

A proposal
for a South West Regional
Development Centre
on the Seale-Hayne site

A submission by Seale-Hayne Future
for the attention of
Stride Treglown (independent consultants)
and the University of Plymouth

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Summary:

This document identifies the purpose of a Regional Development Centre (RDC) for the South West and then shows why such a Centre would be ideally situated at Seale-Hayne. It outlines the kinds of activity to be encouraged there and indicates potential sources of funding. The environment of the estate is also described and the siting of the various activities suggested. The proposal is endorsed by several people well-known in rural and regional development.

Contents:	page
Introduction	2
Indicative range of activities appropriate to the RDC.	3
Collation and dissemination of relevant regional information	4
Advisory functions	5
Provision for the development of rentable units	6
Education in its widest sense	7
Seale-Hayne and the community	8
Funding	9
Environment	10
Map	11
Endorsements	12
Taking the proposal forward	13
Draft leaflet to publicise the proposal	

Introduction

With the end of current teaching activities there is an opportunity to develop an invaluable contribution to the development of a centre to benefit the premier rural region of the country. The South West has several unique features: it is the most rural of regions with a rural economy still more dependent on food production than others; it is perceived by tourists as having a highly desirable combination of coastal, farmed and wilder landscapes; its population is growing due to the influx of corporations and retired people seeking quality of life; there are opportunities and a supportive framework for economic growth and job and income creation.

The main purpose of the Centre is to serve the whole community by providing an integrated focal point for encouraging entrepreneurial skills, generating business and employment, and accessing technical advice and support. This comprises regional livelihood and lifestyle information and education. The beneficiaries of this centre would be intended especially to be smaller and more rural business ventures but there would also be several consequent advantages for local communities in general and include both residents and visitors. The actual activities are suggested below.

Siting the Regional Development Centre at the Seale-Hayne campus has the dual merit of meeting an identified demand at the same time making sensible use of existing University of Plymouth facilities. Seale-Hayne is ideally situated geographically and historically to serve as the proposed centre for the South West, mid way between Gloucester and Penzance. Seale-Hayne offers spacious, gracious and accessible accommodation for a range of projects and organizations involved in the rural sector to come together synergistically. For the important concept of the Seale-Hayne Regional Development Centre to be fulfilled it is essential to retain the nucleus of the present organization, services and reputation of the site. Its successful development would also be prestigious for the University of Plymouth in encouraging partnerships to fulfill its mission as a force within its rural region.

Indicative range of activities appropriate to the RDC.

Given there is a case for developing in the Centre, the following activities could be envisaged

1. Collation and dissemination of relevant regional information
2. Advisory functions
3. Provision for the development of rentable units.
4. Education in its widest sense
5. Seale-Hayne and the community

Further details of each of these follow:

1. Collation and dissemination of relevant regional information

Much emphasis these days is on sustainable livelihoods within an integrated rural economy and a healthy environment. Research as to how to achieve this both regionally and globally is supported at present by bodies such as DEFRA, but it is not known how agricultural change will affect tourism, and how far EU policy can control landscape, and how all this relates to the price of food. The Centre would collate and make available to businesses within the region the results of such illuminating work, and Seale-Hayne has a name which should not be wasted.

An example of a recent initiative that provides a model for the activities envisaged for Seale-Hayne include the Rural Economy and Land Use (RELU) research programme. This will fund research to underpin policy in food production and the food chain, land and water resource management, the environmental basis of rural economic regeneration and economic and social interactions in the rural sector. Another example is the National Rural Knowledge Exchange(NRKE) which is a consortium linking academic skills with rural business development through regional centres. Their remit is not dissimilar to that of the new University of Plymouth Rural Futures Network. The latter has evolved from the traditional Seale-Hayne multidisciplinary activities in rural economic development, for example its Broadband research. NRKE has no centre in the far South West however.

2. Advisory functions

At the present time there are numerous bodies seeking solutions to social and economic problems relating to the countryside and environment. A centre offering facilities for co-operation between the disparate organisations would greatly enhance their effectiveness. Physical proximity is still the best way to collaborate and learn practical skills even in the electronic age. Some such as the Professional Development Unit, SWARD and the Agri-Food Centre already have their offices at Seale-Hayne and provide training and short courses too. Their courses usually address statutory requirements at present but demand for a wider range could be investigated as well, especially marketing.

The Centre would become the place to go for easily available start up advice and encouragement is envisaged for businesses and wealth creation in the region. However opportunities for business development and profitable use of the site itself are also available.

