

CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – DECEMBER 2007

It is customary to review the year so here goes!!

The Rural Scene - Foot and Mouth - Bluetongue has stressed the livestock sector and these stresses will continue into next year. Flooding has affected us all whether on traditional flood plains or in upland villages. Many people are still in temporary accommodation. Tourism figures are down because of the rain. House prices are still rising as inward migration occurs. Lots of other Europeans are coming to work in the food sector and tourist catering. Fuel costs are escalating.

Now the good bits. Cereal/arable crop prices have risen dramatically. New Energy crops and new ethanol/bio diesel plants. New businesses as technology has improved. Less Post Office closures than were predicted.

A little closer to home - in April I became Chairman of the RAF. A signal perhaps for Government to totally reshape their intervention and governance in rural matters. Back to local democracy and trusted Councils as out lined in the Sub National Review. Removal of a special Rural constituency, so we are now mainstreamed as part of the whole. The adoption of City Regions as the framework for economic planning. Defra, our sponsoring department is under severe financial pressure and this is being passed on to us. Questions of where the RAF fits and our relevance and contribution in these evolving structures?

The RAF vision remains, that we are the "rural voice". A route for rural residents to be heard at local, regional and Government Dept levels through a different channel. A way of highlighting the great contribution of rural to the region as a whole and ensuring this is understood at urban dominated decision processes.

All we have to do is to be good at it and convince the policy makers that they get value for money and additionality from the process. We have "privatized" some of our costs receiving generous financial support from Yorkshire Water and Yorkshire Forward for our secretariat. I welcome the Askham Bryan team and thank the Government Office team for their support, particularly from Anna over the last eight months. We are still looking to Government for some funding and advisory input but we may need to prove ourselves as useful to other sponsors next year.

We shall do this if we can "kick" down the doors of the LSP's and get LAA indicators to embed rural into the new sub-regional arrangements. If we can get an evidence study of the uplands to really think through how the landscape and the economy and most of all the residents can progress to a sustainable future and then get action on it. If we can get adaptation to climate change driven bottom up as opposed to top down lectures. If we can get higher skills. If we can get more involvement by our new urban employed residents in our communities and retain some of the spending power locally. If we can get new businesses into the countryside based around the greener fuel opportunities including the big developments like the proposed ethanol plant at Hull. If we can ensure service delivery has standards which are maintained in our lower density and distance separated communities within the mainstreaming agenda.

I need your help and enthusiasms and support for your RAF Steering Group if we are to remain relevant and to achieve some output rather than just outcomes measured as the number of meetings attended.

***A Happy Christmas. A Good Christmas dinner of regional quality food.
A Prosperous and Achieving New Year .***