

Chair's update: Mid November 2007

Rural Mainstreaming

A term which some think is the absorption of rural into an urban agenda, whilst others think joins rural to all major policies and monies as equals. There is no doubt that HM Government is removing the special place of rural (and therefore cases made out on the difference) from its Governance and Funding Strategies. This is called mainstreaming.

An example to illustrate. I have been attending some special flooding meetings being held by East Yorkshire County Council. At the latest one, themed 'who is responsible', the implications of mainstreaming were fully exposed. The lowland flood plain is managed by the Internal Drainage Board (IDB), who raises its own taxes and is managed by local people; so very answerable to all who live in the area. The main river is managed by the Environment Agency, a national body with national priorities, with the limited funds they have made available to them by a national government. The EA has been required to take over maintenance of certain additional main-drains connecting their rivers to larger towns and villages. These drains basically handle the flow of run-off from the higher towns through the flood plain to the river. If these drains are not maintained for the fast flow clearance of peak waters from above, there is a risk that top-over occurs and the lowland is flooded. That lowland is rural with a few houses and agricultural land, whereas the town has reasonable dense housing. The EA agreed at the meeting that since they had taken over these connecting drains they had not maintained them whereas the IDB had previously done it annually. It is not a case they did not want to, but that on limited budget they come as low priority because only a few houses will be flooded as a consequence and agricultural land is low priority. The logic being 100 houses in town is a much bigger cost and publicly-perceived problem than one house in a rural area. This is an example of mainstreaming and distant policy and decision making

I am sorry to labour the point, but unless the 'rural', which is defined as sparsely populated with small communities, has sufficient hurdles and performance standards embedded into the new Sub-Regional Review /LAA indicators and City Region agendas then mainstreaming will, by using national or regional priorities based on economic output of clusters of high population densities, automatically lower service levels to those of us living in the countryside.

Your RAF is spending a considerable amount of time and effort with other regional RAFs, the CRC and our Minister to try and ensure that mainstreaming ensures sustainable communities (economic/social/environmental) are attained regionally regardless of population density and spatial separation. For further detail on these discussions please see minutes of the Chairs and Minister meeting held 6th September [here](#).

Foot and Mouth

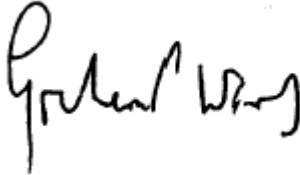
The consequences of the disruption in the marketing patterns are still causing major stresses in the farming sector. The RAF is now concentrating activities on the longer term implications of a range of problems affecting the rural economies where livestock farming predominates. Please see letter to our Minister Mr Jonathan Shaw on the Notice Board, [here](#).

Post Offices

We have had the first area plans in my part of the region (East Yorkshire) and although my neighbouring village has been offered an outreach service, the closure of the Post Office facility in the village shop and the removal of income has resulted in the shop closing. This knock-on effect of total income to the shop was not unexpected, but does illustrate that a group of services is the only way forward in many smaller villages. There appears to be no way out of these dilemmas, unless, like affordable housing, one takes delivery of these local services outside the 'free' market place and thinks of different structures. There are good examples and I notice as part of the Pathfinder some Yorkshire Forward money is being made available via EYCC Pathfinder to explore some of these Both Steering Group members Dave Melling and Shelagh Marshall have updates for their sub-regions if you would like to contact them.

Website

This is our major communication vehicle to the outside world so can members please introduce other members of their circles to it. I have been developing the [Notice Board](#) so that it covers a summary position of some of the issues on which we are majoring. To date I have done Climate Change and Foot and Mouth and will be adding City Regions shortly. Your feedback on the site, good or bad, would be welcome.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Ward', written in a cursive style.**Graham Ward**