The Seale-Hayne farm could accommodate a cross country riding course, very popular at present, and clay pigeon shooting for example as well as being a show-case of diverse agricultural enterprise. The main buildings have potential for a range of functions. If the housekeeping at Seale-Hayne is centralised, space for conferences and meetings could be made available at appropriate prices. There is no other large hall such as the Great Hall at Seale-Hayne (capacity 400) available in the Newton Abbot area. The single bedrooms in Frank Parkinson Hall together with the Great Hall and smaller rooms with AV facilities make the site suitable for small and medium sized conferences. For example the beekeepers' national conference was traditionally held at Seale-Hayne. Open University summer schools would be another possibility. The refectory is already used for weddings and receptions and could continue in this use, perhaps together with the Chapel if licensed.

A one-stop-shop at Seale-Hayne providing information on grants and help with formulating proposals and applications would be efficient and convivial for users and providers alike. Some sharing of catering, office facilities, financial services and library provision would be beneficial. It is

hoped that entities such as the following could be attracted to locate their regional offices Seale-Hayne

	The Countryside Agency
Devon Rural Strategy	FACE
Devon Rural Forum	RABI
Devon Wildlife Trust	Taste of the West
Devon Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group	The Learning Skills Council
SWARD	English Nature
Renewable Energy Group	BioFuel and BioCrop groups
English Food and Farming	Countryside Management Association
The Food Chain Centre	LEAF
Mole Valley farmers	NFU
RuralNet	CLA
Business Link	Federation of Small Businesses

3. Provision for the development of rentable units.

Space exists below the main buildings in the area occupied by disused farm buildings to provide small units for land-based or rurally compatible businesses. These would also share the domestic and office facilities mentioned above and help provide advice and services. The need for these would be established through the economic development officers locally.

The existing laboratories might be attractive to create a regional Pathology Lab which is believed to be urgently needed, or to Greenpeace, currently located at Exeter University. Alternatively the labs and Food Technology facilities might be staffed and used to analyse products created on trial plots on the farm and/or by the small businesses on site and elsewhere as is currently the case. There are also physical facilities such as those for specialist field trials currently used by the National Institute for Agricultural Botany, the low temperature crop chambers, and the Food Technology building used by the food industry. This is in addition to the Seale-Hayne farm which is set up to be used for livestock and crop trials. The latter could be rented out commercially but at attractive rents in return for continuing to provide research facilities when required. Elsewhere, physical facilities for applied agri-food and environmental research are diminishing as institutions act unilaterally, but the need for this currently unfashionable work must resurface nationally before long. Seale-Hayne should be poised to take advantage of this.

4. Education in its widest sense

It is accepted that undergraduate teaching will cease in 2005 but there is a strong case for retaining facilities for training and short courses. This could be in fact become a core activity at the site and a major source of income. Demand for such programmes of study exists, especially through the Learning Skills Council, and can be marketed much more than has been the case in the past.

Contact with practitioners and entrepreneurs in the rural sector is also valued by those seeking training, and has always been a feature of Seale-Hayne courses and continuous professional development provision in the past. Existing courses for the RICS, the Worshipful Company of Farmers and for the Smallpeice Trust exemplify this successfully. If the organizations mentioned above under Need were to be based at the Centre their input into courses would be facilitated and beneficial.

The opportunity for practical experience for postgraduates of the University of Plymouth should not be overlooked and can be uniquely provided there. The idea of a regional Rural Research Centre situated at Seale-Hayne, possibly following the precedent set by the Peninsula Medical School, also seems attractive and feasible.

5. Seale-Hayne and the community

In recent years the University has established a reputation for considering the needs of the community and this is particularly apparent in the city of Plymouth. The Seale-Hayne site, given suitable management, could become an important part in the life of the region. There exist catering, conference/meeting and sporting facilities, the use of which would be greatly welcomed by the area population. Such a development would be in full accord with the University's stated aims.

The University of Plymouth would obviously need to obtain broad agreement to this plan from the local authorities and the community as well as indications of intended collaborations from organizations. A viable businesses plan might involve partnerships with such bodies as the Regional Development Agency, the County and District Councils, and organizations mentioned above. There would also be income generated from the commercial uses of the site. The benefits to the University in terms of constructive use of the asset of the Seale-Hayne site and contribution to the rural agenda of the region would potentially be very great.

Funding

In order to promote a vibrant SW regional economy within conserved landscapes, while strengthening community relationships, the Centre needs to be funded through a combination of public and private sources, as noted by those with wider experience who endorse these proposals. Only so can the Centre hope to service the integrated development of the SW region in a collaborative, inclusive way.

