodies, will just not prioritise it so much.

R2 And I think the other thing is that the community here likes to do things but it likes to do them informally, the minute you begin to formalise it and put it into a structure, they really don’t like that. Whereas they’re perfectly willing, they wouldn’t leave someone who was ill, they would go in there, but they wouldn’t want to have the mantle of being a first responder. I think that would apply in a few different settings.

R1 Yes, I would totally agree. How do you explain that, where in a city there may be others that want to get wired-in and structure-ise these things but here, no, that would be anathema, that would be a bit over the top, it would be seen as a bit too bossy, a bit too hands-on.

R2 In a way it almost diminishes what they would do. They would go and do something but if there’s an expectation, not even an expectation but a responsibility which has been put on you from outwith, it makes the whole task a different thing. Whereas they’re perfectly willing to go and help each other if need be. Diversity in skills is very important but don’t try and pin it down.

I Is there anything else in diversity that makes a community stronger?

R1 I’m thinking diversity can, in this community there’s a lot of elderly, there’s some young people, I suppose there is a decent amount in every age group.

R2 Probably missing a few in late teens and 20s.

R1 I’d say not so much diversity in itself but you need people in all these diverse groups to be willing to contribute. You can have a diverse community but it could be a dead community, even though it’s diverse. So there just needs to be an attitude to be willing to help and to be willing to contribute.

I Have you any sense of what drives that? I was wondering if it was about, we belong here, this place is going to be what we make it.

R2 No, because if you think of those who are on the Community Council, there’s quite a few of them who don’t belong here, if belonging here is growing up here, they’ve moved in here but they’ve got a strong sense of community.

R1 Yes, they have a strong sense of community.

R2 It’s more like a care for your fellow human beings. You want to be there for each other, and I suppose you can’t do that just in isolated instances, so you have to have various times when you meet for different things so that you know people because otherwise you wouldn’t have the background to know how to help.

R1 From [inaudible] around the place, you see how random it is because it just depends on that individual, whether they’re from here or not, if they want to get involved and be willing to do things, there’s no rhyme nor reason, it’s not just from the crofting community or from the others, it’s just a personal characteristic.

I What challenges might you perceive coming to that community cohesion, community resilience?

R1 It would come from more the individuality of current society. It affects here, people that don’t want to get involved, just want to live their own lives without any reference to others. That’s possible. Why get involved with the community, what’s in it for them? Whereas there’s others that will get involved because they think it’s a good thing. So the dangers would be a gradual breakdown of any desire to be involved in the community, in the towns really, say in an area of Edinburgh or Glasgow there would be quite a few folk I would think that would want to get involved in community and they just won’t think about it because they’re just living there, so why should it be any different here in a way, why should there be an expectation of community.

R2 If you didn’t have it then it would make it so much more difficult to live here, that would be the reason. If you’re getting older here and there’s no community around you then you’re very isolated and it could make your life difficult, you wouldn’t feel secure, you wouldn’t feel that supposing something were to happen you could phone that person or that person, if that one wasn’t in at the minute most of the older folk would know to phone that person or there would be a few different people they could contact. But if the whole thing becomes very individualistic then it makes it in a place like this, which is not a street in a town, it makes it difficult to live in.

R1 It would do but then it raises the question of how do you educate or how would you expect people to take that attitude. It would be difficult but that’s one thing, how do you, who should promote it and why should they?

R2 Most of us who are here.

R1 Yes, we think it’s a good thing but there’s others that aren’t bothered.

R2 If you didn’t have community involvement it would be very much a poorer place, it’s what makes it a good place to be. It’s so difficult whenever the few folk who do try to do things, whenever they try and organise something and you only get a handful of people turning up it’s…

R1 That’s right, we’ve been involved in the community and we run a number of events and stuff. It’s always a small percentage that would get involved.

R2 It’s hard work but it’s good fun. I thought maybe having the children and parents having contact with each other and maybe grandparents, that makes for more community resilience. But actually no, because there’s some of the families with children very much keep themselves to themselves as well. It’s hard to know what is it that makes a person want to be involved.

R1 I would break it down to the individuals more, because what is community only but a mixture of… I suppose it’s a more cynical view but you see how things work, I was involved in the community and also legal things so there is a lot of individualism. Now crofters get their apportionments, they can sell a plot or two of land, or just do their own thing, less communality.

I Is there any sort of infrastructure? You were talking about telephones so let’s say telephones disappeared, would that affect the community cohesion? Trying to think about it beyond the individual, is it to do with being able to raise money for the community trust, how important are those sorts of things for maintaining community?

R1 Phones would be a huge thing because it aids communication, if someone’s not feeling well you can put the word around.

