

Chair's Update: 8th August 2007

Foot & Mouth and Flooding

I woke Saturday morning to listen to Farming Today expecting to hear about livestock in the hills but instead another severe problem, namely the Foot and Mouth in Surrey, came through my earphones. It would appear, with luck, the outbreak may be containable, but the effects of the movement ban will soon have major economic consequences. This added to the already difficult situation in livestock farming and the diversified tourist activities in the uplands of our region must make farmers feel very anxious. At least it is drier following recent flooding and in that respect farmers are happier, but the damage to people's homes, the tourist trade, as well as farm crops, will have economic knock-ons for some time.

First Meeting of RAF Steering Group and Climate Change

The new RAF steering group met for first time on July 9th (see minutes on the meetings page). The next meeting is on September 4th so if you want us to consider your burning issues or concerns please tell Anna by 24th August (yhraf@goyh.gsi.gov.uk). We are still developing the concept arising from the last Forum meeting of RAF involvement in a climate change grassroots based approach. Adaptation seems to be where we should be as mitigation is more about behavioral change and the RAF is a non political, multi issue campaign grouping. The cause of the recent weather events can not be attributed to climate change alone, but these severe weather events are one of the major predictions for the future so if the RAF can get people thinking about water management in their village and how that might have effects on those up or downstream from themselves it could be a very useful input to regional thinking by 'experts'. To this end I am involved in discussion to try to build a project involving ten /fifteen villages from the Humber Estuary along the Ouse and Ure up to the topside of Hawes with a view to get them involved in a 'Parish Plan' type exercise regarding climate change and where they may be in 2050. The intention is that this will not only look at water, but also trees, landscape and transport and so on. Your views are welcomed.

My Activity

Besides carrying on my visits to members, and gathering a few new ones (which have included Parish Councils representative, WiRE, Sirius) I attended a meeting of other regions RAF Chair's to consider how RAFs could work better with the Commission for Rural Communities. I also briefly met Defra Secretary of State Hilary Benn, at the Great Yorkshire Show where new RAF member Rebecca Roberts (from FEAST) and myself presented Hilary with a basket of salad produce which he was very grateful for, see picture.

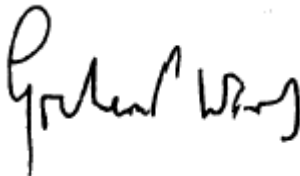


Sub-National Review

I also spent considerable time reading the [Review of sub-national economic development and regeneration](#). This is a Treasury led document (thus the title length!!) about how regions and sub-regions will operate in future. It lessens the role of regional Assemblies and puts Regional Development Agencies (i.e. Yorkshire Forward) in charge reporting to Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (the new DTI). It also boosts powers and responsibilities of Local Area Agreements, creates regional Ministers, assumes 'City Regions' and gives the Department of Communities and Local Government responsibility for running it for central Government. It makes an assumption that deprivation, and therefore need for regeneration, is mainly urban. I can find 'rural' three times in 106 pages and there is no mention of Defra and new economic responsibilities for rural delivery now vested in the RDAs and the Modernising Rural Delivery agenda in which RAFs fit. The RAF is supposed to represent the rural customer not just land based industry and therefore I have some major concerns about these new structures.

We are debating City Regions at our next Forum meeting on 25th September where I will try to ensure we also have some input on this the review document. To save a lot of time could members please read paragraph 2.7 on page 24 and paragraph 6.100 on page 95 of the review. The latter sums up the whole document in 8 lines and the former gives the detailed criteria for management and targeting the delegation of powers to LAAs. We as the RAF must take this document very seriously and work out how we can ensure there is a rural economic future, otherwise the rural areas will become a dormitory for urban economic activity. The very essence of our rural culture, its landscape and cohesion must be a thriving economy and will not be maintained by environmental monies for park-keeping, even if there was remotely enough. The best hope we have is paragraph 6.11 page 73 quoting Sir John Lyons place – shaping role for local Government; "The purpose of local government is to take responsibility for the well-being of an area and the people who live there, and to promote their interests and their future. In doing so it should both reflect the distinctive identity and aspirations of the people and area, and safeguard and promote their well-being and prosperity".

As I said, we were not a single issue campaigning group and we must campaign on this issue as it is the essence of our communities and living places and how they will survive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Graham Wray". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.