Possible sources of funding:

- Government - via GOSW & SWRDA, via DCC, via TDC, via relocation of some government services to rented accommodation at the site (e.g. pathological testing laboratory etc.); EU schemes; linkage with Rural Renaissance coordination and activities. In view of the Centre's proposed inclusive range of activities for community and visitor benefit, it would be eligible to tap into economic, environmental and social/health sources for different aspects of its work.
- Owners of the site being allowed to adopt sympathetic change of use of some buildings and possibly having planning consent for some very limited affordable starter and/or retirement housing at and near the Daracombe zone. This would provide seed capital to develop the site strategically as a SW Regional Development Centre at the geographical heart of its region.
- Charitable Trust funding, including potential appeal to the large numbers of Seale-Hayne alumni to assist with certain service aspects of the Centre's proposed remit.
- Various Service-providing Agencies - by relocation of some of their representatives to shared, networked juxtaposition at the site, renting offices to do so (providers of free, subsidised and paid services included).

- Business - through entrepreneurial ventures to use parts of the site most readily likely to yield a return. Franchises could be granted for particular purposes on a zoned basis within the site (see broadly indicative map elsewhere in this proposal). It would be important that those committing to use the site signed up to their support for its overall mission to provide services for the region in an overall economically viable way. Examples of the possible areas of enterprise which might be managed separately, but with due collaboration include:-

- # conferencing/activity holiday letting;

- # refectory catering;

- # tourist picnicking with countryside and wildlife conservation/food chain interpretation;

- # community educational activities – gallery, exhibition and local networking events;

- # the farm itself could be developed as a source of some local produce, for its sporting/exercise/nature trail value; providing sites for contract research/field trials and land-use demonstrations as previously for NIAB and for commercial agri-input suppliers;

- # various training/CPD providers renting facilities;

- # starter businesses or regular tenants hiring space.

Environment

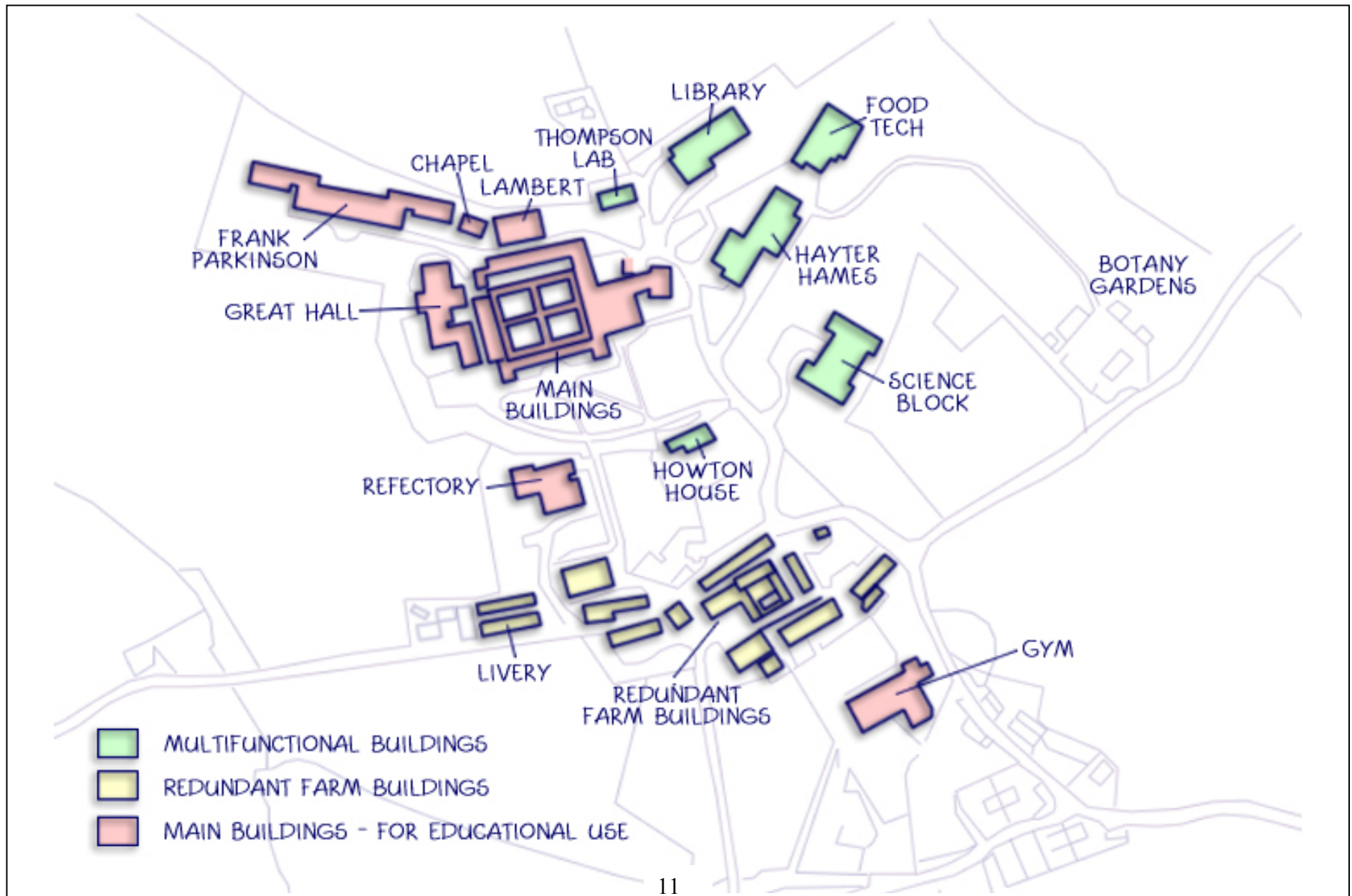
The Seale-Hayne estate as a whole encompasses a range of habitats and landscape features of value. The farm includes permanent pasture with areas of herb-rich rough grazing. There are ancient hedgerows, many dated at over 700 years old. Some of these form a parish boundary and border green lanes and are hence protected under the Hedgerow Act. There are several significant hedgerow trees, mainly oak, which contribute to the landscape of the Lemon valley. In addition three hedgerow management trials are in place, one to recruit new hedgerow trees, one with traditional laying techniques and the other with different regimes of modern flailing. These hedges have also been observed to provide habitat for the rare ciril bunting and hunting corridors for local populations of horseshoe bats. Bradmores Wood is connected to the hedgerow network and provides a refuge for many woodland species and has been managed to increase the species diversity. The attractive listed building Ingsdon Lodge in the corner of Bradmores Wood has potential as an interpretation centre in this respect.