R2 How else could you maintain cohesion? Things like fundraising events, they do get people together.

I Do you have any natural focuses where people do come together for whatever reason, you don’t have a shop here for example?

R2 When the shop went that was quite a big deal. That’s right, there isn’t anything like that. The village hall has various things on there, the likes of an auction next Saturday, there’s going to be an auction for fundraising for the village hall, and that kind of thing hopefully will get a few people together. And occasional ceilidhs that the children put on or…

R1 Yes, Mod events.

R2 …café things in the Church hall, these are quite good for, during a day because older folk don’t like so much to come out at night. These sorts of things are good and you get a funny mix of people, at these various ones you get different mixes of people from the community. So yes these kinds of things are good for getting folk together, and I think you need to have settings where you get people together because otherwise it will be all completely individualistic.

I If something happens?

R2 Yes, and then you would know who to call. That’s why it’s really important I think.

R1 I’m just thinking rural deprivation, in terms of the Church anyway, say the Church produces, it was the University of Dundee that did it, rural parishes which are deprived in Scotland. So deprivation, SIMD index, Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, access to services, there’s various criteria. This parish is about the top 50 of the rural deprived parishes maybe, there’s 300 of them in Scotland, so that means there’s a lot of people that are getting benefits, a lot of people that can’t work or elderly getting help. Access to healthcare is difficult. It is a technically deprived parish.

I The equivalent of an urban priority area.

R1 The Church puts huge amounts of resources into the urban priority areas, but it doesn’t really in terms of the rural priority areas, and that was an issue which is close to my heart. The urban folk tend to see the rural areas, they’re lovely areas to go on holiday and it must be lovely up there, because they’re thinking holidays and sunsets, whereas here it is deprived technically. If you were to say to locals living here, you’re deprived, no, they don’t feel deprived, unlike folk say in Glasgow wherever, they’re not ashamed to say you’re in a deprived area. But here it’s a different mental attitude.

R2 That’s been there forever really. I look back on my childhood here and actually we were deprived but we didn’t feel deprived, we didn’t know we were because everyone was the same.

R1 Interesting isn’t it? Equality giving resilience really because we’re all in the same boat.

R2 Having said that, my father was a minister here, we weren’t crofters but we were all in the same state of poverty, looking back on it. There was also, everyone has this really strong independent streak I think, back then, and I think there’s still quite a lot of that now.

R1 Yes.

I A sense of personal pride?

R1 Yes, a personal pride thing. You could have nothing there would still be a personal pride.

R2 In a way, to have good community resilience you have to have people who are aware of other people’s circumstances and are willing to help them in a way that will not make them feel that they’re being helped.

R1 Yes, that’s the big difference to the cities or the towns.

R2 People don’t want to be feeling a nuisance, so that’s quite tricky.

R1 Yes, there’s a few cases where we’d like to help people but they don’t want help. Yet, having said that, there is also a feeling that no-one spends money here, it all goes to Inverness or something, so that’s a huge thing as well, what’s the point. Maybe getting involved in some campaign or persevering to get roads better or doing something about it because it’s maybe just not going to happen because it’s all going to go to Inverness or somewhere else. So there is a sense of what’s the point in getting involved in campaigns or projects, or letting others do it, just complaining about stuff.

R2 I think that’s probably quite universal.

R1 Yes, we’re dealing in attitudes.

I What about the tourists, do they affect the community resilience at all?

R1 It’s very frustrating in terms of moving around, so there is a lot of frustration, just the difficulties that the gross influx of tourists have brought, especially in the last two or three years. Depending if it’s those who are getting an income out of it of course, but that is, I don’t know what percentage it is.

R2 Makes it very difficult for a lot of folk, moving around from here over to [area 10], driving, that is horrible in the summer, you just don’t want to do it. I don’t, even driving home from work the bit from [town 2] to here can take me up to half an hour because of the traffic. And the roads are disintegrating, and that begins to make you feel fed up. Resilience begins to wane as it gets closer to the summer season again. Whereas, the folk who are able to extend their means of making a living from it still looking forward to people.

I Does that create a tension between those who get all the disadvantage and those who [inaudible] ?

R1 No, it doesn’t get as articulate as that, it’s just one of those things.

R2 Folk who are actually making a living from it, they’re not particularly drawing the people here, the people are coming anyway so they’re just taking the opportunities, you don’t resent them taking opportunities you just wish there weren’t quite so many people coming.

I If you wanted to have something done to make it more resilient, if somebody waves a magic wand and says we’re going to make this community more resilient, what would you do, or what would you ask to be done?

