

Chair's Update 10th May 2007

Climate Change Champion Village Action

Since the meeting on 26th April I have been investigating the Climate Change Champion village concept. There is a competition called the Calor Village of Year which is facilitated by the ACRE/ the RCCs (see <http://www.villageoftheyear.org/>) but there appears to be nothing emanating from Defra specifically on 'our' idea. If we were to do anything it would just be in Yorkshire and The Humber. It would be an effort to raise awareness among communities of simple actions which cumulatively could make an impact. The RAF could endorse those who meet whatever benchmarks we set as 'Climate Change Champions' or suchlike. We would need to encourage virtuous things like reduced family miles and energy saving, cutting packaging, managing water usage - things 'we' can do as a community together involving farmers, local business, commuters and people of all ages.

We would need sponsors, preferably Yorkshire-based. My thoughts are ASDA on packaging, Yorkshire Water on water, Drax on energy & energy crops and NFU Mutual for further farming cropping changes. Endorsement and publicity from a local popular figure or 'celebrity' should also be explored; I am thinking a regional news or weather person! Basically it's a hearts and minds thing as far as mitigation is concerned, but very much more an action thing when it comes to adaptation. Such an initiative would lead to a higher profile for the RAF - much needed if we really are to be the 'customer' voice. A wide range of customers need to know we exist. I very much need your views before we progress too far with this idea....

The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE)

As promised, I attended the presentations by Yorkshire Forward (YF) on RDPE and LEADER to the sub-regional partnerships on 3rd May. Although the Regional Implementation Plan is progressing, finalization will not be until the autumn. We need to make a start on preparing project ideas, therefore the YF team of facilitators, together with Business Link, will start to help with proposal writing in May for the business /economic change strategies.

The LEADER proposals were the main subject of debate. LEADER has been mainstreamed, meaning that it cuts across the 'old' straight economic aspects outlined above, as well as the social and services elements. Europe has now outlined what they expect, again emphasizing 'bottom up' working supported by a useful guide called The LEADER Approach (please contact the Secretariat if you are interested in receiving this). There is concern about 'control'. I am not certain if this is centralisation by YF or a genuine fear of the EU who will fine the UK for poor implementation. You will appreciate the UK public administrators are fearful of 'EU fines'. My perception from all of this is that in order to raise the importance of LEADER centrally, as a bottom-up approach, significant confidence building needs to be done.

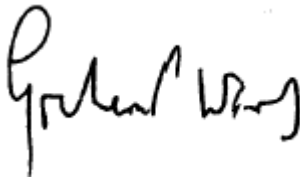
The meeting itself was about the regional administrators talking to the sub-regional administrators. There was emphasis by YF that they were looking at streamlining delivery and improving efficiency. There were few, if any, customers at the meeting, so look forward to some lobbying!! I have written to YF suggesting they have at least one 'customer', e.g. a parish councilor or someone from the Woman's Institute on their various decision making panels. Other suggestions to identify and involve real customer receiver groups, rather than secondary deliverers, are welcomed.

I had a very interesting breakout session listening to representatives from West Yorkshire. Their very mixed urban /rural geography makes selecting a LEADER area very problematic and certainly some creative thinking is needed. The LEADER approach is based on disadvantage so not all of the Yorkshire and The Humber region will be included. There was much discussion on this selection process which is due to begin in June. I fed into my group discussion that I felt the decision making panel would need to visit the short-listed areas to be certain the paperwork was a reflection of the commitment to bottom-up partnership and delivery.

RAF Steering Group and Vice Chair

Thank you for all your interest in the Steering Group and Vice Chair. I will certainly need to go into a dark room for the selection process!

These 'ramblings' are to promote discussion and to keep me on the straight and narrow so please feed back - this is essential. Views can either be fed through the Secretariat or, upon application, they will pass on my personal email address if you want to contact me directly.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Ward'. The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Graham Ward