Other features of the farm include the disused limestone quarry with rock faces supporting pioneer plants and exemplifies ecological succession. Rare toothwort is also found there. Above this the beacon provides spectacular views of the surrounding countryside from moor to sea. Both the beacon and quarry feature in the well developed estate nature trail from which generations of students and the public have benefited.

In the campus area itself the botany garden with its disturbed ground supports a different range of arable weed species. In addition there are specially sown experimental plots with recorded histories and meteorological records going back over decades. The old bee garden and specially constructed ecological pond nearby further extend the range of species within the campus area.

The campus itself has been planted with a selection of fine specimen trees but the part of the estate at Daracombe has a collection of much older and more spectacular arboretum trees plus a walled garden with trellised climbers and cordoned fruit trees and horticultural facilities reminiscent of the Victorian era. This garden has been of great value to the local community both human and avian.

Map of Seale-Hayne with suggested areas of activity for the RDC



Endorsements

There is support for this idea from a number of people influential in rural and regional development. For example:

Lord Cameron of Dillington, FRICS, DL, says “I think your idea is an excellent one, because it is just that form of assistance for rural entrepreneurs that is lacking at the moment. There is nowhere it is more needed than in the south west. I believe it is very much worthy of support by central, regional and local governments.”

Dr Rachel Thomas CBE, FRGS says "This Centre has great potential not only to widen the longstanding tradition of service of Seale-Hayne to land-based industries but also to enable integrated rural development at the regional level. It is crucially located at the heart of the character of the south-west region and its establishment fully merits support."

Sir Donald Curry KB, CBE, FRAgS says "Sustainable farming, food and land care involves not only the whole food chain but everyone who lives in and visits the south west. This proposed Centre at Seale-Hayne deserves whole-hearted support through public and private partnership for the comprehensive contribution it can make to regional development."

Taking the proposal forward

In conclusion, the whole plan for the future of Seale-Hayne is felt to rely heavily and crucially upon the appointment of an energetic and committed leader or director who is given authority, freedom and funding to develop the Seale-Hayne Centre along all or some of the lines suggested in this document.

This leader would need to be funded, initially at least, to develop the Centre, to field enquiries, to manage the site and to liaise between users. There would need to be a small Steering Group comprised of both public and private voluntary representatives and independently chaired, together with a more widely representative Reference Panel to meet less frequently.