R1 You could talk of structural things, better roads, that aids communication and speeds up times, roads, play parks, places to gather, village hall improvements, facilities. I would say they’re a lot less better here than in towns or cities. These are structural things, you would want a sea change in people’s attitudes I suppose, if you could go into their heads and give them a more care for the community, care for others, willingness to get involved to do things together. How does one regulate…

R2 I think to make more resilient, this is one of my things having better access to healthcare would make a difference here because that has got so much worse in my lifetime, you can’t access a person easily outwith the hours of 8-6 o’clock. I think not being able to get a hold of someone is really quite difficult. The likes of [area 8] community are fighting to get a nurse but we haven’t had a nurse here for a very long time. I know [area 8]’s an island so that makes it more difficult but if our nearest health professional who’s going to answer their phone is in [area 14], or if you go through NHS24 it’s maybe Lanarkshire, it does make it very difficult for older folk particularly who have an emergency or just something beyond their normal resilience that they can deal with. People don’t tend to, the older folk anyway don’t tend to bother the health professionals for little things, and when they do want to get hold of one it would be nice to be able to access.

I Is it a known person, somebody they actually know?

R2 It wouldn’t really matter but someone who was actually aware of the geography of the place would help. You can get an ambulance sent out to [place name same as area 13] in [area 1] instead of [area 13] here. It doesn’t have to be a known person as such but someone who was acquainted with the geography of the place would be good. I haven’t had experience of phoning up NHS24 but the folk who have told me that they have it’s been such a long lead in to the call that you’ve lost the will to live by the time you’ve been able to get a nurse to phone you back four hours later. So I think to be able to access some healthcare would be good.

R1 We know folk that have left the area because there just wasn’t a good healthcare, which they can get.

R2 It’s not the individuals who are providing the care, the doctors and nurses who are here, it’s not them, it’s the systems that they’re having to work in which make it very difficult.

R1 I suppose resilience, you’d want more employment, more strength to the core. Again, how can you bring that in, the Highlands and Islands Board trying to do that by setting up plants and stuff?

I If you had something like the horrible thing they’ve built just by the [location 1], if that had been here would you have felt that would have enhanced or not, ignoring the environmental aspect?

R2 There’s a lot of things like that. Some people are all for anything like that, new fish farms or whatever, and other people are not, it just depends on your outlook. I’m in two minds about these things, you do need to have some jobs, I suppose that’s one thing.

R1 I’m thinking in the cities you’d never think, factories come and go, whereas here it becomes an issue of environment against tourism as against this and that. You’re dealing in different mindsets in terms of what could be done.

R2 The folk who have been here for a long time tend to welcome anything that comes, that is going to provide jobs and work. Because I suppose they’ve known from years ago having to go away for work, people of my generation would have to have gone away for work and even they went to and from [area 16] on a daily basis. So people like that would welcome even a carbuncle if it was going to provide work, and then you get the environmentalists who are not for it.

R1 Some folk just want to keep it in aspic, and their idea of [area C], they don’t want any change because they’ve got this vision of [area C].

R2 They didn’t want the bridge.

R1 Or even getting a lamppost down at the village hall, getting a street light. I remember in the community council some folk didn’t want that, because who knows, but that was progress. So there’s strange things that work, cutting across perceptions.

I Was that people who had always been here and didn’t want it changed, or people who’d come in?

R1 Come in, yes, and just wanted it stuck in the 1970s or whatever.

R2 They’d come in because of the way it was and they wouldn’t want it changed, whereas the people who have been here see that if it stays like it is it’s going to collapse, it’s not going to be a place worth living in, you have to have progress. The thing is there are these tensions.

R1 Yes, there are tensions, there is a lot of tension between various, not power groups but just people have their own interests, they want to do stuff often for their own benefit and is that going to help the community.

R2 Like the environmentalists who are against, they don’t like that thing near the bridge, I think it looks awful but I suppose it brings jobs, it does bring jobs.

R1 Yes, it will bring jobs. I suppose you want people that can represent the community and can represent the community well, when it’s wanting to do stuff, that can talk on behalf of the community, that can draw investment in, windfarm money or whatever. You need that sort of nucleus of people that know how systems work, in the towns you would have some of these folk… I think that’s important.

You can get funding to employ a consultant for 12 months, so I think that is a very important thing. The communities that are thriving just now are probably people or have people that can do that, can attract money, who know how to fill in an application form, they know the outcomes, they know the boxes to tick and in comes the money, as to whether that helps the community or just is for, depends on what the money’s for. There are big pots of money out there, some people know that and the ones that are up for it can get that money. That’s one factor I suppose.

I Is there a particular feature of [area C], in particular this part of [area C], that you think should be preserved, that you think is particularly [area C]?

