Elmwood Stakeholders Meeting
Thursday 27 April 2017
Elmwood Campus, Cupar.

Approx. 18 present.

Please note that this is a summary of a discussion, not a transcript.

Key:

**Question (Q) = a question or comment asked by an attendee at the meeting.**

**Response (R) = the response provided by SRUC Principal Prof. Wayne Powell or another member of the SRUC Executive Leadership Team.**

Q The blue print for the future looks excellent, but sustainability starts and stops with profitability, so do you expect capital expenditure to be in line with cash flow generation or do you expect to exceed that. If so do you expect that to be met from increased profit, subsidies, loans or what?

R I chair the Finance and General Purposes (F&GP) Committee and agree we need a bottom line that justifies the organisation’s continued existence. The expertise of our people and our existing estate are important assets but in the future we need not own everything we use and that’s where, through partnerships and co-operation we can modernise our approach, share facilities and deliver what we need in a different way. But it is important our vision is not driven by money, we should get the vision right first and then formulate an appropriate innovative funding model for a College Scotland needs.

R We tend these days to talk about investors rather than funders. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has made it clear they see SRUC as critical for the future of education and rural development in Scotland. But they are not prepared to invest in an organisation that is retreating, they want a compelling vision underpinned by a business case. This is what we are trying to do here. My own view is that in future we will need a very different model, based on a very efficient organisation generating surpluses but also looking at private-public partnerships and others because doing things on your own is not the way to be sustainable in future. Our relationship with Edinburgh University remains important but so too will be relationships with other Universities and organisations like the MRP’s (SEFARI organisations), depending often on what is best for meeting regional needs. But relationships are best made from a position of strength and on an international basis we will need scale to meet the competition.

Q As an alumnus of Elmwood and a Fife resident I have an interest in the future of Elmwood. You mentioned innovative partnerships and under utilised assets. Across the road Bell Baxter High School is bursting at the seams and you have empty space. What consideration has been given to operating with them and possibly even offering courses.

R Just as cooperation with Universities is important, involvement with schools is vital, not least because that where our next students come from. It is something we should consider in the short term. In the medium to long term we will have to take account of the review presently underway in Fife.
R We already do a lot of work with schools and the Government is wanting increased involvement, whether it be through apprenticeships or other changes to the curriculum and we are very much involved with that. School students are being welcomed to some Golf activities very soon.

Q How wide do you think engagement could be across the business community in a region like Fife? How ambitious are you about engaging with industry groups you may not have had engagement with before?

R We are ambitious. We recently interviewed for a Director of Innovation and Commercialisation to join our management team. The two leading candidates, who came from commerce, will meet us again soon. An appointment will send a strong signal that we mean to drive business engagement. We are also appointing Stakeholder Engagement officers, based locally and will have antennae out into local businesses communities to identify opportunities for not only meeting their needs but utilising our assets here to best effect.

R Through my background in rural development I am aware that as a Rural College we can deliver more than straight agriculture. But I also acknowledge it is best done through partnerships and sharing of skills and expertise.

Q Commented on setting of the education provision in the presentation and importance of Elmwood locally. As a trained nurse was particularly interested in power of vocational qualifications and the opportunities local facilities showcased for local youngsters.

R One point not stressed in the strategy was our reaction to influences like the UK Government’s Industrial strategy which focussed on the 50% who did not want to go to university. We feel that focus on technical and vocational education offers an opportunity for SRUC to start driving that a bit more, especially within rural sectors.

Q I stress importance of maintaining Elmwood as what SRUC could achieve in Fife is important. Schools teach not just new employees but future consumers and customers so any partnerships with schools, St Andrews University that achieve added awareness and opportunities will see the business communities buying in to the benefit of the whole of Fife. But how does SRUC plan to ensure any locally driven initiatives are properly managed?

R We need to understand the P&L account for each locality, have the right people and work within a strong strategic financial planning framework and key performance indicators. I think issues like local sourcing and the whole waste food problem are real opportunities for us.

R My own experience with the Highlands and Islands Development Board which became the far less centralised HIE is that we must trust and empower local staff to take opportunities while being risk aware but certainly not risk averse. It can be difficult to manage but something we should grasp.

Q Can you say more about One Health?

R Uni of Edinburgh and SRUC are very involved in the “One Health Issue” including things from soil health and fertility to plant and animal diseases, nutrition and diet, not forgetting support to primary producers, local food businesses and retailers. There is a whole area of
science we are involved with that is important for the future of Scotland. We must continue to make the case for our role.

Q How important is greenkeeping and golf course management to you. We have supported Elmwood for many years and we want to know if it is going to continue to be one of your priorities?

R I think there are opportunities for us to grow these activities and opportunities for us to be connecting better greenkeeping and course management with our research and consulting staff as well. But we need a curriculum that first rate, facilities that attract students and an offer that differentiates us from others. That is why connectivity between research, consultancy and teaching is so vital. It means considering issues like water management for golf courses, soils structure, big data and how that can help take the sector forward. Is golf included in the Agritech strategy initiatives like Agri Epi.

Q I emphasise the outstanding reputation Elmwood golf training has across the world through the R&A scholarship programme. Numbers of 116 students representing 18 nationalities on our on-line programme. Golf is a success story for Elmwood and SRUC.

Q I reinforce the significance Elmwood holds for the Fife economy. WP acknowledged that, stressing the document was not the finished item and need their kind of contribution.

Q While supportive of SRUC /SAC concerned that at a recent series of consultancy meetings he attended the organiser had been obsessed with getting the funding to continue the programme and that two outside “experts” had been flown in, contributing in a way SRUC’s own specialist could have done equally well.

R While not knowing the detail of the programme in question I would agree that SRUC has world class experts in fields like dairy nutrition and genetics. There is a need to change the way we do things. While the internal market, where one department pays for the staff time of colleagues from a different department had been played an important role at one time, a different approach would be needed to meet future challenges.