R2 Community, that is one thing that we still have here, there is still a very strong community feel about it and relatively diverse. When young folk come up and what they see is a lot of friendly people who do have a care for each other, and that’s nice. I don’t know how you preserve that.

R1 I take the view, you’re in the generation now that likes to preserve things, you preserve heritage and stuff, but that’s a pretty modern thought process really. Up to 100 years ago no-one bothered about preserving stuff. There’s going to be transition and change, that’s part of things so I would tend to go with the flow in a sense, whatever it is. Having said that, I worked in the community and did lots of stuff, but that’s because I thought it was a good thing and I felt that that was good for the community, and that’s part of why I’m here because I’m still, the Church and community very much go together and the current Church thinking is big on that. But you’re dealing with areas that are subtle and it’s difficult to bring things in because it’s down to personal choices. Within this too, keep that culture where people care…

R2 Culture that’s another one. Part of it is the culture where people get together and work together. Even if they don’t do it in a crofting way now, you can still get together whether it’s fundraising or cleaning the hall or that kind of thing. I don’t know how you could preserve it but it’s definitely the community and the working together, that’s what would make this place worth being here.

I I guess as long as people want it to be like that, it will stay like that.

R2 As long as there’s enough of these folk.

R1 I suppose that’s it, as long as there’s a certain block who are willing to go out of their way to maintain things.

R2 And they’re scattered geographically right along the [inaudible].

R1 Yes, it’s a settled crofting pattern in terms of township.

I Does that make it harder, the fact that you are strung out?

R2 Not really because we’ve got cars [inaudible]. But that does make it good in a way because then they’re not all in one little place and other streets being neglected, folk are spread all the way along to [village 17]. People who are willing to do things for the community.

I How would you rate the resilience of the community around here at the moment?

R1 Pretty good I would say.

R2 I think it’s really not easy. Just now it’s been great but the day after day when it’s windy and wet and terrible and dark then it’s a battle to do anything. Still, you can visit someone and I think it’s pretty good. Folk are still good at helping each other.

R1 I think the community would be pretty pleased with itself in its resilience in its own self.

R2 I’m sure the likes of things that are going on, various projects with the children in the school, researching songs that the older folk had liked. And that gets the older ones and the younger ones together on a Saturday afternoon in the church hall, these kinds of things are really good. Ostensibly that was a project for the children but actually the older folk I think maybe got more benefit out of it, they really enjoyed it. We had a good range of young and old from here round to [area 10]. These sorts of things are good, I don’t know that they happen, that’s not for fundraising or anything, that’s just for fun.

I But the school is important?

R2 The school’s quite important but it’s actually, it’s more the community, various individuals in the community who arrange these things and then involve the children. So there’s this other Clan [area 18], which was the children of [area 18], is a group that get, two or three individuals who get the children together to practise things for the Mod, that was how it started off but then besides that… That’s been a really good thing because it gets the younger ones together involved with older members of the community to do with music and language, but then these youngsters, teenagers some of them, they also then come back and do things in the church.

The events all happen at the church hall so having a place where you can do things comfortably is also quite important. When you were saying we didn’t have a shop, that was a big miss when it left because people met there, but I guess in a community if you have, that went that was a shame, but if you replace it with other things which you can get people together then it will keep going.

I It’s interesting, I’d forgotten the Mod and all that.

R2 Some of these folk do go into the school and do some things. I guess the school is quite important too.

R1 Yes, if it wasn’t there then it wouldn’t be a place…

R2 If it wasn’t there you’re not going to get young families in the place, and that will then not give [inaudible].

R1 It is a circle really. But difficult just to pin it down as to how it works.

I Transport, how important is the bus?

R1 Transport’s important. The bus goes in and out, school kids, that’s important to get them to school, but I would say most folk have private transport [inaudible] range in the old days. The bus is significant but not a be all and end all I would say.

I If you didn’t have it would it be a real loss?

R2 A real loss for some that maybe want to go into [town 1] for their shopping and come back, but folk could survive I think just because folk would be willing to maybe give a lift. It becomes important in terms of visiting a hospital, not the bus but… That was an issue in this new hospital setup because they hadn’t done any research I think about transport, getting people to [area 14] when the buses run. I don’t use it much myself. There’s a few elderly folk go in for their shopping.

R1 You often see the bus going round and round with no-one on it, or very few, so it’s probably subsidised. On the face of it it appears a good thing to do, to have transport links, but most folk could manage without it or don’t use it.

I I guess because you need a car for so many things, there’s so limited buses and pushes towards your car, and once you’ve got a certain number of cars, you’ve either got to have a lot of buses to make it viable.

R1 We’ve got two cars.

I Is there anything else you wanted to say you’ve not had a chance to say?

R1 No, that’s very interesting.

End of transcript